

Blondin set to take a little piece of your heart at Concerts in the Park

By Brock Weir

Growing up in the 80s, Krista Blondin didn't have much time for contemporary music. Instead, she gravitated towards the tunes of the swinging sixties.

She might have been in the musical minority when she was in high school, but it served her well; these early interests proved influential and next Wednesday this influence will come to life as she takes over the Town Park Band Shell to pay tribute to the legendary Janis Joplin.

Joined on stage by Wild T. in a tribute to Jimi Hendrix, the sounds of Woodstock will be in the air on the 50th anniversary of the iconic music festival.

'I always liked Janis when I was a teen,' says Ms. Blondin. 'When I started singing myself, I kept hearing, 'You look like Janis' and 'You sound like Janis,' but in those early days I wanted to establish myself as Krista. I was doing dance party music, but the time came that I was ready to do it. Janis Joplin is not music that you can just sing; I wanted to do it right and I invested a lot of time into learning her style and her character on stage.'

At the time, this was easier said than done. Internet was still in its comparative infancy. There was no YouTube to watch Joplin in concert to learn her style, or live interviews to gain insight into her character. So, she did her best with the information she had, going as far as to order VHS tapes, which were studied intently, books that were read voraciously, and music that was absorbed with passion.

'I wasn't singing anything else and I just researched every day, practicing four hours a day, not just the music but the moves,' she says. 'Watching the videos, you could see how she was hitting the notes, and it was a really physical thing.'

The more she studied Janis Joplin, the more she understood why an up and comer such as herself gravitated towards the style of a woman who paved the way for so many female rock artists.

'As a singer, one of the best parts is that release of anxiety, stress, the whole thing, just getting it out there and being true,' she says. 'Knowing Janis did that and it was part of her singing is something I could really relate to: the freedom of being able to sing and not care what you look like while you sang. It didn't have the same feeling as when, say, I was doing a jazz show all dressed up and more poised. I loved the feeling of letting it all out, getting sweaty and messy. Who cares what happens to your hair or your clothes? I could really relate to that.'

This is something she finds the audience relates to as well. When she performs as Janis Joplin, Ms. Blondin says she can see how her music affects people deeply. This is something that sticks with her as she forms her set list. You'll hear classics like Me & Bobby McGee and Piece of My Heart, but you'll also hear some of the lesser known hits, ones that had personal resonance for Joplin ? and continue to do so for Ms. Blondin and the audience.

?I'll be going through a journey of Janis' life, incorporating the music and I will stay in character for the whole show,? she says. ?The show opens with one of the biggest hits, and even if they're not a Janis fan or didn't know much about Janis, they are going to learn more about her as a person and performer. It's always, ?Wow, I didn't know much about Janis, I wasn't a fan before ? and now I am.' In that 45 minutes I can give audiences as much information as possible about her. You'll hear the hits, but it threads together ? and that comes with time.?

A Tribute to Janis Joplin & Jimi Hendrix will take place Wednesday, August 14, at Town Park as part of Aurora's Concerts in the Park Summer Series. Concerts run each Wednesday through August from 7 ? 9 p.m. Admission is free, but donations to the Aurora Food Pantry are encouraged. For more information on this and future shows, visit aurora.ca/summerconcerts.