



I performed with Tegan and Sara at the Junos: hours of work, seconds on the screen



From left: Tegan Quin, Globe and Mail editor Mason Wright and Sara Quin backstage at the 2014 Juno Awards in Winnipeg on March 30, 2014. COURTESY AMELIA ARTISTS

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I'm on screen for only a few seconds, and my voice is one of 27 you can hear for not quite a minute, but you wouldn't know it judging from the hours of preparation it took to arrange for a choir to join Tegan and Sara on the Juno awards stage.

It can be hard to generate enthusiasm performing a smash hit single for the thousandth time, after more than a year of touring on it. Tegan and Sara, who performed *Closer* during the show last night, were inspired when they saw a Toronto choir stand in for them at last September's Polaris Prize awards gala. At the Junos, why not form a one-weekend-only choir to act as backup singers?

That's how I got on stage at Winnipeg's MTS Centre on Sunday night, wearing a graffiti T-shirt and dancing like crazy with singers who came mainly from Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto – even one who travelled from Utah. We were chosen based on a one-minute audition video of our a capella rendition of *Closer*, plus our ability to pay our way to the host city.

The commitment wasn't trivial: three intense sessions of rehearsing and recording over five days, including a dress rehearsal of the entire show on Sunday.

Choreographer Dave Campbell was our north star throughout rehearsals, encouraging us and bringing us notes from the producers after each run-through. A born performer, he called out instructions with a show-biz accent, and explained how to avoid looking stiff on stage using turns of phrase invoking Tennessee pageant queens. At one point he offered to sing us Disney songs in Japanese.

The dance steps weren't complicated, but nevertheless we blocked out our movements in the arena's main concourse on Friday morning – one of the few areas where there was enough space. Masking tape marked where the edges of the stage would be – one next to the concession stands and photographs of musicians who have performed at the arena before us, names like Metallica, Eric Clapton and Taylor Swift. We could barely hear Campbell's instructions while Matt Mays sound checked *Take It On Faith* on stage.

Friday's [sound check in the empty arena](#) may have been a novelty for us, but it wasn't for the musicians in the band. They wisecracked with Sara and Tegan about the infamous Bill O'Reilly "do it live" video clip and joked around between run-throughs. The twins were exceedingly kind and seemed honestly grateful we were there.

Backstage on Sunday it was a lot of hurry up and wait, with not much excitement except near the Talent Tunnel. There, hallways bustled with production crew and Canadian celebrities. While we waited for our dress rehearsal Sarah McLachlan, Chris Hadfield and host Serena Ryder passed by. The next time I saw Hadfield, I was in the bathroom. I decided against asking him how peeing in space is different from peeing at the Junos.

The week began on Wednesday in an unspectacular rehearsal space at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People in Winnipeg's Forks district. Daveed Goldman and Nobu Adilman, the leaders of Choir! Choir! Choir! in Toronto, were asked to help choose the singers and prepare them for the gig. It was their group's performance of *Closer* at the Polaris gala that inspired the idea.

There were 90 audition videos, from which 25 singers were selected to form the so-called *Closer* Choir. Aside from three of us, nobody has even met Goldman and Adilman before, let alone sung with them. But since the singers had experience organizing or singing in choirs at home, the process was quick. Within an hour we had already divided ourselves into high, mid and low voices and learned the three parts for our one-minute appearance in the song. Filling the rest of the time with an impromptu singalong ended up being a good icebreaker.

Most of us were fans as well as singers, so getting to rehearse with Tegan and Sara later that evening was a big moment. Their crew, sound engineers and bandmates turned a small, high-ceilinged theatre space with a few risers into a pop-up recording studio where we could run through the song a few times before recording a vocal backing track to be used in the arena and on the air Sunday night.

It went well, and erased any doubts I might have had about whether we could click on short notice and come across as a cohesive choir.

A few days and some unforgettable experiences later, our appearance on the Juno stage was [over in a flash](#). Nobody fell down, the audience cheered and my Twitter feed lit up with congratulations. I'm impressed at the hours of work that went into such a short performance. And at some point, I definitely want to hear Dave Campbell sing *It's a small world after all* in Japanese again.

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