

Culture: Popping up at a corner near you



Music lovers might have a long wait before they can enjoy a performance inside the Aurora Cultural Centre once again, but keep your eyes peeled because the Aurora Cultural Centre's musicians could soon be coming to you.

This month, the Aurora Cultural Centre, which has seen its traditional home at the Church Street School temporarily closed not only due to the pandemic but ongoing construction related to Aurora Town Square, will take the show on the road with a series of surprise pop-up concerts throughout the community.

The series was inspired, in part, by musicians coming together to perform live for people waiting for their turn at mass vaccination centres in New York City.

‘The idea for them in New York was to be playing for a half-hour or so in a vaccination clinic and then allow other artists to come in and do the same,’ says Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, noting the idea was first pitched to her by Communications & Events Manager Jane Taylor. ‘We reached out to York Region Public Health and there was some real concern about adding people to vaccination clinics who didn't need to be there, I completely understand it, so we started to think about who in our community has been most deeply affected by this pandemic? We already have connections with our long-term care facilities, so we reached out to them and asked, ‘How would you feel about musicians being outside your venue, playing music?’ They have just been so affected by this pandemic and there was a real surge of warmth and welcoming around the idea and we all recognized that we needed to wait until there was an opportunity.

‘At the same time, we were thinking about where else we could be. Because the Centre is closed and under construction, our whole intention and strategic direction over the two years we were not going to be in the building was to be all around Town and try and generate an audience and really help them understand who we are.’

Integral in making this idea a reality is Kalasian Kalaichelvan, who recently joined the Aurora Cultural Centre team as Producer for the Aurora Pops Up program.

‘We wanted the program to reflect the diverse and changing landscape of Aurora,’ says Mr. Kalaichelvan. ‘Aurora is a fast-growing community and a fast-changing community. We're looking at a pool of a broad range of emerging and established artists based around the GTA with very diverse practices in music and movement that usually you're not seeing in theatres or large-scale wealth resource places. The question we keep going back to is how can we empower the brilliant artists of our community and revitalize the relationship between the public and the artist ? because that is a relationship that has been challenged, tested and unsettled in so

many ways over the last year. There are just so many interesting [questions] about what does programming mean? What does staging mean? How do we find new ways to present art that intersects with the way people need? How do we bring art to public spaces? More importantly, how do these everyday spaces ? street corners, outdoor dining patios, parks ? become cultural hubs of their Town?

?What's really exciting about what we're doing right now is the model we're developing for performance experiences can also provide a roadmap for the broader re-entry into the performing arts for York Region.?

To keep building on the excitement, the Cultural Centre is not giving the slightest hint on where these pop-ups might take place. You might see one at Town Park during the Aurora Farmers' Market, or at Machell's Alley near Yonge and Wellington, at your favourite neighbourhood patio, adjacent to your nearest retirement residence and maybe even outside your office window. What you will know, however, is a bit about the artists. All you need to do is keep your eyes peeled.

?A big part of this is we want audiences to start learning about the artists themselves,? says Mr. Kalaichelvan. ?Over the course of publicizing these concerts, while we may not be giving away the location and the time, we will be teasing the artists and the work they do. A big goal with this is how can we expand the kind of art we're presenting and the kind of art forms we're shedding a light on ? and how we can also [engage] audiences with things they haven't seen or heard before.

?You can expect a lot of artist engagement with our social media platforms and a lot of the collateral that comes with that, being mindful again of public health standards and keeping the surprise element of it is a big part, for sure.?

Adds Ms. Haines: ?We continue to find ways to connect with the community and I am thrilled this is a live action we can take. It feels like a long time coming and there is a real sense of waiting for something like this. If there are any artists who would like to be a part of it, please join us. We are delighted the community is responsive and interested in this, and we look forward to getting to know new people where they are.?

For more, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

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