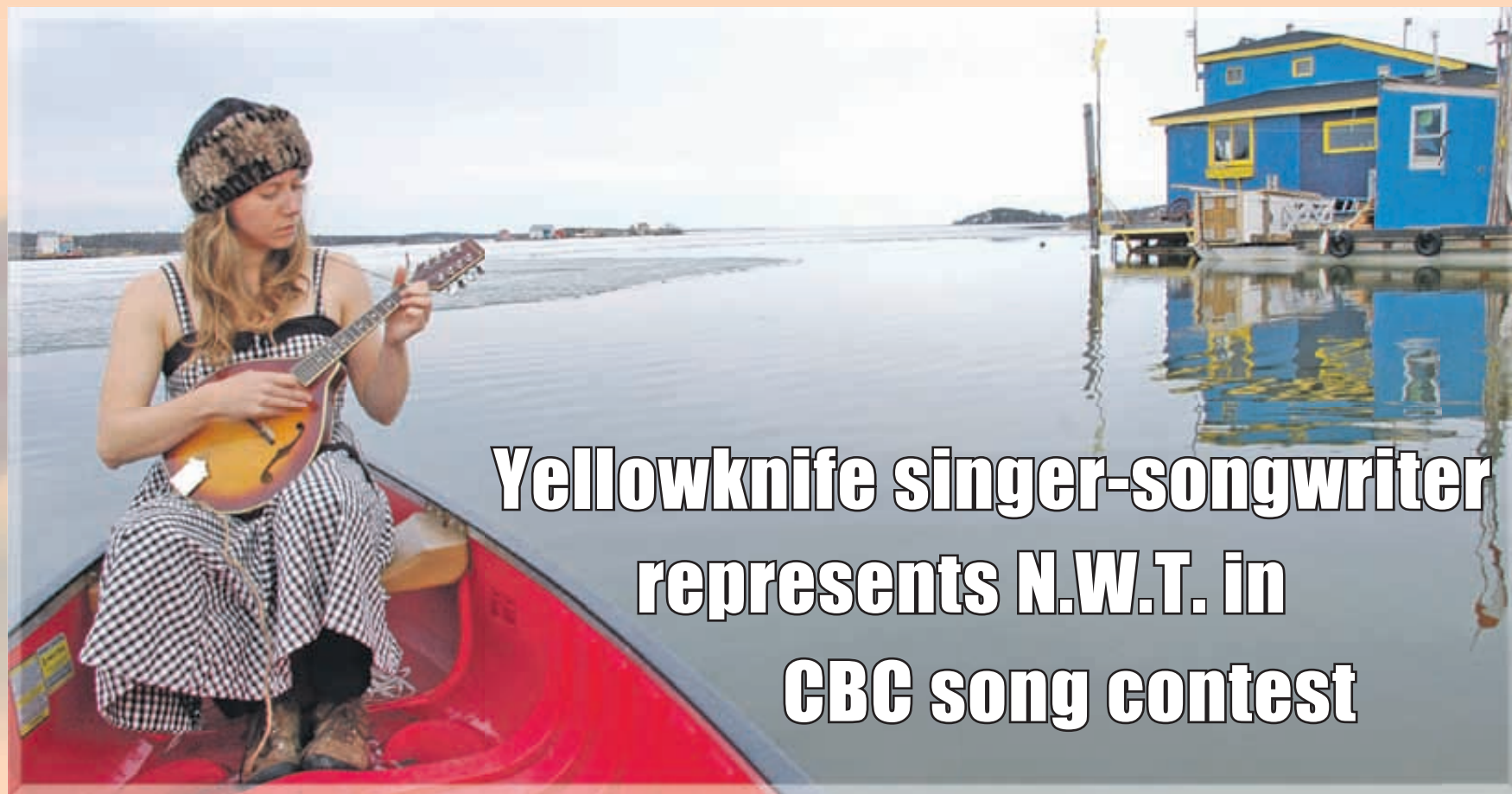


And now for something completely different:



Yellowknife singer-songwriter represents N.W.T. in CBC song contest

By **CARA STERN**
Special to *The CJN*

Dana Sipos may have won a spot representing the Northwest Territories in a CBC music contest, but she says she never sought a musical career.

“It just sort of evolved from learning to play a couple of chords,” says the 25-year-old singer-songwriter.

“I’ve always been singing and writing lots and then I started songwriting, getting more confident, and sharing it with people.”

Sipos was voted to write a song about the Northwest Territories as part of CBC Radio Two’s Great Canadian Song Quest.

The annual contest asks Canadians to nominate their favourite locations in the country to be celebrated in song and then vote for a singer to represent each province and territory.

On Dec. 15, Sipos will debut her song during a Toronto concert with the other winners, which will broadcast across the country.

“It was really exciting and a little bit surprising,” she says, about being selected to represent the Northwest Territories.

Born in Hamilton, Ont., Sipos has lived in Yellowknife since 2003, although she says she has moved around quite a bit since then. A few years ago, she spent six months living in Israel.

She lived in several places, including on Kibbutz Lotan in Arava Valley, which is north of Eilat.

There, she took part in a green apprenticeship program, where she earned a certificate in permaculture – designing settlements and agriculture so as to reproduce the natural environment.

“I loved living on the kibbutz,” she says. “I improved my Hebrew a lot, and living in the desert is pretty magical.”

Living in Israel is a stark difference from living in Yellowknife, where there are only “a small handful” of Jews, Sipos says.

“I miss being part of a vibrant Jewish community and having people at Shabbat,” she continues, adding that she does celebrate the holidays with friends.

“They will have Purim parties and Chanukah parties, and they just try to open it up and welcome anyone that’s interested to come.”

There are no synagogues in the city, she says, and it is sometimes challenging to be a Jewish woman living in the Northwest Territories.

However, Sipos says her surroundings greatly influence her music. Many of her songs, she says, tell stories about the north.

“There’s the magic up here, like the midnight sun and the Northern Lights.

“It’s also what the trees look like at 40 below and what it feels like at 40 below.”

Although she describes her music as northern folk/roots music, she admits her last album explored many genres, including blues, jazz and bluegrass. She says she is first and foremost a singer-songwriter.

She lists some of her musical influences as being the artists she listened to growing up, among them Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen.

“People that tell stories with their music have always been an inspiration,” she says, adding she is also influenced by some younger artists.

Sipos plays the guitar, mandolin and the kazoo.

She says living in the Northwest Territories has helped her progress as a musician.

“There’s a really supportive music community, so there were people to nurture those songwriting skills and hone them,” she says.

“There’s a really artistic community and musical community, and a collection of all sorts of people and characters coming to the north for an adventure, so it’s fun living up here.”

She describes the community as unique. “There’s a cross-section of people from all over the world,” she says. “[Yellowknife is] right on the edge of Great Slave Lake, so you feel like you’re right at the edge of the wilderness.”

She also says that, ironically, living in Yellowknife has given her opportunities to further her musical career.

For example, in 2007, she won another CBC singer-songwriter contest to represent the Northwest Territories in the True North Concert Series – a competition for artists living in Canada’s north.

She will be representing the Northwest Territories again as part of CBC’s Great Canadian Song Quest, in which listeners voted for one artist to represent each province and territory.

There were five possible locations for her to write about.

Through a public vote, it was decided that her song would be about the pingos – cone-shaped hills filled with ice – located in Tuktoyaktuk, a settlement north of the Arctic Circle, inside the Inuvik region of the territory.

In Inuvialuktun, an Inuit dialect, Tuktoyaktuk translates to “it looks like a caribou.”

Sipos says she refers to this idea in the song and took a poetic approach to it.

“I tended towards the mystery and ancient legends boxed inside the pingos,” she says. “I talk about how they have hearts of ice.”

She says she tries to give geographical context and understanding of the pingos in the song, and to express why they’re magical, as well as their importance to the community.

“They’ve been used for centuries as navigational guides. People would go on top of the pingos and be able to see into the distance to check for whales or caribous.”

A few years ago, she could not have imagined achieving this much success, Sipos says.

“I probably wouldn’t have been able to imagine that I would have these opportunities,” she says, adding that she is excited about flying to Toronto for the Dec. 15 concert, which is taking place at the Glenn Gould Studio.

She says she hasn’t really set any specific goals for the future, although she hopes to perform in more folk festivals next summer, as well as record a new album next year.

“I’m just going to keep playing music, and if people are enjoying it and I can travel with it and spread a little bit of a message, then I’m happy.”