

Community to raise voice in 'Poetry and Song for our challenging times'?



Words and music have been inextricably linked for millennia.

They can pack a wallop on their own, but when they come together, both elements are challenged and elevated as is the listener.

That will be very much the case in the 'living room' space at the Aurora Public Library next week when Toronto Poet Laureate George Elliott Clarke returns to the community with fellow poet Giovanna Riccio, vocalist Honey Novic, and local musicians Vanessa Wang and The Sonical Bees for Poetry & Song for Our Challenging Times.

'This relates to my efforts since the pandemic started to try and partner with various artists of various backgrounds to produce new art and that has generally taken the form of song,' Clarke explains. 'I've worked with several composers over the last two to three years and we've presented these songs generally in Zoom presentations and I think we all had a great time. [The Library] came back with the idea that maybe we could do something that would involve local talent in Aurora and a different kind of program that would focus on young singers.'

Poetry and song have gone together since early peoples took up chanting to any number of deities. From there, what Clarke describes as 'formal systems of how you should sing' developed particularly in the European tradition.

'There is a division, especially in our culture, between print poets who are generally perceived to be people that you read as opposed to listen to and people you might actually read silently and study as opposed to hearing them recite their work with passion before a live audience. While that is one approach that some poets and audiences prefer, we know that given the success of the Beat Movement and the success of the spoken word artists going back to the 1960s [and] of course, I can't leave out the great folk and rock poets like Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, the poets of the Blues and R&B, songwriters work in a poetic idiom and definitely writing words that are supposed to be sung.'

You don't need very many examples to underscore just how 'challenging' the times in which we're currently living are. From Clarke's perspective, 'we all face grave economic challenges with runaway inflation, not to mention supply shortages, even of medicine, and foodstuffs every now and then,' but, at the end of the day, there is 'healing in poetry and song.'

'We know this just from the Blues, that particular genre of music and the idea that on the one hand you can be very sad, singing the blues, sorrowful and downcast. On the other hand, there is a catharsis that happens [through the Blues] in that your sorrows are wrenched out of you,' says Clarke. 'Maybe they're wrenched out of you in a cascade of tears, but you feel purified, uplifted even, even after you've had a chance to purge your system of the sorrows that you face, or the grief that you're feeling, thanks to the power

of song.

?Performers are a pretty upbeat group and we're not going to be appearing in Aurora, a Town whose name conjures up light and gold, happiness, associated with brilliance and that very precious metal of gold, which is actually my favourite colour ? not to mention notions of dawn and new beginnings and so on. Given all those happy associations with just the word Aurora, we have to be present to basically chant away the problems, sing away the consciousness of ill, and come together and celebrate the fact that most of us have survived the last three years. Unfortunately, some have not, but most of us have despite the challenges and difficulties, and we may actually manage to get beyond the current slate of issues, problems, and there's also something to be said for winter, the long, cold season; But appearing, reading, speaking sprightly material, sprightly songs, and reminding us that there's much to be thankful for, much to hope for, much to anticipate.?

Poetry & Song for Our Challenging Times will take place in the Aurora Public Library Living Room on Wednesday, January 11, at 7 p.m. For more information on the free event, visit aurorapl.ca or register at bit.ly/3C6SwU0.

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