



Colleen De Neve, Calgary Herald

Calgary Singing Telegrams' Shannon Shade says she's been preparing for the singing telegram business, in one way or another, her entire life.

Singing telegrams bring touch of Vegas

KATHLEEN RENNE
FOR NEIGHBOURS

Well it's your birthday, it's your day to whine,
Say good-bye to age 39.
This year is the big 4-0,
When we're crashin' your morning show.
You're still a babe, but soon some day,
All your hair will turn shark grey.
As you age,
Wrinkles will grace,
Your picture-perfect poker face.
Happy Birthday Eric,
You have to grin and bear it,
You're 40 now, 40 now . . .

These are the words with which Calgary entertainer Shannon Shade serenaded Eric of Jack FM's Matt & Eric Morning Show, to the tune of the Bee Gees' hit, Stayin' Alive. It's just one example of how Shade is bringing "a touch of Las Vegas to Calgary" through her business, Calgary Singing Telegrams Inc. The primary service offered on the company menu? Popular tunes customized to fit that special someone to help make their birthday, anniversary, or bachelorette party all the more memorable. As well as being a professional vocalist, Shade says she's been preparing for the singing telegram business, in one way or another, her entire life.

"It's always been setting itself up. I've been writing songs for family and friends for years. I'm also one of those freakish people who's really into Halloween," Shade laughs.

However, it was after an acquaintance asked her last year to dress as a rock star and serenade her son at his birthday that Calgary Singing Telegrams really got rolling.

January of this year, Shade, and her partner, musician Kevin Shredder, formally incorporated Calgary Singing Telegrams.

Since then, business has been, well, humming along, her date on Matt & Eric being a highlight so far.

Her only criteria to deliver a telegram? That it be in good taste. (In other words, she says, bachelor parties are not high on her list.)

I decided to accompany Shade on one of her deliveries, this one, for Valentine's Day.

When I arrive at Shade's and Shredder's house in Ramsay, which also

includes a recording studio as both are also music teachers, a large bouquet of heart-shaped balloons greets me at the back door.

Shredder is wrapping up a bunch of flowers. Shade, meanwhile, is making sure all the other last-minute details of her delivery are in place, including a goodie bag complete with chocolates, a teddy bear, and a Valentine's Day game, along with a printed copy of the song lyrics to give as a memento to the recipient.

Shade removes a fluorescent pink wig off a Styrofoam head before stuffing her long, dark hair underneath. The remaining wigs — in red, green, orange, and purple — hint at the many wacky personas Shade adopts when doing a delivery, whether it be showing up as a purple fairy, "Miss Pumpkin," a banana, or, as in today's case, the "Lady In The Cake."

Besides offering singing telegrams, Shade is also in the business of "gag-o-grams," again, as she says, always with good taste in mind.

So far, she's employed her performance skills, which she honed doing musical theatre in British Columbia and, also, while performing in a western variety show in Vegas, playing a neurotic dental patient and a drunk without insurance after, supposedly, crashing into a lawyer's expensive vehicle.

Today's delivery is in Copperfield, a long enough drive to allow Shade to run through her vocal warm-ups en route.

Once we arrive, Shredder parks the van a few doors down, while Shade sends a covert text to the woman who ordered the telegram for her girlfriend.

As soon as Shade gets the go-ahead, with a video camera already rolling to record the moment, she rings the doorbell.

A pause and then, as the door opens, "Surprise! Happy Valentine's Day!" Shade exclaims.

"Oh my God, Terri," a surprised, and embarrassed, looking woman says.

Shade proceeds into the house, as her thigh-high white stockings and strapless, sequin top that's tucked into a three-dimensional tiered skirt, doesn't provide much for warmth, and chattering teeth are not a part of the performance.

After draping a red feather boa around the recipient's neck, Shade proceeds to serenade her with a rendition of Love Will Keep Us Together.

Unlike many of her other telegrams, today's song is not customized.

Shade explains that, when she does get a request for customized lyrics, she first sends out a questionnaire to the client for some information about the recipient.

She then re-writes a song, incorporating these details, a process that can take up to six hours.

"That's the most work in all of this," she says.

The delivery takes a few minutes, all recorded for posterity, and then Shade is off in a flurry of Valentine's Day greetings.

"I love surprising people with a personalized song. It makes them feel special," she says with a smile. With that, she gets back into the van and Shredder drives off.

It's all in a day's work for the people behind Calgary Singing Telegrams.

There are a few other entertainment bureaus in Calgary including fuze Entertainment, Quicksilver Entertainment, and Gestures that also offer singing telegrams as part of a wider array of services.

Shade, however, is the only person locally who specializes in singing telegrams.

Her prices range from \$165 - \$250, depending on the length of the song, the distance involved in delivery, and if special present requests are made. To contact Calgary Singing Telegrams, visit calgarysingingtelegrams.com or call 403-454-SING.

Parking madness



MARIO TONEGUZZI
A CITY'S SOUL

The timing could not have been orchestrated or planned any better.

Recently, I headed downtown as I do a couple of times each week. Two items were on my agenda. An interview with a commercial real estate contact for a story for our Business section was my primary purpose.

While I was there, I thought I would also get a photo to go along with this column on Calgary's downtown parking woes.

So as I parked along 10th Avenue S.W., I couldn't believe my fortune in finding a parking spot so easily.

Then reality hit me as I walked to the machine to pay.

I could see a man standing there. He was fuming. His blood was obviously boiling.

"I feel like kicking the (expletive) out of this (expletive) machine," he said to me as I approached.

He then proceeded to tell me how he put six dollars into it with nothing in return.

"I hate this city council," he said. "I hate this city council," repeating his anger and frustration. And with that he left in a huff.

Who in this city hasn't experienced what that man experienced that day?

The ParkPlus system hasn't exactly warmed the hearts of Calgarians. It can be confusing. You have to pay, and pay quite a handsome price, to park. The machines don't always work.

But here is my pet peeve. Why do we make this so difficult to understand where and when we can park on a street, particularly in downtown Calgary?

The day I went downtown I walked along 2nd Street S.W. between 9th Avenue and 7th Avenue. At the corner of 2nd Street and Stephen Avenue was a sign for parking for 30 minutes. There was also a no parking sign. And there was a taxi cab only sign.

Further north on the street. There were signs for loading zones. Signs for no parking at certain times on certain days. No stopping signs.

Along 2nd Street just north of Stephen Avenue parking was for two hours. Half a block away closer to 7th Avenue it was for one hour.

This is madness. Who can decipher all this?

First of all, 30 minutes in downtown Calgary barely gives you

enough time to get out of your vehicle and walk to your destination.

But more importantly, how do you figure out where and when you can park? Remember, you are driving your vehicle. You have to slow down, even stop to take a look at all the signs to know whether you are safe to park somewhere.

If I didn't have to go downtown because of work, I certainly wouldn't choose to go there. Not because of the downtown itself. It's a great place. Lots to do. Lots to see. But parking? Well, it does make it easy to simply avoid the hassle.

Over the years, safety and cleanliness have been deterrents for people coming to the core. Pardon the pun, but both those issues have been cleaned up. Parking, however, remains a mess. The city needs to rectify this.

Maggie Schofield, executive director of the Calgary Downtown Association, is aware of that. She hears about it all the time.

"Even from an anecdotal perspective, it's the number one deterrent that we hear from people coming into the core. I'm not talking about the people who come down and work here everyday. I'm talking about people who need to get down here to do some sort of business, or to have dinner, or to come for lunch or whatever it is. They say the number one reason that they don't like to come downtown or they choose not to come downtown is because of parking," she tells me.

The one positive is that there is very inexpensive parking in the evening and on weekends.

But obviously it is not enough to satisfy people.

No matter where she goes, when people meet Schofield and find out her position, they inevitably ask her the same question.

SEE TONEGUZZI, PAGE N5



Justina Contenti, Calgary Herald
Mario Toneguzzi tries to decipher the ParkPlus system in downtown Calgary.

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Please contact goodwishes@shaw.ca or (403) 475-9350 or 554-8017.

The event is fully licensed and alcoholic beverages will also be available.

Any donation is greatly appreciated.

All proceeds will be used to help Himalayan Orphanage Project and many other Projects.

We also take a team of volunteers to deliver supplies and provide medical, dental, and educational support.

Right now, we have 200 students at the Elementary Boarding Orphanage School, with 50 new kids arriving next year!

All proceeds will be used for a good cause.



Courtesy, Calgary Humane Society

Hey! Diesel here. I'm only a three-month-old boy. I am a Boston terrier/Beagle cross. Come visit me today! Visit The Calgary Humane Society online at www.calgaryhumane.ca for more great pets!

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