

Alexa Heller steps up

The dancer-turned-singer will play homecoming show at Jazziz Nightlife.

By Barbara Corbellini Duarte
STAFF WRITER

Alexa Heller decided to be a professional dancer early on. The South Floridian began dancing ballet, tap and jazz at 4. Before she was 10, she had already performed in "The Nutcracker" with the Miami City Ballet.

But when she turned 13, a series of events crushed her dreams. While Heller was recovering from a hip injury, a blood vessel malformation caused a benign tumor in her brain that required emergency surgery. Later, she discovered she had torn cartilage in her hip, and wouldn't be able to pursue a dancing career.

"The thing that I loved the most was all of a sudden taken away from me," says Heller, 25. "It really dawned

upon me that I had to find something else to do with my time."

While emotionally healing from those experiences, Heller couldn't identify or connect with other teenagers, and therapy didn't make her feel better. So she began writing songs as a way to express herself.

She moved to New York after high school, and released her first album, titled "Alexa," in 2013. She'll perform her pop-R&B for the first time in South Florida on Sunday at Jazziz Nightlife in Boca Raton.

"I came home because I want to be with the community, and I want to show the love I have for them, and be around a lot of love," she says.

Before dedicating herself to music, Heller tried acting, and received several rejections at Broadway

auditions. Her childhood experiences, she says, have made her tough.

"You just have to keep reinventing who you are, because you can't predict what life will bring to you," she says. "I learned to try on my own, and start creating my own work."

Heller worked as an extra on the movie "Step Up 3D." During filming, she met professional break dancers who partly inspired her first album.

"I was just inspired by how those dancers made their dreams come true," she says. "I was like, 'Wow. If they can do it, I can do it.'"

Heller's album is also inspired by 1980s pop and hip-hop rhythms, and Madonna, whom she considers a role model.

"She was a dancer at first, and then she moved to New York by herself," Heller says. "She was auditioning for Broadway, too. And she ended up doing her own music."

In her lyrics, Heller often taps into love, overcoming obstacles and dating. A new song, "Gentlemen," describes the man Heller hopes to find: respectful, understanding, responsible and fun.

"To me, that's what this song is about. It's for Millennials who want true love, and want to be treated with respect, and want to create something that's deeper than just a hookup," Heller says.

"People live ordinary [lives], and I want to live in a world that is extraordinary," she says. "And I want to bring people with me on my journey through my music."

Alexa Heller will perform 7 p.m. Sunday at Jazziz Nightlife, 201 Plaza Real, in Boca Raton. Tickets cost \$25. Call 561-300-0730 or go to Jazziz.com or ItsAlexaOnline.com.

bduarte@sunsentinel.com, @babicorb or 954-356-4710



DANYO IP / COURTESY

South Floridian Alexa Heller will perform Sunday at Jazziz Nightlife in Boca Raton. She began her career as a dancer, but a series of health problems changed her path, and she found her passion in music.

BEST BET



BLISS KATHERINE/COURTESY

Swimm

Waves of digital loops crash into rock, folk and shoegaze in the Melbourne-spawned duo's endless summer sound, elevated by vocalist Chris Hess' channeling of Marc Bolan and Perry Farrell. The now-Los Angeles-based Swimm is touring in support of a just-released EP, "Souvenirs II," a trek that takes them from Bardot in Miami to the Bowery Electric in New York.

When: 10 p.m. Thursday

Where: Bardot, 3456 N. Miami Ave., Miami

Cost: \$10

Contact: 305-576-5570 or BardotMiami.com

— Ben Crandell

Calendar

Listings are subject to change. Please call the venue in advance.

FRIDAY

Blues

Selwyn Birchwood Modern blues rocker. 9 p.m. Friday, Funky Biscuit, 303 SE Mizner Blvd., Boca Raton, \$10-\$25, 561-395-2929, funkybiscuit.com.

Jazz

Motel Mel Jazz/blues veteran. 7 pm Fri. & Sat., The Fish House, 10000 SW 56th St., Miami, Free admission., 305-595-8453, thefishhouse.com.

Metal

De La Tierra Latin American metal quartet. 8 p.m. Friday, Grand Central, 697 N. Miami Ave., Miami, \$30, 305-377-2277, grandcentralmiami.com.

Rock

Savoy Distinctive brand of electro bridges gap between studio and live. 8:30 p.m. Friday, Revolution Live, 100 SW Third Ave., Fort

Lauderdale, \$16, \$18, 954-449-1025, jointherevolution.net.

Pop

Elsten Torres Singer/songwriter. 8 p.m. Friday, Arts Garage, 180 NE First St., Delray Beach, \$25-\$45, 561-450-6357, artsgarage.org.

SATURDAY

Funk

Come Back Alice Southern gypsy funk band. 8 p.m. Saturday, Funky Biscuit, 303 SE Mizner Blvd., Boca Raton, \$7-\$20, 561-395-2929, funkybiscuit.com.

Jazz

Motel Mel Jazz/blues veteran. 7 pm Fri. & Sat., The Fish House, 10000 SW 56th St., Miami, Free admission., 305-595-8453, thefishhouse.com.

Markus Gottschlich 8 pm Sat., Arts Garage, 180 NE First St., Delray Beach, \$25-\$35, 561-450-6357, artsgarage.org.

World

Celestial Sounds of Veena Indian classical - Saraswathi Rang-

nathan, Ganapathi Rangnathan. 6 pm Saturday, NSU Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, 1 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, \$25, \$35, 954-885-1466, apaiart.com.

Pop

TKA/Nu Shooz Late '80s pop acts. 9 p.m. Saturday, Magic City Casino, 450 NW 37th Ave., Miami, \$10, 305-460-6579, magiccitycasino.com.

Sing for Hope Concert Benefits St. Jude Children's Hospital, 9 pm Sat. American Rock Bar & Grill, 1600 E. Hillsboro Blvd., Deerfield Beach. 954-428-4539.

Reggae

Cris Cab Album release party/performance 8 p.m. Saturday, SLS Hotel South Beach, 1701 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, \$20, 305-455-2990.

Rock

Kings of Leon With Young the Giant and Kongos. 7 p.m. Saturday, Cruzan Amphitheatre, 601-7 Sansburys Way, West Palm Beach, \$29.50-\$74.50, 800-745-3000, Ticketmaster.

SUNDAY

Latin

Prince Royce With Sofia Reyes, 7 pm Sun. Fillmore, 1700 Washington Ave., Miami Beach. fillmoremb.com, 305-673-7300 or Ticketmaster. \$63.50-\$149.

World

My Tam Vietnamese ballad singer 9 pm Sun. Hard Rock Live, 1 Seminole Way, Hollywood. hardrocklivehollywoodfl.com, 954-797-5531 or Ticketmaster. \$50-\$150.

Pop

Alexa Heller South Florida chanteuse. 7 p.m. Sun., Jazziz Nightlife, 201 Plaza Real, Boca Raton, \$25, 561-300-0730, jazziz.com.

TUESDAY

Jazz

Tierney Sutton "After Blue" (The Joni Mitchell Project) 7 & 9 pm Tue. & Wed., Jazziz Nightlife, 201 Plaza Real, Boca Raton, \$35-\$75, 561-300-0730, jazziz.com.