

BROCK'S BANTER: Right Here in River City

By Brock Weir

Outside of one instance surreptitiously recorded on an iPhone at a Los Angeles karaoke bar of me belting out the Sonny Bono part of I Got You Babe, which was subsequently uploaded onto social media last year, the odds of finding me singing in public are slim. Sure, I can mouth the classic words of O Canada ? none of this ?in all of us command? nonsense ? and God Save the Queen enthusiastically with the best of them, but putting wind in the notes to actually make a sound might be considered an act of treason, such is my vocal prowess.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm is there, but the talent is not.

So, I was heartened to catch the new film Florence Foster Jenkins over the weekend. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the true story, Meryl Streep plays Ms. Jenkins, a New York socialite and patron of the art who invests her considerable fortune in Manhattan's classical music scene.

Eventually, she decides to splurge on herself and re-launch her career as an operatic soprano. The only problem ? and it is a big one ? is that she can't sing a note.

Her heart is in the right place, but nobody knows where she left her talent.

Nevertheless, it is made clear she does it for the music. Music is the fuel that fires her and to hell with all those who don't share her point of view.

The film reinforces the healing and therapeutic power music can have on anyone, whether a soldier preparing for war, or a New York socialite with enough money not to care.

After the week that preceded this particular screening, it is clear in retrospect that this film should be required viewing for all Aurorans aspiring to make a difference in the community.

I watched with dismay last Tuesday when a seemingly simple request to host a community celebration to mark the farewell concert of the Tragically Hip descended once again into the swampy marshes of minutia that seem to be the hallmark of all Council discussions in Aurora pertaining to music or entertainment in any one of Aurora's beautiful parks.

Just a few short years ago, Aurora experienced the high drama over the former Aurora Jazz+ Festival. There is no need to rehash a complete chronology of everything that transpired in that debacle, or do a rundown of the cast of characters, or the fallout that eventually resulted in the Festival moving to Newmarket. Countless column inches have already been devoted to that subject, well after the Festival upped sticks to Riverwalk Commons and eventually the Ray Twinney Complex.

Following that brouhaha came the debacle facilitated by those desperate to fill the gap left at Town Park by the Festival's absence, resulting in the one-off Celebrate Aurora, a three-day event that inflamed no end of passion among participating partners and elected officials.

It was complete with photo opportunities, Council members staging peaceful protests by refusing to participate in said photo-ops, still smarting from all that Jazz.

In the middle of all this was the staging of Aurora's Sesquicentennial Celebration, with various musical and cultural components, which left the organizing committee of citizen members repeatedly voicing exasperation with ex-members of the Town's communications team and two or three incumbent members of staff both at the table during public meetings.

This was punctuated by verbal sparring matches just outside the committee door.

?Roadblocks? was a term thrown around freely by committee members venting their respective spleens during what was supposed to be a time of celebration. It was thrown around the Council table once again last week in the attempt to decide whether or not a simulcast of the Tragically Hip concert was going to be a Town-run affair.

Shakespeare wrote, ?If music be the food of love, play on.? If this is the case, Aurorans have access to an endless romantic buffet each summer with a Concerts in the Park program designed to appeal to just about every taste, Canada Day entertainment tailored for the same, and next weekend's Ribfest headliners keen to awaken nostalgia.

The common denominator in their success is they are entirely town-run events.

Trouble in this musically-inclined town doesn't start with the arrival of a billiard table, but when citizens try to get involved in augmenting the program.

The one exception to the rule seems to be the one-day annual Music In The Park Festival, which seemed to go off without a hitch. Formerly the ?Gospel Music Festival? founded by Jim Edwards, the smooth success of this event in Town Park is the one thing leading this agnostic to believe God might be on their side.

?Let's try and get past this and focus on what a great opportunity it is for the community,? said Councillor Michael Thompson near the end of last week's farce.

It would be wise if everyone approached musical events in this way.

If Council can agree to throw up a tank at the Aurora Cenotaph with a comparative snap of the fingers, or put a long gestating school safety plan on ice in even less time following a delegation from a solitary resident, surely a music event is one area where everyone can find common ground and row, in time, in the same direction.