

Aurora Winter Blues Festival set for return as Cultural Centre launches 2025-26 season



The Aurora Winter Blues Festival will make its return to the community in 2026, hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Last held in 2019, and forcibly placed on the backburner due to COVID-19, its revival was announced by the Centre on Thursday evening as they launched their 2025-2026 Performing Arts Season – a season fittingly titled, ‘Let Our Stage Surprise You.’

The season launch on June 26 was hosted by comedian Martha Chaves, who has become a Cultural Centre regular in recent years, and featured a variety of acts – including Canadian Flamenco artist Tamar Ilana and Joe Blues.

‘The Blues Festival is back in Aurora,’ said Derek Andrews, Programming Arts Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre. ‘When I started here [at the Centre] there was no Blues. There had been Blues Festivals for 10 years produced by Music Aurora and COVID crushed it.’

Andrews said he approached Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, on the prospect of bringing it back.

‘We met with Music Aurora who said, ‘Bring it back, if you can.’ We can and we have!’ said Andrews. ‘Why Blues? Those guys [Music Aurora] did it because they loved it and, of course, Blues is the bedrock of all other music. There would be no Rolling Stones, no Led Zeppelin, or any of the popular acts we hear on the radio, and the Blues was the forerunner of that.’

The new edition of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival will continue to be a February affair, beginning on Thursday, February 26 with multiple Juno-winner Jack de Keyzer. Additional concerts include Suzie Vinnick, supported by Jay Blues and featuring guests Kevin Breit and Tony D. on Friday, February 27; Glenn Marais' Jook on the afternoon Saturday, February 28, with Dominique Fils-Amie performing that evening; and, on Sunday, March 1, the Festival concludes with Harrison Kennedy with Brock Stonefish and Dave Mowatt in the afternoon, followed in the evening by Little Magic Sam.

It's just one component of a jam-packed season ahead that the Cultural Centre proudly boasts features 100 per cent Canadian talent.

The Centre's upcoming season formally kicks off Thursday, September 18 with roots-rockers Skydiggers.

Family-friendly fun is next on the bill as Coos takes the stage with two performances as part of the Centre's Magic Carpet series, which is designed to introduce the youngest audience members to arts and culture.

The Great Artist Music Series, one of the Centre's longest-running programs, kicks off a busy October when Payadora takes the stage on October 3. They will be followed on October 18 by Lori Cullen and Talia Schlangher, folk artists who are returning to the Centre by popular demand.

Quebec folk music will be in the spotlight on November 8 as fall programming continues on November 18 with Le Vent du Nord, followed on November 15 by Divine Brown Sings Ella, Billie and Sarah ? a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holliday, and Sarah Vaughan in two performances.

Comedy is also part of the fall fare as Chaves and comedy pals present Age Against the Machine on November 21.

Moshe Hammer and Angela Park round out November programs, when the Great Artist Music Series returns on November 30.

The holiday season takes centre-stage in December as the month opens with A Christmas Carol, a family-friendly presentation by Dufflebag Theatre on Sunday, December 7, followed by the ?fiery fiddle tunes? on Saturday, December 13 with the Allison Lupton Christmas Show.

?This room is filled with so many of our friends who know us well, and I am grateful that you were able to join us [and] be a part of the incredible cultural community that's here in York Region,? Haines told supporters at Thursday's launch event. ?You make everything we do worth the effort and you deeply impact how creative our community is.

?A very special thank you to the people and organizations that make this season possible. As a not-for-profit charitable organization, we could not produce, present or teach the arts to the community without them. I'd like to start by thanking the Town of Aurora. The Town is an extremely special and sustaining partner for us. We have an even stronger relationship with them since we moved back into Aurora Town Square, and we coexist in this beautiful venue. A true operating partner that helps make everything that we do possible. I just couldn't be more grateful to Doug (Nadorozny, Municipal CAO), Robin McDougall (Aurora's Director of Community Services), Phil (Rose, Cultural Services Manager for the Town of Aurora), Mayor Mrakas, and all of Council for continuing to trust us to provide cultural services on the Town's behalf to the community.?

For more information on the 2025-2026 Performing Arts Season, including tickets, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

NEXT WEEK: The British Invasion meets R&B with favourite artists returning in January.

By Brock Weir