

Arts Court serves up a Holiday Helping of Music Soup

By Barbara Brunzell

It's been almost 30 years since the bright-eyed little girl with curly brown hair known as Jen Gould stepped on the stage for the first time. The show was the Ottawa Orpheus Musical Theatre Society's production of *The Music Man* and even though the 10-year-old Gould was only a chorus member, she knew she had found her calling.

"It was after that show that I started dancing seriously, five or six days a week, taking singing lessons, doing other shows," says Gould, who later studied theatre at York University in Toronto. "I don't think I've had a grown up job since."

This holiday season, the now Juno Award winning children's performer is returning to the city that helped to nurture her talent so many years ago to perform two very special shows at Arts Court. *A Holiday Helping of Music Soup*, starring Jen Gould, takes place in the Arts Court Theatre, at 2 Daly Avenue, at 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Sunday December 13th.

Children, aged two to six and their adult accompaniment, will delight in some of Gould's bestloved tunes such as: *Monster in my Closet*, *Yummy in my Tummy* and her Cha Cha-inspired version of the *Three Little Pigs*, as well as a host of other *Music Soup* songs and holiday favourites. But the fun doesn't end there, before and after the show, concert-goers are also welcome to experience a magical Winter Wonderland located in the Arts Court Studio. People can chow down on cookies and coco while chatting with a snowflake or gingerbread man, win a prize playing one of the many festive games on site or purchase last-minute gift items from local artists at the child-friendly Arts Market, all for the cost of \$15 and a can of soup for the Ottawa Food Bank.

The producer of the event, the Ottawa Arts Court Foundation (OACF), is a charitable organization that supports Ottawa's performing, visual, literary and media arts through the provision of leading facilities, programs and services.

"We wanted to create a fantastic event for young children; that is also affordable. Many of us on staff are parents ourselves and we are often frustrated at the limited number of quality arts and entertainment offerings for children in this age range," says Linda Balduzzi, Executive Director of the OACF.

Gould couldn't agree more. She says there are many wonderful grass roots children's performers in Canada, but most people don't know they exist because it costs so much to mount a show and that it is only the large corporations fuelled by merchandise sales from branded characters that can usually afford to present to young audiences.

"You have to really be passionate about being a children's performer if you are going to make it your career," says Gould, who has worked with children throughout her career as an entertainer, teacher, counsellor and mother.

"My children learned the alphabet, how to spell their names and the days of the week through music. It's those moments that pushed me to turn our home jam sessions into an album," says Gould.

In 2008, Gould's inaugural album *Music Soup* won "Children's Album of the Year." The classically-trained actress is no stranger to success. She's performed on some of the finest stages in Canada and the United States including five seasons at the Stratford Festival, The National Arts Centre and the New York City Center on Broadway. Gould has also provided voices for many children's cartoons such as: *Rolie Polie Olie*, *Sailor Moon*, *Totally Spies* and *The Busytown Mysteries* to name a few. But it's the throngs of little fans she has around the world that is motivating Gould to take her success as a children's performer to the next level.

"I can't afford to be everywhere, so I thought I could reach out to my audiences through video," says Gould, whose CD has sold more than 25,000 copies to date.

Gould's concerts in Ottawa are being recorded for an upcoming live concert DVD featuring her *Music Soup* material. She is co-producing the children's video with the Ottawa Arts Court Foundation. The OACF will receive a percentage of the profits from the video to help them to continue to support local artists and capital improvement projects.

"It's a great opportunity to raise the profile of a wonderful arts organization with historical significance in the City of Ottawa," says Gould. "Ottawa has the potential to be an amazing cultural hub and supporting the work of Arts Court is an important part of making that happen."

*For more information about the show please visit www.artscourt.ca or to purchase tickets call the Arts Court Box Office at 613-564-7240. You can listen to Jen Gould's *Music Soup* at the performer's website www.jengouldmusic.com.*

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