

Polaris-nominated Georgian Bay brings 'Songs for a Winter's Night' to Aurora



By Brock Weir

Evocative original music will blend with traditional favourites of the season next Thursday at the Aurora Cultural Centre as the Polaris Prize-nominated duo Georgian Bay takes the stage with 'Songs for a Winter's Night.'

Presented in perfect harmony by Joelle Westman and Kelly Lefaive, backed by a five-piece band, Songs for a Winter's Night comes hot on the heels of Courage, their most recent two-part album.

The first volume of Courage, entitled Soleil, was released this past spring, while the second part came out in October.

'Courage is a double album that we ended up titling after recording seeing that the idea of courage was a common thread within a lot of the songs we had written,' Ms. Lefaive tells The Auroran. 'In Soleil, we explore the theme of looking more outward with a lot more brightness. We have a song that we like to think of as our anthem and it talks about female empowerment. We basically tackle Disney princesses and these ideals that come up in some of the movies.'

A particular princess that inspired this idea was Ariel in The Little Mermaid, who gives up her body to be with the prince.

'We just thought this was such a horrible, horrible message, and in the first album we tackle things like that,' she continues. 'The second album is more introspective and personal. We talk about the courage to love yourself, to feel more comfortable in your own skin. We talk about death and the courage to overcome that adversity. We also talk about breakups, the end of relationships and the courage to move through those times.'

Of course, the Georgian Bay duo writes a lot about their own personal experiences and the things they observe in the world around them. While songs aren't ultimately about them, they try to have a piece of themselves in each piece. In fact, that is an essential part of their approach to performing.

The name Georgian Bay also conjures rugged images of nature that are quintessentially Canadian. This isn't by accident. Both women are 'huge nature lovers,' says Lefaive, inspired by the beauty they find in the world. The natural world, in turn, inspires their melodies, their vocal harmonies, and even their arrangements.

'On our most recent record, we have a few songs that were actually written in a cabin on Georgian Bay. One particular one called L'Hiver was very much inspired by the winter season, especially in the Georgian Bay area - the starkness and the beauty of the landscape, how cold and dead everything looks, but how we always have that feeling of hope for spring and the return to warmth. We have a lot of imagery from that area in our texts and also our writing. We feel it transcends into the musicality and the expression in what we do.'

Indeed, Ms. Lefaive grew up in Penetanguishene, a community on Georgian Bay that has a significant Francophone population. She identifies as a Francophone, while Ms. Westman is an anglophone. Despite this difference, Ms. Lefaive says it was her writing partner that actually suggested writing some original music in French.

'She was born in France and had lost the language,' says Ms. Lefaive. 'Her parents are Anglophones and when they moved back when she was quite young, she didn't have the opportunity to keep up the language and went to an English school in an English community. When we started writing, she was really curious to reconnect with that part of her past and she had a big curiosity on

how to use language as a form of expression, and how you can express things in French that you can't necessarily in English, and vice versa. That has been a really interesting thing to explore.?

Based in Toronto, and performing predominantly in Ontario, Georgian Bay usually finds itself playing for Anglophone audiences, but they relish the chance to make those connections with people and see how 'open and appreciative' they are of this blend. Even if they only catch a word or two here and there, the universal language of music transcends all, she says.

This original music will blend seamlessly with traditional favourites at the Aurora Cultural Centre next Thursday, December 13.

Both members of the Georgian Bay duo are full-time musicians on their own and often play solo gigs, but 'Songs for a Winter's Night' is one of the few times the women will be able to perform seasonal music together, this time in a program inspired by Gordon Lightfoot's song of the same name.

'We're really looking forward to sharing our music and looking forward to sharing some holiday warmth with everybody,' says Ms. Lefaive. 'We're really looking forward to this performance. It will be unique for us and unique also, we hope, for people to attend.'

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