Before there was Lady Gaga...
...before there was Madonna, there was Eva Tanguay (1878-1947), the Holyoke-raised singer who became America's most popular live entertainer in the early years of the 19th century.

Appearing first in Broadway musicals, then headlining the famous Ziegfeld Follies and ultimately reaching the peak of fame and fortune as the "Queen of Vaudeville," she displayed a brassy self-confidence, was adept at shameless self-promotion (via outrageous behavior) and had a thing for extravagant costumes (one dress, covered in coral, weighed 45 pounds and cost $2,000; another was constructed of dollar bills).

Tanguay readily admitted she couldn't really sing, dance or act, and insisted she wasn't even pretty — which didn't stop crowds (and lots of men) from flocking to her brazen protofeminist persona. While her career stretched into the 1930s, Tanguay's stage charisma did not translate well into the new media of radio and movies and she ended her days in Hollywood in relative obscurity.

Andrew Erdman, author of "Queen of Vaudeville: The Story of Eva Tanguay," the first actual biography of the performer, was set for a reading and book-signing Saturday at Holyoke's Wistariahurst Museum but had the better idea of reviving Tanguay's spirit. He's recruited Mary Lorson, a singer with her own long-time interest in the former star, for "Cyclonic: Readings from The Queen of Vaudeville: The Story of Eva Tanguay," a dramatized rendering of four scenes from the book with music and pictures.

Sponsored by the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, the show is 7:30 p.m. $20. Wistariahurst is at 238 Cabot St. in Holyoke 322-5560, wistariahurst.org