

# Alex Pangman swings again, with second new set of lungs

MN Nov 7, 2014

It's hard not to move to the groove of the 1920s and 1930s swing music that defines the career of Mississauga singer Alex Pangman.

It's infectious.

The singer loves it when she's performing and the audience finds it impossi-

ble to resist the urge to get on up and dance.

That's what the music was made for, after all.

So fans who took in her brand of vintage vibe may have been a little taken aback when Pangman performed live shows to support her last CD *Have A Little Fun* last year.

Instead of her normal bouncy self, Pangman sat on a stool and looked pensive.

She had a lot to think about.

Her body was rejecting the new set of lungs she received in 2008 at Toronto General Hospital. For the second time in her life, she was on a waiting list for a set of lungs that would save her life, and let her continue singing the music that defines so much of it.

When she was having a particularly bad day, Pangman barely moved on stage. She might have been singing *Rhythm Is Our*

*Business*, but she couldn't prove it.

"You just have to have an expressive face," Pangman says in retrospect, thinking of that difficult time. "Every once in a while, you shake one shoulder, then you snap a thumb - just one," she laughs.

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Incredibly, Pangman got her "second, second chance at life," as she says in the liner notes of her new release, thanks to another double-lung transplant in August 2013 that saved her life.

She was born with cystic fibrosis, a genetically-inherited lung disease that used to kill many children before they reached their teens.

The singer has never made her disease an issue. In her career's early days, she refused to talk about it. She didn't want her personal story overshadowing her musical one.

After her first double lung transplant became public, however, Pangman became one of the most public faces in efforts to get Ontarians to improve our sorry record of organ donation.

Her precarious medical position put her in at least one odd professional position.

In June 2013, Pangman was asked to open at Massey Hall for genre-busting country superstar Willie Nelson at the Toronto Jazz Festival.

"When I got the call I said yes, yes, yes ... right away," recalls Pangman. "Then the next day I had to call them back and explain my medical issues. They were very supportive. They didn't have to be."

When the concert came, the "weather gods smiled on me" and there was almost no humidity. The show went off without a hitch, with Pangman's husband standing in the wings with the pager that would ring if the hospital called to say a donor was available.

"Shortly after that things worsened and I was bordering on not begin able to do the craft anymore."

This time the surgery was five hours longer, 13 hours in all, because of the complications of removing scar tissue from the first transplant.

The new set of lungs was a particularly good match. Out of hospital in three weeks, she was singing at the Port Hope Jazz Festival two weeks later. "That was probably

premature but it was OK because it was a jazz festival and I was a redhead and stoned (on anti-rejection drugs)," she laughs. The

concert was unusual in that it consisted of mostly instrumentals with just a few spare Pangman vocals.

"It was great. They loved it," she said. "I hadn't sung yet but I opened my mouth and music and happiness came out."

When you have a transplant, you can send a thank you note anonymously to the donor family through the Trillium Gift of Life program.

"I got a lovely letter back," says Pangman, whose father died last May of Parkinson's disease while she awaited her new lungs. "What a wonderful woman she (her donor) was, a mother and a grandmother. She enjoyed music. That was a great thing to learn."

Although she can't thank her donor's family in person, as she'd prefer, Pangman will continue to say thanks in her own way - by getting on stage as long as she can to sing the music she loves, as loudly as she can.

Once again, she'll be moving to the groove of life's inevitable swings.



Alex Pangman