

Aurorapalooza strikes just the right note for Canadian Mental Health Association



Planning a music festival in the midst of a global pandemic is a tall order for even the most seasoned event producers, but 23-year-old Aurora resident Joel Gouveia pulled off a sold-out show in less than three weeks, one which went a long way to giving back to the local community.

Mr. Gouveia, a budding music industry professional, recently welcomed 100 music lovers to Town Park and tens of thousands of streaming music fans from all over the world for Aurorapalooza, the first of what is hoped to be an annual event showcasing local musicians, benefiting the Canadian Mental Health Association.

A self-described "concert junkie" who attends up to 20 live music events each year, Mr. Gouveia says he was "devastated" when countless concerts were scuttled due to COVID-19. But, as soon as York Region entered Stage 3 of the Province's plan to re-open Ontario, he saw an opportunity and approached the Town to examine the possibilities.

"We were allowed 100 people in one spot and live concerts were technically legal, so I thought I could just do it myself; I knew a bunch of local bands and I knew the space at Town Park was perfect because they already had a stage, so I put my entrepreneurial cap on and just did it myself instead of waiting for it to happen," he says, noting an added bonus was the Town had recently moved forward with its plan for a socially-distant Concerts in the Park series, so social "bubbles" were already marked on the lawn in front of the Town Park bandshell.

"That made my life a lot easier," he says with a laugh.

The next step was booking the music and, drawing on his contacts, he assembled Yellow Magnolia (Evin Jennings, Jake Allen, Keith Jarvis, and Owen Jennings), The Beresfords (Brendan Beresford, Shannon Beresford, Graham Unsted, and Carlos Aguilera), and Ed Jackson & His Band (Jackson, Manny De Grandis and Robin Joly).

"I knew they were all super-talented, so I figured it would be the perfect combination to bring everyone from Aurora in," says Gouveia. "They were the perfect combo. I have known all three acts personally for a long time, so it made my life really easy. I wasn't dealing with any strangers or booking agents, so it was all personal."

And the line-up was potent. The 100 tickets, the maximum allowed under present emergency restrictions, sold out in just a couple of hours, and each ticketholder not only had a chance to enjoy live music, but support a worthy organization at the same time.

"We wanted to raise as much money as possible for the Canadian Mental Health Association," he explained, adding that each ticket purchaser had the option to donate to the cause at the point of purchase or make further donations to a Go Fund Me campaign.

'We're trying to break the stigma. Now, more than ever, it is really important and it is something that effects every one of us. Whether you have a mental illness or not, I am sure everyone knows someone who does. It is something I really care about.

'With quarantine and everything that happened in March, it is a really hard on the mental health of people if we're not allowed to see our friends and our families as much and go do fun things. It is something I really care about and I thought this was the perfect time to tackle it and give back as much as I can because it has been a really crappy time over the last few months. Even if you don't actually have a mental illness, I think it has been tough on mental health overall.'

With the first sell-out Aurorapalooza in the books, Mr. Gouveia is looking forward to building on this year's success for year two ? and next time with a bit more time to plan.

'I want to plan it months ahead of time,' he says. 'The person I was working with at the Town said, 'Just so you know, things don't usually happen this fast. Let us know five or six months ahead of time,' so I was doing this on top of my day job, scrambling around for three weeks, working 16-hour days, just to put this together. Being able to put this together in three weeks was amazing.'

By Brock Weir