

Pride Festival begins busy month of music, heritage and Indigenous celebration at Town Square

Aurora's inaugural Pride Festival will begin a busy month of programming at Aurora Town Square, a June that will showcase music, heritage and Indigenous celebrations.

The Aurora Pride Festival, an initiative of the Aurora Community Band in partnership with York Pride and Aurora Town Square, will end May in a celebratory note on the eve of Pride Month.

The May 31 extravaganza will begin in the outdoor plaza with opening ceremonies at 6.30 p.m., before shifting to the Aurora Town Square performance hall for an evening of music by the Aurora Community Band, a Drag performance, and more than a few surprises.

“With Town Square opening freshly in September and Town Square just being a cultural hub where we want the community to come, feel inclusive, feel like they belong, and feel like this is their home to celebrate who they are, it's very exciting to be able to host this here,” says Nichole Campsall, Cultural Development Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. “It's very exciting the fact that it is such a collaborative event and there's participation from so many Aurora organizations [like] York Pride. It's just such a wonderful way for us to come together and celebrate such an important part of the year. It's perfect for us to host it at Town Square and to be a part of it, so we're very excited for this.”

HERITAGE COLLABORATIONS

Heritage collaborations will help kick off June programs as local historian David Heard of Dave's Vinyl Party and Aurora Town Square come together to celebrate Aurora's built and musical heritage.

On June 3, at 7.30 p.m., the Aurora Museum & Archives and Dave's Vinyl Party will present a screening of the documentary “Who's a Good Boy?” It's a documentary shot by Heard on location of Aurora's Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery, for which he's been a long-time proponent.

A ticketed event, admission is \$8.

A free event is planned for June 14 as Heard presents the Great Canadian Songbook on Vinyl from 7 ? 11 p.m. in the Outdoor Square.

“It will just be a great time for everyone to come out to enjoy the Outdoor Square itself,” says Campsall. “Dave is so passionate about music, so this is a great time to enjoy. We're finally in June with some beautiful weather and, of course, with Canada Day coming up, it's all Canadian music. It's a great, great time all around.”

INDIGENOUS CELEBRATIONS

June is Indigenous History Month and this history will be explored through music on June 5 from 6.30 ? 8.30 p.m. when the Sultans of String present Walking Through the Fire: A Visual Album.

Billed as a “journey where cultures collide, boundaries dissolve, and the universal language of music unites us all,” it's the brainchild of Chris McCool who Campsall says “absolutely puts on an incredibly captivating show.”

“He works with artists from all different backgrounds, so Walking Through the Fire is brought on by the 94 Calls to Action [coming from the National Truth & Reconciliation Commission] that called for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to work together to show a path forward,” she says. “They created Walking Through the Fire and it's a collection of collaborations between First

Nations, Metis and Inuit artists from across Turtle Island. It will have songs, music, discussions, and then, after the film, there's a Q&A talkback session with the director, Chris McCool, and Indigenous artist Shannon Thunderbird.

?We're very excited to bring that to Town Square as a celebration of National Indigenous History Month.?

GRUNGE FEST

Closing out the month on June 28 will be the Town's first Grunge Fest, a three-concerts-in-one show that promises, ?relive the raw energy of 90s grunge as top tribute bands bring Pearl Jam, Foo Fighters, and Nirvana to life.?

?We just thought it would be such a great time to celebrate Grunge,? says Campsall. ?We have had great experiences with the Pearl Jam band, Pearl Jamming, in the past and that led us to think, why not do a Grunge Fest? We have this amazing building now open, let's test it out and see. We're trying to make sure we have something for everyone, right?

?The response has been fantastic and we're very excited. It will start off at 6.30 p.m. with Monkey Wrench, the Foo Fighters tribute band, and then we have Lounge Act Band and their tribute to Nirvana, which will be coming on at 8 p.m.; and the final band will be Pearl Jamming, a great way to kind of relive the 90s and rock it out to top grunge songs that we all remember and love.?

Programming the spaces of Aurora Town Square is ?one of the most incredible experiences of my entire career,? says Campsall, noting that the community response has been fantastic.

Since the complex's opening last September, they have had a number of opportunities to see what works from a programming standpoint and are excited for all the opportunities that lie ahead ? not just for the Town Square team, but for the other groups that call Town Square home and what they're able to do together: the Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Public Library, and the Aurora Museum and Archives.

?Town Square was sort of an idea and a plan, but now it's real and being able to see people in there enjoying it, sitting in the café, out in the outdoor square, dancing to the music ? it just brings on more ideas to grow and expand what we've already done, and new things. It's been the most amazing experience and we just have the best community in Aurora.?

For more information on these and other upcoming events from the Aurora Town Square partners, including tickets, visit www.aurora.ca/en/town-square/whats-on.aspx.

By Brock Weir