

Popular Bernadette Connors prepares for Saturday ?homecoming?

By Brock Weir

Despite being born and raised in Georgina, Aurora feels like home for musician Bernadette Connors.

A popular singer-songwriter on the local music scene, the regular performer at local pubs and restaurants has been warmly embraced by the Aurora community, and on Saturday she's coming back to return that love as a featured performer at the Aurora Music Festival.

The free Aurora Music Festival is set to take over Town Park starting at 4 p.m. through 10 p.m. this Saturday, August 5. Headlined by MonkeyJunk, the festival will feature Aurora's Pick Brothers Band, youth bands Half Birthday and Louisa & The Planets, the up-and-coming singer-songwriter Lauren Haze and, of course, Ms. Connors.

?Aurora has become a very important community of people to me,? says Ms. Connors. ?Between [festival organizers] Jamie Macdonald, John Abel and Greg Smith, they have all been very supportive and encouraging. That whole community of people have just been so supportive of everything I have done, from playing covers in a bar to playing my own original music, it really does feel like home to me and I really appreciate that. When I get an opportunity like this, I always try and present my strongest foot forward with my band.?

Describing her style as soulful with blues influence, spiced up with pop undertones, Ms. Connors says when she's on stage she just goes up to be herself.

?Herself? comes by her musical roots honestly, with her parents musicians, as well as her two older brothers. With a music store in Keswick as the family business, Bernadette grew up watching her parents play and listening to people taking music lessons in the store, which was actually in the basement of their home.

She resisted her musical roots for a while, however, entering high school with dreams of becoming an auto mechanic.

?The Fast & The Furious came out and I really wanted to be that cool chick who could work on cars,? she says, adding that when push came to shove she didn't feel she had the right skillset to be that cool chick under the car. So, it was time to be that cool chick behind the microphone and, at the age of 18 started laying the groundwork for her first album.

?At the time, I thought that was all I needed to do,? says Bernadette of recording that first album. ?I thought I accomplished everything a musician would need to do to be an established artist! Now, looking back on it, every album, every recording and every performance all adds up on the journey. Being a musician is a dedication to the ongoing development of your craft. It is not about that one album, it is not about one performance; it is really about always growing, learning, and enjoying the journey.?

So far, that journey has taken her from her early inspirations of Carole King's ?Tapestry? album and Paul Simon's ?Graceland? to finding her own inspiration in life experiences. Inspiration strikes, she says, when she has something to say and not always having the words to say it. It doesn't have to be about a breakup or an ?earth shattering experience?, but sometimes inspiration strikes simply reflecting on what life means to her and ?where I want my perspectives to fit.?

Over the years she has had the opportunity to work with many different musicians, amassing a large network of people along the journey, and she is now working on a new album, her first since 2012. The new album will feature two singles she released last year.

?It is a collaboration of music that is a little bit more mature than what I have written in the past,? says Ms. Connors. ?I have gone through a little bit more, not that I am going to pretend I've lived and I know what life is like, but I have had a few more life experiences that have helped me evolve as a person. Musically, the musicians came in and they really elevated everything. The band has just taught me a lot and they are really brilliant musicians who have always challenged me, elevate me, and make me want to be a better musician.

?At music festivals, people take away what they are looking for. I hope that if they come this Saturday, anyone who has seen me in the past, I would like them to see now, at this point in my life, I am in a really good place. I love sharing that with people. All the important parts of my life that make me a good human, make me a happy person, are in place now and I think that is coming through in my music and performances right now. I want them to feel that energy.

?The Aurora Music Festival is a great opportunity. It is a free community event for people to come together and that alone makes it all worth it. The bands that are performing are fantastic. It is worth paying for and, if it is worth playing for, don't take it for granted if it is in your back yard for free!?