

Kobo Town set to spice up Valentine's Day at Cultural Centre

By Brock Weir

If you're looking to spice up your Valentine's Day plans, look no further than Kobo Town, which is set to bring its warm calypso sounds to the Aurora Cultural Centre on February 14, just in time to get the blood pumping.

Kobo Town takes the stage as part of the Centre's 'Brevik Hall Presents' music series and the Juno Award-winning band is looking forward to giving all ticket holders 'exuberant sounds' on themes of love.

The band was formed by lead Drew Gonsalves, a native of Trinidad, who took the sounds of the islands to heart when planting his musical roots growing up as an émigré to Ottawa.

While in the nation's capital, Mr. Gonsalves sang and wrote music while in high school, but after moving to Toronto after his graduation, he says he 'gave up music to become a sensible person.'

He tried his hand at becoming a school teacher, but while he was in the classroom he found himself writing a lot of new material in the calypso tradition.

Somehow being a 'sensible person' wasn't all it was cracked up to me, a sense that was bolstered after meeting fellow Trinis in the city.

'At that point in my life, I realised I either give this my all or I give it up,' he says. 'I either had to jump in and fully commit or put it on the list of deferred dreams.'

There was really only one option on the table and Kobo Town began to take shape.

There was never any conscious effort to develop a particular style once the band was formed, says Mr. Gonsalves. He grew with various styles of calypso and reggae as the soundtrack to his life, so this naturally influenced how Kobo Town took shape. On the other hand, this soundtrack of calypso and reggae was supplemented with a healthy dose of rock and roll.

'I think this is very much true for the other members of the band as well,' he says. 'They all had come into the group with different musical backgrounds; some are rockers, some are jazz guys. They all bring an interpretation and energy to the material that it wouldn't have if we had all grown up in the same genre playing the same music. Whatever sort of eclecticism there is in the music is a result of the varied interest of the members, and not something we consciously try to create.'

Once the band was formed, Kobo Town hit the road and took what Mr. Gonsalves describes as 'a lot of uncalculated risks' at the start, going to music events, putting out an independent record as a 'shot in the dark' not knowing how people would respond to it. But that result was clear and almost immediate, connecting with audiences Mr. Gonsalves was certain would be more of a hard sell.

'One of the most formative moments for us as at our first show, our first time presenting this music for a live audience,' he says.

'We had a crowd come, which was mostly Trinis from Toronto and I remember being very frightened, thinking, 'How is this going to resonate?' I hear the music in my head and it comes naturally to me, but in some ways it could be foreign to anybody who hears it. Their response was really touching, warm and overwhelming, and it is an experience that has been repeating itself over and over.'

That response has been repeating itself again more recently as Kobo Town toured with their latest album, *Where The Galleon Sank*, which was released in 2017. The seed was planted by the sight of several sunken ships spotted during a dive between Trinidad and Venezuela.

'I remember thinking at the time about how much of our history was like that,' he says of Caribbean history, which can be considered dark and painful. 'It is buried in the sea.'

Songs on the album are all inspired by historic traditions ranging from first contact with Christopher Columbus to the Caribbean Diaspora, the latter represented by a song inspired by the struggles of a new immigrant mother.

'Writing is like bringing one of these boats up to the surface that has been obscured by the time that has passed,' said Mr. Gonsalves.

What has been unearthed, however, never fails to strike a chord.

'Every now and again we'll stand in front of an audience in a small city in Germany, a festival in Malaysia or whatever, and I will ask myself this question every time: Are people going to get this? How are they going to respond? I have always been pleasantly surprised and touched to see that people have been so gracious and positive.'

Kobo Town hits the Aurora Cultural Centre on Valentine's Day ' Thursday, February 14 ' from 8 ' 10 p.m. Tickets are on sale now and available now from the Centre by calling 905-713-1818. CDs will be available for cash purchase at the event.