

Young storytellers showcased at Aurora Music Festival



By Brock Weir

Claire Wright is a storyteller by nature.

As a writer, she is inspired by the lives of those around her, whether they are fellow friends at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, or survivors of traumas of monumental proportions, and music has turned into potent outlet for her.

The 17-year-old student, along with her band Half Birthday, are set to be one of youth bands showcased at next month's Aurora Music Festival, which will take place at Town Park on Saturday, August 5.

‘They are artists we have all known,’ says Festival co-organizer Jamie Macdonald, ‘and to see them excel and come together now is just a different dynamic. And Claire? When we did the Porch Fest (as part of Open Streets in June), her voice just carried so much.’ Adds co-organizer Councillor John Abel, ‘When I heard they were all together, it was just like magic and all the pieces were fitting in. It is all about enabling youth and that is our underlying mission.’

The Aurora Music Festival will feature the headlining act of Monkey Junk, along with local favourites Bernadette Connors, and the Pick Brothers Band, and local youth bands Louisa and the Planets (lead by former Aurora Teen Idol Louisa Barbosa) and Half Birthday.

The members of Half Birthday, including Claire on lead vocals and guitar, Ray Goudy on bass, Harrison Smith on guitar, Charlotte McMunn on drums and Ben Rosittan on sax, have largely become known to Festival organizers either as solo acts or as members of other bands.

They came together as Half Birthday with a first gig at 33 1/3 Record Store at Bayview and Hollidge, with a mix of original songs and covers, from Led Zeppelin to contemporary tunes.

‘I have always been exposed to music by my parents, especially my dad, and I did musical theatre when I was younger,’ says Claire, ‘But I was reintroduced to performing live music about a year ago.’

Setting out for local open mic nights, she found her musical theatre training made it easy to be comfortable singing and strumming for an audience. She wasn't sure how it would feel at first, but she says it came back very naturally.

From there, she began to write. One of the first songs she wrote was called By Chance Alone, which was inspired by an experience she had meeting Max Eisen, a Holocaust survivor.

‘I feel when you're writing it is more personal, but when you're on stage, you're sharing your feelings with all the people you are playing with,’ says Claire. ‘As a band, we all bounce off each other and it is a different energy than writing.’

Since putting herself out there, Claire says she has been described variously as sounding like an R&B artist, but she has also received feedback that she has a bit of a country vibe. She doesn't necessarily buy it, but she's not discounting it.

‘I feel like everyone can determine my sound in different ways,’ she says, inviting the community to come out to Town Park and experience Half Birthday themselves. ‘We're just looking for everyone to have a good time!’

And, in the end, having a good time and nurturing young talent is what it is all about for the Aurora Music Festival, and its umbrella

group Music Aurora.

?There has always been a component of introducing the local community to local talent and something that is going to wow you,? says Mr. Macdonald. ?That keeps any festival fresh. Our lineup always keeps spots open for youth acts and local acts as well. There is so much great talent in our back yard and it is making opportunities available. That is the mantra of Music Aurora.?