

Touch of Class set to bring unique island sound to Town Park

By Brock Weir

As they take their unique-shaped instruments from venue to venue, musicians have been astounding listeners with the versatility of their deceptively simple-looking instruments, and this Wednesday you'll have a chance to listen for yourself as the sounds of steel pan drums fill Town Park.

Touch of Class, a GTA-based steel band, are set to take over the Town Park Band Shell on July 25, the latest entry in the 2018 Concerts in the Park Summer Series.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the unique sounds of the steel pan have become synonymous with the Caribbean, but have, over the years, considerably expanded their reach.

"I could play a Justin Bieber song, or a Grover Washington piece, a classical piece, or a calypso piece," says Winston Frederick of Touch of Class. "We can take the steel pan into every era of music. Languages might be different, but the melodies created can cross borders."

As far as musical instruments go, the steel pan is a relative newcomer.

Its origins are in the islands and Mr. Frederick, a native of Trinidad & Tobago says just about everyone has tried their hand.

"It's the national instrument," he explains. "Trinidad is an oil-producing country, so the development of the steel pan [from a drum] was kind of a given and that's how it started back in the days after the Second World War. It's an accessible instrument and a poor person can join a group because [the instrument] is available. Your parents might not be able to send you to piano or saxophone lessons, but the steel pan is sort of a free for all. It's like soccer - all you need is a ball. It's accessible to any class of person within the country and that is how we started playing."

Mr. Frederick, who is pursuing a Masters Degree at York University with a particular focus on the steel pan, says he and his bandmates just look at the steel pan as just another instrument, but it is an instrument that resonates with audiences of all ages and all cultural backgrounds.

"We're looking forward to sharing our culture and having a lot of fun," says Mr. Frederick of next week's Aurora concert. "We do a lot of jumping music and, in the summer time, people are looking for a nice night of entertainment, peacefulness, and togetherness - and that is what we look forward to, too. That excites us when we see crowds of people having fun. That energises us a lot."

Concerts in the Park run at Town Park each Wednesday evening from 7 - 9 p.m. through August. Festivities are preceded by a mini-market offered by the Aurora Farmers' Market, which begins at 5 p.m. and runs throughout the evening. Admission is free, but donations to the Aurora Food Pantry are welcomed.