

Concerts in the Park offers tributes, original artists

The latest season of Aurora's popular Concerts in the Park Summer Series gets fully underway this week, with a new program of fresh twists and returning favourites.

Following an early start with The Dave Mowat Trio on June 21 to mark National Indigenous Peoples' Day, the series is set to continue at the Town Park band shell this Wednesday, June 5, with a tribute to British music legends David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Elton John, Rod Stewart and Freddie Mercury, followed by Hotel California: A Tribute to the Eagles, on Wednesday, July 12.

"We know Aurora loves their live concerts, so it was an extra-special treat for the community to see an additional concert on June 21 with Dave Mowat and his trio. From the reception at the event, people really enjoyed his unique presentation and his unique sound, and his is definitely a band that we want to invite back to participate once again," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "That set the tone for a really incredible summer lineup."

Hotel California, says Ware, has a "long history in Aurora" having last performed in the community in 2005.

"We tried to get them back for a solid five years thereafter with no success, and in an ironic twist, we booked them for August 2020 but COVID hit that March and that didn't come to fruition, but now it's time. We're thrilled to be able to welcome them back to Aurora 18 years later."

Tribute acts take a "country" turn on Wednesday, July 19, when The Chicks Tribute Show takes over the band shell with a salute to the top-selling female country group of all time.

"We had The Chicks Tribute back in 2008 or 2009 and we were blown away with how strong that band was in the music industry," says Ware. "They are one of the single most successful country bands and similar to Hotel California, it is long-overdue for us to be able to get them back to Aurora. We're thrilled to see them perform once again and be able to relive their music."

Canada's own Tragically Hip has a deep connection to the Town Park area, having been the scene of a live screening of their final concert in an event that brought thousands to the downtown core.

The tribute band, From the Hip, which performs Wednesday, July 26, aims to recapture that magic.

"I am confident they are going to hit a home run at our Concerts in the Park, because it's such a beautiful venue," says Ware. "The lead singer's mannerisms, his body language, the whole package is just so authentic and I truly believe this is one of the best Hip tributes out there. We're so excited to be able to share this with the community."

Tributes take a back seat to an original artist on Wednesday, August 2, when Juno Award-winner Suzie McNeil takes the stage.

The last woman standing on the CBS reality competition Rockstar: INXS, McNeil has sung backup to P!nk, with Aerosmith on their 2023 Peace Out Farewell Tour, and has had multiple Top 20 hits on the Canadian charts.

"We're excited to get Suzie McNeil as our original artist for this series," says Ware. "She's at a really high peak with her career with a new album being launched and we really lucked out with schedules being able to line up and her willingness to be able to come to our community. This is going to be a really nice treat for us to see an original artist working so hard getting her career moving. It's nice to have an original artist, but at the end of the day, this series is about supporting all artists."

Female artists continue to be in the spotlight when tributes resume Wednesday, August 9, with Piece of My Heart: A Tribute to Janis Joplin.

"This tribute to Janis Joplin is the show of all shows," says Ware. "I remember seeing Piece of My Heart back in 2007 and I learned so much about Janis Joplin. Part of the thing that makes this tribute so successful is not only Krista Blondin's ability to be authentic, but to tell the story of the artists themselves."

Young talent is set to take the stage on Wednesday, August 16, when The Toronto All-Star Big Band, takes over.

"It's a group of a minimum 30 youth who work so hard to maintain the band," says Ware. "Big Band music is always a treat and always a hit. We're going from country, to classic rock, to folk, and now Big Band Music, and that's really something else."

Jukebox Heroes, A Tribute to Foreigner, is next up on Wednesday, August 23, with a salute to the Platinum-selling artists.

"Jukebox Heroes is a phenomenal band that is actually locally-based," says Ms. Ware. "If you close your eyes and listen to the music, you really do think you're listening to Foreigner, which appeals to many, many age groups."

Closing out the 2023 Concerts in the Park series is a "spectacular" finale paying tribute to Cher and The Bee Gees.

"This takes us back to the 70s with the best of the best," says Ware. "This is a case where we've been able to bring in two really strong music forces and pull them together for one evening - the finale concert, which we always try to increase the momentum and energy and I'm really confident these two tribute acts will achieve that."

All concerts begin at 7 p.m. at Town Park. They are free of charge but donations to the Aurora Food Pantry are highly encouraged. Attendees will be able to purchase and enjoy food from the Canadian Food & Wine Institute at the Aurora Armoury or from a rotating roster of food vendors courtesy of the Aurora Farmers' Market. The Market will also offer an array of artisans each Wednesday to encourage shopping local.

A pilot project will also be carried out at the August 23 and 30 concerts where licensed beverages will be sold. The results of this pilot will determine whether licensed alcohol sales will be the norm in future years.

"Also new this summer we will be setting up our beanbag toss games each evening between 6 and 8.15 where people can play before the concert and be active before they set up for a great night of music," says Ware. "In addition to that, we're really pleased that once again this entire music series has been presented by TD, along with our event sponsors Aurora Home Hardware, Pfaff Newmarket, and, new this year, Magna International.

"Those who donate to the Food Pantry will have their names entered into a draw for a prize pack that includes an exclusive lawn blanket. If your name is chosen, we will have two blankets to give away on each of our concert evenings and the blanket itself is absolutely amazing."

For more information about the 2023 Concerts in the Park lineup, visit aurora.ca/summerconcerts.

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