

INSIDE AURORA: Cultural Comparisons

By Scott Johnston

I met up with some friends the other day, and as we discussed what we'd been up to lately, one noted that they'd been to a play in the city. Another friend said they'd attended a concert downtown the same week-end.

I was able to top them both by explaining that I'd done both activities here in Aurora, at a fraction of the cost and time required. In my case I'd attended the recent Theatre in the Park performance of Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor, and a few nights later had dropped by to see, or I guess more importantly, to hear, a Concert in the Park. Both of these had taken place outdoors in Town Park.

While we all had a great time at our various events, comparing these experiences re-emphasized to me how fortunate we are up here in Aurora.

While my friends had been required to plan for their evenings months in advance, I had noted the local events at the last minute in The Auroran.

As they were battling late rush hour HOV traffic on the Don Valley Parkway hours ahead of their performances, I had given myself about 10 minutes to leisurely travel back streets to get to Town Park. I even had time to chat with a few neighbours before the shows started.

Instead of queuing up for \$20 parking, I pulled into a free (which describes both cost and availability) shaded spot next to the venue. True, I didn't have a cushy theatre seat like my friends. In fact, I had to supply my own. But I was perfectly content with my folding chair, and unlimited legroom. And if I didn't like my sightline, or wanted a change of company or perspective at any point, I just moved.

It's hard to do that mid-performance at the Royal Alexandra Theatre.

At intermission, they lined up again with the crowds for pricy drinks and snacks. I also had to pay for my snacks at the park, although I could have easily brought them with me, as so many others did, but the ones on offer were reasonably priced, and there were no crowds. And I could comfortably eat them in my seat without incurring angry stares from ushers and my fellow arts patrons. As the shows continued, the atmosphere in the downtown theatres got warmer and stuffier. In Town Park, there was plenty of fresh air, late day sunshine, and warm breezes, not to mention soft grass underfoot.

When the show was over I was packed up and home in a few minutes while it was still light out. Unlike my friends, no late night parking garage congested, multi-hour traffic-jammed commute was required.

Apart from the convenience of it all, another benefit was the price. A small voluntary donation to the theatre company, and a non-perishable item for the Food Bank covered them both. This was probably a couple of hundred dollars less than what my friends paid.

Both the outdoor theatre and concerts in the park series are just two of the many low (or no) cost events and activities held here in Aurora throughout the year. Whether they are hosted by the Town, or other organizations, we are fortunate to have such a variety to choose from.

Based on the slowly growing crowds, it's nice to see that more and more Aurorans are discovering these local pleasures. However, the increase in numbers could have one unfortunate drawback; it may eventually start to put a dent in my unlimited legroom.

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