

Cultural Centre marks 10th anniversary with a Welcome Home



By Brock Weir

Just a few short decades ago, the Church Street School was a home away from home for generations of Aurora students.

It is a building that sparked the imagination for countless young minds and, over the last decade, sparks have continued to fly within its walls as home to the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Now, as the Aurora Cultural Centre prepares to mark its tenth anniversary, they are going back to their roots for an ambitious new season.

The Aurora Cultural Centre lifted the curtain on its 2019-2020 season last week at a dazzling evening for its patrons and loyal guests that featured live music and the sounds of dance ringing through its historic walls.

"We are launching our tenth anniversary season, a season welcoming new and past artists to Aurora to celebrate ten years of delivering arts and culture to the community," said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre. "We're proud to be here tonight after ten years of hard work, building capacity, with and for our partners, and gaining a reputation for strong, professional programming in the community.

"It has not always been easy, and the fruits of this labour are seen in the long-standing and loyal patrons, sponsors, board members, volunteers and staff. When we started thinking about the theme for this tenth anniversary, we kept talking about what we were hearing from artists: that the Aurora Cultural Centre felt like home. We remembered how

excited we would get every time a student from the schoolhouse came to visit, and they talked about how it was a home for them. We thought about the history of this building and our part in making it an active place once again over the last ten years and decided not only to welcome home those in the community who may not have been here for a while to return, but also we wanted it to be a home for the next decade and beyond.?

The theme of 'Welcome Home' is very much reflected in the 2019-2020 Gallery Season.

According to Gallery Manager Clare Bolton, the last decade has seen the Cultural Centre evolve into 'a welcoming home for creativity in the community and beyond.'

'The idea of Welcome Home has become a familiar thread throughout this gallery season,' said Ms. Bolton. 'We highlight the importance of partnerships, inclusion and diversity. We're so incredibly proud of the community relationships we have been able to build with our groups, such as the Society of York Region Artists and the Pine Tree Potters Guild. Each year, on average, we have showcased over 200 emerging professional artists on these historical walls.'

'For some artists, showcasing with us has been their first opportunity to present their work in a professional gallery. On numerous occasions, we have invited artists back to either teach at the Centre or become a participant in a group show, or bring another project to the Centre. Artists from diverse backgrounds consistently tell me how welcome they feel. We have built strong relationships as we have grown over the years, our ways of seeing programs develop to enhance the gallery experience for visitors. Artists have come into the galleries and facilitated demos, workshops, art talks, guided tours with the public, and we have been able to offer these programs at no charge.'

Among the highlights of the Gallery Season will be the Pine Tree Potters Guild's 40th annual Juried Show and Sale, featuring nearly 50 new works from local artists. The Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) will be back with their annual Showcase Exhibition, this year built around the theme of Curious Minds.

In the winter, young artists from Aurora's four high schools will once again have the chance to show off their talents at the eighth annual Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

More broadly, August 31 will see the exhibition 'Light Grows the Tree' take over the gallery spaces, curated by Liz Ikriko, which documents and showcases a community of Black artists, writers, collectors and curators in Toronto, photographed by four artists over the course of two months.

She Flourishes, a solo exhibition by Gaia Orion takes

over October. Subtitled 'Creating a Vision for a Peaceful World,' it is intended to foster conversation about 'women's qualities and leadership in today's world and how women have the powerful potential to transform.'

Above the main floor gallery spaces, all varieties of music will form the Aurora Cultural Centre's upcoming live music season.

'I started here over a decade ago when these doors weren't even open and music ringing out in Brevik Hall was just a dream,' said Jane Taylor of the Aurora Cultural Centre. 'In the intervening years, we have worked with our community to bring a wide variety of professional performing artists to the stage to grow the number, variety and genres of concerts and to ensure there is a broad representation and a bit of experimentation as we push out the edges of our programming.'

The Brevik Hall Music Series features 'Canadian artists working in beloved genres and at the pinnacle of their craft,' said Ms. Taylor, of the lineup that includes such artists as Rum Ragged, the Laila Biali Jazz Trio, Patricia O'Callaghan and Friends, and perennial Cultural Centre favourite John Sheard.

'These are award-winning artists who continue to make their mark on the Canadian Music landscape and frequently find themselves on the airwaves and in the recording studio and atop the awards podium,' said Ms. Taylor.

Another highlight of the live music program is the return of the Great Artist classical music series, which is sponsored by Grammy Award winners Bonnie and Norbert Kraft. This year's lineup features a number of new, returning and emerging artists including Celil Refik Kaya, Janina Fialkowska, the Payadora Tango Ensemble, and Crozman & Chiu.

'From the first year that we started the classical music series, we have been able to present exceptional musicians coming to share their artistry with us, musicians who have played at Carnegie Hall with the great orchestras of the world, yet they have all expressed the specialness of playing in our intimate space, and for our wonderful Aurora audience,' said Ms. Kraft.

'No matter how easy it is to listen to music on various devices, nothing compares to the experience of live music. In this day of ear buds and listening in the car, it is easy to forget that those digital downloads are not the real thing. Convenient, yeah, but a digital recording is only a sampling, a one-dimensional representation of the whole sound spectrum. Listening to music being performed right in front of us, oh, what a totally different experience it is. It is a whole other world; a world where we find ourselves catching our breath with a beautiful phrase, feeling our hearts race with excitement, our eyes opening wide at the performer's skill, or even sometimes feeling a tear welling up in what the music invokes in our soul, and all in the company of others around us. Live music has that power to bring us

together at the deepest level.?

For more on the 2019-2020 Welcome Home series, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.