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SUN News Canada

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Shania's Mirror image

To Zahava, a Shania Twain tribute artist -- imitation is the highest form of flattery

By RADHIKA PANJWANI, TORONTO SUN

AN EXPECTANT hush falls on the dimly lit room. The singer -- resplendent in a black miniskirt, black corset, black gloves and high boots -- saunters onto the stage.

The audience gasps in disbelief. Is that Canada's country-pop sweetheart, Shania Twain?

Zahava, 31, a Shania Twain tribute artist, is ecstatic. Her clothes, hair and makeup are flawless imitation of the real deal.

"I take this very seriously and I want that reaction to keep happening" Zahava said.

As Zahava starts to croon the opening lines to "Man, I Feel Like a Woman" the smokiness in her voice takes on the characteristic Twain twang. The crowd is riveted. Is she or isn't she Shania?

"That comes from a lot of studying. I watch Shania's music videos, read books and do a lot of research," Zahava said. "If she was watching my show, she would give me the thumbs up."

Each show entails hours of preparation. "It takes two hours of make-up and hair" Zahava says "It is such a transformation ... it is the whole personality behind it too. If you are true to the character, it will show."

Zahava signed on with an agent and began getting deeper into the skin of her character. Offers began to pour in. Zahava performs more than 200 shows a year for a variety of corporate clients.

She spends thousands of dollars duplicating original Shania Twain costumes.

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"For my very first show, I dug into my savings and spent \$900 reproducing the leopard-skin costume Shania wore in That Don't Impress Me Much," Zahava said. "Now, I have over seven custom-made costumes."

Costumes and looks aside, Zahava said she is influenced by Shania's music and life.

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"It's not only about looking or singing like the celebrity ... you have to be excited about the character too."

Zahava met Shania last November. The pride of Timmins, Ont., complimented Zahava when she heard she was a tribute artist and saw how great she looked.

"That was the ultimate validation," Zahava said. "When I was young, I would

dream I was the next big thing ... I am not searching for it ... If it is meant to happen, it will."



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