

Renowned mixologist Bowen creates signature drink for Intercultural Festival

By Brock Weir

You may not be able to catch lightning in a bottle, but you'll be able to swish Aurora in a glass next month at the inaugural Intercultural Food & Music Festival courtesy of renowned mixologist Jamaal Bowen.

Mr. Bowen, CEO and Founding Director of the TopShelf Academy in Barbados, will be at Town Park on Friday, September 6 to serve up his latest signature drink, a centrepiece of the Festival which celebrates the ties between Canada and Barbados.

With nearly 20 years in the food and beverage industry, Mr. Bowen has several bartending awards to his name, awards secured with wholly new creations and new spins on classic cocktails. Aurora ? that is, the drink ? falls into the first category and Mr. Bowen himself is not completely finished creating the concoction.

?The key here for me is really trying to understand the demographics and try to bridge the gap in bringing more Barbadian kinds of flavours to the Festival,? he explains. ?I try to use things that probably aren't used in Canada as much as they are in Barbados. We're doing away with run-of-the-mill things. We're not going to do anything with orange or pineapple, but I am going to go out of the box and not focus on imported fruits like strawberries; I am going to try focusing on lots of spices we use in the Caribbean like nutmeg, cinnamon, all spice, and you might even get a bit of tarragon in, too.

?A big thing right now is butterfly pea flower. It doesn't have a lot of flavour, but when you introduce it to citrus it changes colour, going anywhere between cyan to lilac to heavy hues of blue.?

So, three things are certain: it is going to be vivid, full of flavour and, given that this is an event celebrating Barbadian culture, it will be based on rum.

The power of food and drink to bring people together is something Mr. Bowen says was clear to him from a very young age. It not only evokes a sense of home, but it can also foster dialogue. His interest in food and drink comes from his grandmothers, who each had very different approaches to the culinary arts. His maternal grandmother was very much set on routine, having set menus for each day of the week which rarely deviated from the norm. His paternal grandmother, on the other hand, was more adventurous with her flavours.

Herbs and spices were the hallmarks of her kitchen and grandmother and grandson bonded over their shared love of crackling (deep-fried

pork fat), a taste that was not shared by other members of the family, but is very much on trend in today's restaurants.

It soon became clear he wanted to be a chef, taking this passion into studying hospitality, and while his work started out in the kitchen, he found he really hit his stride ? and won the admiration of his peers ? behind the bar.

?A chef can only do so much with food: chicken has to taste like chicken, pork has to taste like pork, fish has to taste like fish ? otherwise you're sending it back to the kitchen,? he says. ?If I tell you four or five ingredients for a drink, you'll probably think it is going to taste [a certain way] but when you take your first sip it can taste totally different from what you assume it to be, or it can taste exactly the way you want it to or envision tasting. You can tell a story through food and drink.?

See the story unfold at The Aurora Intercultural Food & Music Festival on September 6 at Town Park. Sponsored in park by Tourism Barbados, the festival will feature an evening of food and drink, music from calypso musician Red Plastic Bag, chefs from around the world, and more. For more information on this free admission event, including food and drink tickets, visit facebook.com/aurorainterculturalfestival. The event will be followed Saturday, September 7, with the annual Aurora Multicultural Festival.