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Famous violinist Amanda Shaw: On her 'hidden talent,' dream house, 4 dogs, giving back, more

BY SUE STRACHAN | sstrachan@theadvocate.com OCT 21, 2018 - 7:00 AM

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Vocalist and musician Amanda Shaw at her home in New Orleans on Friday, October 12, 2018. She is with her dogs Lincoln (a bulldog), Marley (a Brussels Griffon), Vivian (a chihuahua) and Frankie (a pug.)

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Amanda Shaw really likes to entertain. This homegrown vocalist and violinist, who has been on stage since the age of 8 — she made her debut with the Baton Rouge Symphony —

whipped up vegetarian hors d'oeuvres (who knew cashew cheese was good?) and cookies for a recent interview at her new home, which she had moved into two months earlier following a yearlong renovation.

Shaw gave us a tour of her chic renovation — think Hollywood glamour meets comfort — and introduced her four rescue dogs: Vivian (a chihuahua), Marley (a Brussels griffon), Lincoln (a bulldog) and Frankie (a pug).

The records she had set aside on the coffee table said a lot about her: Dolly Parton's "Jolene" ("My favorite album of all time," said Shaw); Jefferson Starship's "Red Octopus"; the self-titled Ramones album; "The Best of Amy Winehouse" ("Her songwriting is so intimate"); and Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall" (which she borrowed from her mom).

Shaw makes her own albums, too. Her latest (and third) EP, 2017's "Please Call Me Miss Shaw," showcases her evolution as an artist, from a child prodigy Cajun musician into one who integrates other musical influences, such as Parton.

“It is the first record to come out the way I originally envisioned it,” said Shaw.

She recently hosted at home her first party, which celebrated the relaunch of her Amanda Shaw Foundation. Originally set up in 2015, the foundation worked through the Northshore Community Foundation to partner with other groups to support programs such as Head Start.

This year, Shaw decided to up the ante and focus on an initiative that she holds dear: the Orchestrating Dreams Fund, which she describes as a “grants program in partnership with the Northshore Community Foundation, where school-aged children in Louisiana can apply for financial assistance to support their passions and fulfill their dreams.”

After 20 years as a performer, it is a cause near and dear to Shaw, who credits her success to those who helped her fulfill her own dreams.

“If I hadn’t known them, my life would be different,” she said. “I wouldn’t be in this house right now.”

If the 28-year-old Amanda Shaw could meet the 18-year-old Amanda Shaw, what would you tell her?

Everything happens for a reason. Everything is going to be good. Think positive. Everyone can always use good, positive words.

We all go through ups and downs. I had my fair share of good things and bad things, and you always need to remind yourself that you can do anything that you really dream of. You should be encouraged to do that.

Tell me about the foundation.

The first initiative is Orchestrating Dreams, which I am really excited about. The initiative is a grant program to help young people achieve their goals, whether it be a young musician getting into a Berklee (College of Music) or Juilliard summer program (who) can't afford the bills, or a young athlete going to meets. It gets expensive. The initiative is about getting resources to people, with the foundation hopefully closing those gaps. I hope I can give young people that opportunity.

What age are the grants for?

Junior year and senior year high school students. The form goes online on the foundation website on Nov. 5.

How many grants do you plan to give out?

To me, it's about meeting people who really need it, to hear their stories and give their stories life. Rather than giving small amounts to a lot of people, I would rather help one person a lot.

What was the first benefit you played?

I am not really sure. I enjoy giving to the community. Louisiana does well with community, and I am all for it. Now that I am on the other side and can help is the point of the foundation.

Our mission statement says: "The foundation works to build, sustain and empower strong Louisiana families through music, food and culture." So, I would like work on more things in the future.

Thanks for the vegetarian fare.

A few years ago, I switched to a plant-based diet, with fish and eggs occasionally. It was hard because I grew up in a family that ate steak. (But) I feel better, performance-wise.

Your hidden talent?

I don't know about a hidden talent! I love my dogs. I do yoga, like to cook, and being at home and hanging out. My childhood dream was to have a beautiful kitchen.

(Members of Shaw's band) the Cute Guys like to tease me that I can fall asleep anywhere!

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