

Musicians get ready to lift you up at this Sunday's Gospel Music Festival



By Brock Weir

Jim Edwards wasn't always a man who felt like he was on the right path for himself.

Indeed, he characterises his past as often one of 'inner turmoil', 'leaning on the wild side of life', and making compromises he later came to second guess.

As a child, he grew up with musical parents, a father, a veteran of both World Wars, proficient on the mouth organ, and a mother never shy about expressing herself musically with her voice around the house. Eventually, this music came to be his solace and after hearing the song 'Without Him', he says he felt the correct path was laid before him to get back on track with life and love.

'I was compromising here and there and it just wasn't really satisfactory,' he says. 'I was self-centred, looking for my thrills, my joy, and not caring about who I might hurt. The message of the Gospel is, 'What can I do to help others? I often run into people who are discouraged or depressed, and you have to be careful because you can't come across as too preachy. You just have to listen to them, pray for them, and that helps him.'

Although he wants to shy away from being too preachy, Mr. Edwards, 84, wants to bring the type of uplifting music, music which he found personally lifted him up out of a murky existence, to the people of Aurora.

Mr. Edwards is spearheading the inaugural Aurora Gospel Music Festival, which will take over Aurora Town Park this Sunday, June 27, from 1 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. It brings together a veritable who's who of talent from the Ontario Gospel scene, ranging from country to folk, from southern style to traditional, and even classical pieces performed by musicians ranging from Aurora to London, ON.

Proceeds raised through the free will offering event will benefit the Southlake Regional Cancer Centre, as well as the Aurora Food Pantry.

These are causes very close to Mr. Edwards' heart. After beating cancer before, he now lives with the disease. There are some ways his particular kind of cancer can be treated, but it will put him out of commission for weeks at a time. He would rather, he said, 'burn out than rust out' and laying the foundation of this Festival has been something that has driven him forward.

'We're going to have something for the community, something hopefully for all the churches to cooperate with and hopefully the whole community will be blessed, because this is what blessed me years ago,' says Mr. Edwards. 'Going to that Gospel music festival and hearing a song which touched my heart gave me new enthusiasm for my faith. When you love something, you love to

sing about them, and you love to sing to them whether it is a person or whether it is God. Then, you are inspired to do good things because some parts of the world are in a chaotic situation. Everyone needs to get focused on something that is definitely positive. If you love one another, forgive one another, and help one another, it is all there in the message.?

While most of the money spent on making this festival a reality has been out of pocket, Mr. Edwards says it is money well spent because, to be frank, it is better than simply going on a cruise which would just satisfy himself.

?If we could have 500 to 1,000 people blessed, encouraged and inspired in one afternoon, why not?? he says. ?I hope people leave thinking, ?Boy, I am glad I came' and ?Man, that was fantastic.' I hope they feel blessed if they are experiencing depression, or the blues, that they are picked up out of that. We make choices of whether we want to be happy or unhappy, and if we want to be happy, we will seek things that make us happy, and that is what music is for me. It is a decision we make every time we get up.?

For more information on Sunday's Gospel Music Festival, email Mr. Edwards at musicjim@gmail.com.