

From The Hip aims to capture magic of Downie and company

Andrew Muia and Nick Foti are, according to Muia, "self-proclaimed superfans" of The Tragically Hip "but, as the two musicians honed their craft together, they graduated to a next level of fandom.

Muia and Foti, along with CJ Ashley, Gianluca Mauro, and Steven Piersanti, have pooled their musical talents to further the legacy of one of their favourite bands as From the Hip, a group that is rapidly gaining a reputation of one of the best tributes to one of Canada's favorite bands.

Now, they're set to bring the sounds of The Tragically Hip back to Town Park next Wednesday, July 26, as part of Aurora's Concerts in the Park series.

Although relatively new on the tribute circuit, the band has deep roots for Muia and Foti going all the way back to high school. The duo brought on friends, who, in turn, continued recruitment, and the band hit it off right away.

"The lyrics, for me, were always the thing they brought me in," says Muia. "[Late Tragically Hip frontman Gord] Downie was such a unique writer in the way he told a story; he was not just a songwriter, but a storyteller. For live shows, he would have stories in between the songs and going back to listen to old concert footage, you can hear the start of a song. What really pulled me in were the performance aspect, the writing, the painting of a picture and the creating of an atmosphere and a mood."

But it takes a lot of work to get into the "rhythm" of such an iconic group "and it's often a fine line between impersonation and paying tribute.

"We try to balance imitation vs. honouring," he says. "The best way coming in is just doing things here and there that Gord would do, and, at the same time, do my own thing. I think we do a pretty good job of bringing that energy back. I say it all the time in shows that I am lucky enough to surround myself with some of the best musicians I think that are out there. Sometimes when Gianluca is doing something on his pedal board, I'll think that is so close to the album" it is a great way to honour them."

In early 2020, From the Hip booked a gig for September of that year at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts. By March, COVID-19 had other plans, sidelining bands the world over. But rather than waiting to simply see what happened, the pandemic proved to be From the Hip's time to shine.

"We thought we had to create our own opportunities," says Muia of the myriad cancelled bookings. "We couldn't sit back and wait for the bookings to happen because they weren't going to happen and even if they did, they could get shut down at any moment. We found the Markham Fairgrounds, where the Hip had played a couple of times, and spoke to them about doing an outdoor drive-in show. We knew we might not be able to fill the whole place, but we put on a festival called GrungeFest and invited a few other bands to join us.

"The realization [we had clicked] came that night when we looked out into the crowd and there were just rows and rows of headlights, people who came to watch us in their cars and listen to it on the radio. That was the moment we thought, "We can really do this. This is going to be good."

Helping, of course, were the deep roots The Hip have in the Canadian psyche.

"It's that Canadiana thing," says Muia. "We're really dealing with a large group of people who are just really captured by the music. I know I am captured by the music; I can still put on any album and listen to it front to back and not get bored, even songs that we have been playing over and over. For audiences [I think they are] reminders of their youth. The songs evoke memories, feelings that we've had, bad and good, and the way that we could relate to the lyrics, the way that we could relate to the music, the way it made us feel, the people we were with when we were listening to it, the people we were in love with, the people who broke our hearts when

we were listening to it.

?For a lot of people, it's really that trip down memory lane that keeps everyone in touch.?

To rekindle old memories and create new ones, come to Town Park next Wednesday for From the Hip. Concerts begin at 7 p.m. For more information, visit aurora.ca/summerconcerts.

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