

Aurora United Church to raise voice in song to mark first anniversary of fire



By Brock Weir

Ursula Ivonoffski, a resident of Sharon, just happened to be in Aurora last April 11 when word began to spread of a church fire on Yonge Street in Aurora.

Her heart immediately sank.

A long-time friend of the Aurora United Church (AUC), only one church came to mind given the scant information she had heard, and she immediately made a bee-line to the scene of the blaze to be with her church community.

‘It was just a shock to everyone and I was quite devastated,’ says Ms. Ivonoffski, a singer, who performed regularly at the church with her husband, Voltr. ‘I went to the site and spent most of the afternoon there. Even on the day, I had an oddly upbeat, optimistic attitude towards it. I thought it was very ironic it happened to happen at that time of year being Easter, and the thoughts of rebuilding and renewal of life.’

‘I thought this is a very strong, loving community and they will rebuild like a phoenix rising from the ashes, and it looks like that is just what the community has done.’

Ms. Ivonoffski has retained that upbeat, optimistic attitude over the course of the last year, and that spirit was the driving force of her upcoming concert ‘Songs of Faith, Hope and Love.’ The concert is set for 7.30 p.m. on Saturday, April 11, at Newmarket's Trinity United Church. All proceeds will benefit the Aurora United Church Future Fund.

Joining Ms. Ivonoffski in the concert, which promises ‘something for everyone’, are members of the Aurora United Church choir: contralto Colleen Abbott, tenor George Collins, soprano Linda Henshaw, and bass Bob McRoberts.

?We thought it would be a marvellous idea if we could do something to give back to the church and suggested a fundraising concert,? says Ursula. ?The fact it is taking place on the same day of the fire was actually an accident, and we weren't sure if it was going to be a good thing or not, but I think it turned out to be a good decision. Right from the start, the concert was going to be one of optimism, hope and looking forward, and an evening of confidence, strength and working together.

?The congregation of Aurora has really banded together and we are just thrilled to support that and be a part of it. I don't get the chance to do duets with people very often, so for me this is an especially thrilling concert.?

A native of Austria, Ursula came to Canada as a child, living first in Ottawa before moving with her family to Richmond Hill. Her childhood was one filled with music, both classical and folk, and she says the story goes she never used to talk to her dolls ? she sang to them.

Her love of music and, in particular, opera, became more serious as she grew older, taking master classes with renowned singers in Europe, and now sharing her voice at home.

?We want to convey a sense of joy and optimism,? she says. ?Although some of the songs might be a little wistful, there is an attitude of looking forward, of hope, of expectation, of a better future, of meeting the loved one once again. I want people to be inspired that the future holds great promise to work together in a spirit of life, hope and goodwill to build a wonderful future together. If music is a vehicle to inspire people, I think that is a wonderful gift we can share with them.?

The morning before the concert, the public is invited to gather at the site of Aurora United Church for a commemoration beginning at 12 noon. The event will include prayers, remembrances, music and more.

Tickets for the April 11 concert are \$20 for adults and \$10 for students. For more information, call Yvonne at 905-713-6890.