

STAGE MIGHT

East Aurora student's vocal performance a demonstration of courage, confidence and personal growth

February 28, 2010 • Erika Wurst



AURORA - "This is a celebration of energy, commitment, and excellence," Mayor Tom Weisner told the crowd of supporters who packed the Prisco Center on Jan. 27 to watch their friends, sons and brothers be honored for their academic excellence at the Boys II Men Phenomenal Men of the Year awards.

"You have to realize how powerful you are, your potential is literally unlimited," he said, and perhaps no one understood this more than honoree Tavarrie Meeks, a sophomore at East Aurora High School.

Even in a crowd of excellence, the former introvert has managed to stick out as a rising star - "quickly finding his way in this world," said Boys II Men founder Clayton Muhammad, who is director of community relations for East Aurora school district.

"Tavarrie is undoubtedly a shining star in the making," he said.

Seated among the stars that night were 2010's Phenomenal Men of the Year award winners, Aurorans Tony Martinez and Adam Welton, and Chicagoan Alexander Sewell, as well as about 50 area high school students who would be honored for their achievements. But Meeks stood out from the crowd by stepping out of his box, and in doing so, earned himself more than an award, but a standing ovation.

"He was very nervous that night . but he jumped right in," Muhammad said of Meeks' endeavor. In front of more than 300 people - an audience of Aurora Idols, aldermen, officers and peers, Meeks grabbed a microphone and began to sing. Only this time it wasn't just practice, and it wasn't in front of his bedroom mirror. This time he was singing solo in front of an audience, and miles from where he ever expected to be.

On his Facebook page, Meeks picture shows a confident young man with a clean cut, and sparkling eyes that peer curiously through trendy, black frames. The blossomed shy-guy now deems himself "Tavarrie Royalty Meeks" - and rightfully so.

"From the kid who didn't participate in anything, he has now made honor roll, had a role in the school play, ran for homecoming prince, participates in choir, ran track last year, and recently decided to join the tennis team," Muhammad said proudly.

"He is coming full circle."

As he stepped up to the mic that night to honor the year's Phenomenal Men in song, Meeks' circle became a little closer to full. No one would want to stand within 10-feet of a microphone following former Aurora Idol, Ta-Tynisa Wilson. Her vocals sent chills down dozens of necks as the crowd stood for the singing of the National Anthem.

f they weren't on their feet already, spectators surely would have stood, but it was Meeks who would get the evening's first standing O.

"He was so reserved and shy," Muhammad said, reflecting on Meeks' past character.

But these days, the bubbly up-and-comer is anything but. He commanded the mic with ease that night, and belted out his tune like Simon, Randy, Kara and Ellen were watching from the front row. Immediately, Meeks defied his former stereo-type as "just another face in the crowd." Simon might have told him not to quit his day job, but luckily, he wasn't there. Instead, there were hundreds of Fox Valley residents who unwittingly saw the small dream of a man come true, and appreciated it more than even Meeks himself would have expected.

He was no longer the boy he used to be, but the man had looked so forward to becoming. And the crowd he raised to its feet was living proof of that.

"It doesn't matter where you come from, or where you're at right now. All that matters is where you want to go in life, and how you're going to get there," Muhammad told the crowd.

There was a time when Tavarrie "Royalty" Meeks would have been sitting on the sidelines, but today he stands in the spotlight as an example to those who fear getting off the bench.