

Cultural Centre lifts curtain on 'Transformative & Bold' season By Brock Weir

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As they approach their tenth anniversary, the Aurora Cultural Centre has established itself as a hub for the full artistic experience, but now they are kicking things up a notch, unveiling a new season they can only describe as 'Transformative and Bold.' Transformative & Bold is the theme that runs through their entire professional arts program for the 2018-2019 Season, encompassing gallery shows, special events and performing arts.

There are returning favourites, new series, and some acts that are set to break new ground at the Cultural Centre, all in the name of creating a 'diverse experience for the community.'

'We have created an arc to really give people an interfiled sense of the professional arts year at the Cultural Centre,' says the Centre's Jane Taylor. 'We thought it was really time. We have grown so much. In 2020, we're heading into our tenth anniversary and this is a time to really look at our collateral and redesign it. The ethos that we took when we were programming for this season is you will have transformative experiences when you come through the door and you will see the bold changes that have been made.'

To get a flavour of the bold changes in store, look no further than October 12 with Alysha Brilla, the first concert in the Aurora Cultural Centre's new Brevik Hall Presents series, which encompasses most of their performing arts programming for the season ahead.

Ms. Brilla is a multi-Juno award nominee who will bring a fusion of world musical sounds to the centre, blending sounds from her own Indian and Tanzanian heritage.

'Her agent says, 'Yeah, she's amazing and she's always up against Michael Buble,' says Ms. Taylor of Ms. Brilla's Juno experience. 'That said, she is being recognized in the same stratosphere as him. Her sound is upbeat folk fusion and I'm very excited because this is a new sound we haven't had on our stage before.'

Bold holiday fare is also on the program on December 13 with 'Songs for a Winter's Night' presented by the Polaris Prize-nominated voices of Joelle Westman and Kelly Lafaive of the duo Georgian Bay.

'There were a couple of people who whispered to me about this duo,' says Ms. Taylor. 'They are Franco-Ontarian and they're anglophone, so what we have is holiday content, some in French and some in English, so it gives you a nice flavour for the duality of our province.'

Kobo Town, featuring frontman and songwriter Drew Gonsalves of Trinidad, takes the stage on February 14, bringing what is described as an 'intoxicating blend of lilting calypsonian wit, dancehall reggae and trombone-heavy brass' to the Centre.

'This guy has been on my list for a long time,' says Ms. Taylor. 'He is bringing his five-piece band for Valentine's Day. His sound is very calypso and we can have very political statements that are woven throughout his incredibly danceable music. He is based in Toronto, but he is hard to get because he is huge in France and spends a lot of time in France.'

Enduringly popular Celtic sounds arrive in Aurora on April 26 with Coig, one of Atlantic Canada's premiere traditional groups hailing from Cape Breton. They are an ensemble of East Coast musicians who promise 'one explosive coming together.'

'What was once solo acts on stage has amalgamated into an electrifying super group, picked as Penguin Eggs magazine's 2014 #1 New Discovery Internationally.'

Juno Award-winning band Digging Roots hits a vein of rock when they bring their sounds to the Cultural Centre on May 24. Fronted by ShoShona Kish and Raven Kanataktak, they have played everywhere from the Glastonbury Festival to Canada's most remote northern communities, to Australia, and everywhere in between, delivering 'their message of love, activism and positive change' wherever they perform.

'These guys are awesome,' says Ms. Taylor of the Indigenous group. 'They're based in Barrie and bringing a five-piece band as well. They're a mixture of upbeat folk, but a lot of rock influence in their music. They have been on our list for a long time, but travelling internationally, it was hard to pin down a date that worked for them, but because we managed to snag them when they're back home for a bit, they will be part of our Bold series in May.'

'Throughout the rest of the year, we have genres that people have really responded to. We have the luxury of being able to go out and find the best of Canada. Part of the reason is we're so close to Toronto, so if they are passing through the city or based in Toronto, it is easy to lure them up to Aurora and it makes my job even more fun because I can dream big.'

Returning favourites are part of the 2018-2019 season as well, including the popular Great Artists and John Sheard Presents series. The Great Artists Series, presented by local Grammy winners Bonnie and Norbert Kraft, kicks off November 9 with Tristan Teo. A

23-year-old Vancouver-based pianist who has just started his doctorate at Juilliard. Last year, he was a quarterfinalist at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, and is considered on a "meteoric ascent onto the world stage."

The series continues on January 18 with Chopin specialist Charles Richard-Hamelin, who is making a return engagement to the Great Artists program.

The AYR Trio, consisting of Angela Park on the Piano, Yehonatan Berick on the violin and Rachel Mercer on the cello, usher the Great Artists series into the spring with their varied repertoire, while the Ralston String Quartet closes out the program on May 3. The legacies of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong will be explored in "Ella & Louis: Cheek to Cheek" on January 25, the first in the John Sheard Presents series. This first installment will feature Mr. Sheard on the piano, Dennis Pendrith on the upright bass, and special guests Donovan Locke and Kelya Ramu.

Jazz and standards from the Great American Songbook give way to a little bit of country on March 22 with The Best of the West: Golden Country Classics, honouring the sounds of Patsy Kline, Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash and more. The series closes June 7 with Homeward Bound: The Best of Simon & Garfunkel on Friday, June 7.