

Revived Aurora Winter Blues Festival looks to 2027 and building on legacy



Winter Blues were received warmly over the weekend as the Aurora Cultural Centre brought the Aurora Winter Blues Festival back to the community.

The four-day festival, hosted by the Centre in conjunction with Music Aurora, was the first since the long-running event was put on ice due to the Global Pandemic, and organizers hit the ground running with a packed program in 2026, many of which were sell-out events.

The Festival (AWBF) kicked off on Thursday, February 26, with a welcoming reception followed by a performance by Jack De Keyzer. Other artists taking over the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall included Suzie Vinnick with special guests Kevin Breit, Tony D., and Jay Blues, Glenn Marais' Jook, Dominique Fils-Aime, Harrison Kennedy with Dave Mowat, and Little Magic Sam Band.

Educational workshops were also hosted by the Centre throughout the weekend with Early Instruments of Blues, led by Glenn Marais and Manny DeGrandis; a String Bending session with Suzie Vinnick, Tony D, and Jay Blues; Banjo Man Blues with Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives and historian Diana Braithwaite; and a Blues Harp Workshop with Little Magic Sam and Dave Mowat, led by local musician Steve Falk.

‘It’s a very special journey for the Blues in Aurora, starting from a conversation with Music Aurora many years ago to include some Blues in our programs,’ said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre at Thursday’s reception, referencing the organization that led the AWBF for nearly a decade before the pandemic break. ‘The conversation continues to build to the revival that we’re seeing today – this music that’s beloved by the community in a new relationship between Music Aurora and the Aurora Cultural Centre.’

This relationship, she said, includes furthering Music Aurora’s efforts to support up-and-coming artists through their scholarship fund, which was supported on Thursday evening through live and silent auctions.

‘Over the years, we’ve raised a significant amount of money for Blue Door Shelters and CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors) and most recently for our Youth in Music scholarship program,’ said Music Aurora President Greg Smith. ‘We also [get]

youth paid gigs to get some exposure and some opportunity on stage. We try to give the youth of this Town opportunities when we can.

?What's different about AWBF versus many other music festivals? Community is first and foremost. It's about community giving back, having them participate?. We had a hiatus. COVID made it a little challenging for us, but we're so glad to have this partnership with the Aurora Cultural Centre and we look forward to a long, prosperous relationship working with them and the community on this.?

Also on hand for Thursday night's kick-off celebration were Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and members of Council. In his remarks, Mayor Mrakas highlighted the community spirit of the AWBF as well.

?I couldn't be happier that this incredible event is back on our calendar after a five-year hiatus, because events like this don't just fill a room with music, they fill a community with energy, connection, and shared experience,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?I want to thank Suzanne and the entire team at the Aurora Cultural Centre, as well as?Jamie, Greg, Stuart and the entire Music Aurora team for joining forces to bring back the Aurora Blues Festival, but for the incredible work that you do year-round fostering the music scene here in the Town of Aurora.

?Tonight, as we celebrate the revival of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, let it be a powerful reminder of what's possible when community vision, partnership, and creativity come together. I couldn't be prouder of what this represents for Aurora. We also know that events like this inspire the next generation of artists and that inspiration must be matched with opportunity. That's why I want to thank everyone for their generous support tonight of Music Aurora's scholarship program, helping young musicians pursue their passion and share their talent with the world.?

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