

Bright Lights in the Afternoon brings music, collaboration to Aurora Town Square



Local music lovers had an afternoon treat on Saturday as they enjoyed a blend of soulful folk and Persian percussion in Aurora Town Square ? the first of five such interludes presented by the Aurora Cultural Centre as part of its Bright Lights in the Afternoon.

Running each Saturday afternoon through August 23, the relaxed outdoor concert series is the result of the Centre's Brevik Collaboratory, a group of performers who have participated in the Centre's inaugural professional development residency.

Each Saturday, participants in the program will have a chance to flex their musical muscles before a live audience, bringing new opportunities for the artists and a giving residents ?the perfect excuse to slow down, soak up the sun, and support local talent.?

The inaugural July 26 outing featured Sam Jolodari with Persian percussion, Arvin Omidvar and Brassquake (horns from Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School), and hip-hop artist Dynesti.

?Our open call produced a wide range of folks, from a couple that are actually in high school right up to people in their 60s who were rebooting their careers or needed the instruction we were providing,? says Derek Andrews, Performing Arts Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre. ?Sam and Arvin are actually Dr. G.W. Williams students, but very serious about their music and they happened to [also be at the first show] contrasting with Leslie Taylor who is rebooting her career as a performer. We had quite an age gap in the first show between youth and elders.?

The Brevik Hall Collaboratory Program was conceived by Andrews and Aurora Cultural Centre Executive Director Suzanne Haines following a report from the York Region Arts Council outlining performing arts needs in the community ? among them was a shortage of professional development opportunities.

?We started planning as we were getting into the new Aurora Town Square building how we could best use the new facilities to start to fix it and that's how the Brevik Collaboratory idea came about,? says Andrews, referencing the portmanteau of ?collaboration? and ?laboratory.?

?We were successful with the Canada Council providing funding that has allowed us to hire the instructors, give an honorarium to the participants, and pay for all the other expenses, including, ultimately, the performances that are happening at the outdoor stage that is kind of unprecedented as well.?

One such program, led by Micah Barnes of The Singer's Playground focuses on artists improving their stagecraft and presence ? a compulsory part of the program ? and these performances are a great opportunity for these artists to put some of what they've learned into practice.

Upcoming performances in the Bright Lights in the Afternoon series include:

Saturday, August 9 at 2 p.m. with Sophie Atkin (powerful folk pop), Kent Mills (The Best of Canadiana), and Anna Leeming (Beyond Stevie Nicks);

Saturday, August 16, at 2 p.m. with Sarvi Seivani (Persian and keyboard pop), Dana Valerie (Roots Folk Rock), and James Clark (Wicked Finger Guitar Rock);

Saturday, August 23 at 2 p.m. with Micah Barnes (Solo) with special guests Dana Valerie and Daeyong Lim.

?The program is really properly reflecting the cultural makeup of York Region,? says Andrews. ?There's a lot of dynamism and it has been really fun working with the folks who are taking the instruction and these concerts are a by-product of a month of well-planned, well-executed instruction on career development. These are names to watch for. There is a curious and really charming sidebar to the project ? the group has really bonded. They're very supportive of each other during sessions where they're performing, in the critiques Micah Barnes is overseeing. They're applauding each other's performances, are very supportive, and it's remarkable how artists want to help each other.

?I love seeing that community feeling that's coming from the arts community that we've been able to foster. Aurora Town Square is a remarkable gift to Aurora and we're trying to make the most of using this space. We're going to bring back the residency that we did in January and February this past year and those four months ? January, February, and then the summer months are when we're activating Brevik Hall and this fulfilment of need in York Region to improve what is going on for artists.?

For more information about Bright Lights in the Afternoon, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/brevik-collaboratory/bright-lights-in-the-afternoon.

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