

I.D.E.A. Symposium wants your voice in creating Inclusive, Diverse, Equitable and Accessible community

Art, music and drama are universal languages that can break down barriers and build cultural bridges and the Aurora Cultural Centre is looking to harness this idea with its first I.D.E.A. symposium.

Set to take place next Saturday, June 25 and Sunday, June 26, at CFWI The Aurora Armoury, the forum will welcome artists, facilitators, and members of the arts community for performances, keynotes, workshops and more, all with the idea to broaden horizons.

The event is focused on the four aspects of Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility and we wanted to do something that was not your typical conference; I wanted it to be more of an experiential type of conference but we changed the name to 'symposium' because at conferences a lot of times you're going from one thing to another and you don't really get a chance to sit and talk to people,' says Glenn Marais, Artistic Outreach Coordinator for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Artists coming together to help answer this question on Day 1 include opening keynote speaker Taylor James McKinnon on 'Finding My Voice', a workshop facilitated by Dr. Gerald Yun, a lunchtime art reflection with Courtney Revie, a performance in the round with singer-songwriter Mimi O'Bonsawin, Dr. Yun, and composer and instrumentalist Lucas Tensen, before a closing keynote from Phiona Durrant, President of the Aurora Black Community Association.

Day Two features an opening keynote from Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, Chair of Truth & Reconciliation at Lakehead University, 'Giving Voice to the Voiceless', a roundtable facilitated by Jan Beaver, a lunchtime art reflection with Lauri Hoeg, and a closing keynote from Grant Peckford, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Community Relations with York Pride, entitled 'LGBT Elders: Have We Lost Our Voice?'

'I find a lot of the things we learn about each other through culture are story-based: the person's history and their experiences and also what your hopes are,' says Marais. 'We speak a lot about these terms in our society but the actual movement of the societal structure takes a long time and it is too slow for a lot of people, particularly people who have faced inequities because of these different societal structures that have been in place for a long time. How do we move this further and how do we use the arts?'

'One of the things we often forget when we speak about accessibility, for example, it is staying in the physical realm, but there are ability issues we don't see where someone might be hearing impaired or visually impaired, or they may have a mental health issue. Do we put it into place those considerations? Often we don't, and at a basic level there is very little physical accessibility where someone in a wheelchair can say, 'I can get anywhere I need to without assistance.' We don't have that yet, so there are a lot of these things we speak about and they don't seem to change. It is my hope that we can have people bring their vision and their experiences.'

'Sometimes people think these events are just for artists, agencies, or facilitators, but it is not. It's actually going to be incredibly entertaining and it's free. I encourage people from the general public to come, even if just from an educational perspective, and experience an amazing weekend of art and music performances. It is open but it is true to those beginning artists who are trying to get a foothold in the industry, it's a fabulous place to come and network.'

For more information and to book your place for the Aurora Cultural Centre's inaugural I.D.E.A. symposium, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

By Brock Weir
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