

Award-winning country artist Leah Daniels to kick-off Concerts in the Park



Award-winning country artist Leah Daniels will take over the Town Park band shell as Aurora kicks off the popular Concerts in the Park Summer series.

Fresh from CMT Fest and Boots & Hearts, the Uxbridge-raised Daniels is set to bring a blend of original music and homages to the stage as the Magna Hoedown mainstay prepares for something of a homecoming.

"It's so exciting because it means that I will probably recognize some faces in the crowd," says Daniels with a laugh. "I love the part where I get to see old friends from school, or a teacher who will come out, and it's super-special to be able to have my family and friends [there]. It's a great feeling."

Also adding to the great feeling is a chance to share music which has a very special place in her heart.

"Performing is my favourite thing; I love writing, I love recording, but to be on stage is my favourite part," she says. "They are all songs that I love. I love songs with energy, songs I can dance to, and I try to think, how can I take the audience on a musical journey?"

Daniels' love of music began in school choirs. From there, she fuelled this passion on the stage through musical theatre, but it wasn't too long before she honed in on her love for song writing, influenced by such favourite artists as Shania Twain, Sheryl Crow, and Sarah McLachlan.

"I remember reading those artists wrote their own songs and I thought, maybe I can do that, too. I started to write my own songs and form my first band in high school. My music back then was more pop-rock, but as I started writing more, I realized my music was shifting to sounding a bit more like country. People were saying, 'That could be a country song?' and I thought, 'Really?' Then I thought, at the heart of country music is the lyrics and the storytelling. I think I love that part of being able to share my life through my songs. The highs and lows, the heartbreak, the happy times, the adventures that I have and expressing that through music.

"My music was inspired by my life, but also my different interests across generations. I had an uncle that was really into classic rock when I was younger and, of course, he would always come over and say, 'Leah, you need to sing this AC/DC song!' or Led Zeppelin and that kind of crept in at times.

"A friend of mine introduced me to song writer Sam Ellis when I just finished high school. He was writing primarily in the country genre, and when I met him things just clicked. He was my first producer who did my first album and I think that really took my

career into more of the country genre. It just felt right, it felt like home.?

Next week's program will be a blend of original works, as well as tributes to singers who have influenced her along the way, not just Twain, Crow and McLachlan, but also John Denver, Chris Stapleton, Hank Snow, Bryan Adams, Bon Jovi and more.

?I hope [the audience] will leave with an appreciation for country music, and that I have been able to include people no matter their background, no matter what their technical musical preferences are,? she says. ?I hope they will find something to enjoy in myself and maybe even become a country fan if they weren't before!?

Aurora's Concerts in the Park summer series takes place each Wednesday night at Town Park beginning July 3 and running through August 28 from 7 ? 9 p.m.

Admission is free but donations to the Aurora Food Pantry are encouraged. For a complete lineup, visit aurora.ca/summerconcerts.

By Brock Weir