

Ribfest will be thrill for performers Desire as SAGA headlines Friday night

As a group of music-loving high school kids, the music of Canadian rockers SAGA had a profound impact on the development of what's now Desire, a popular U2 tribute band made up of members of this core friend group.

Now, as they prepare to take the stage at Ribfest this Friday, August 23, they're thrilled to be opening for a headlining band that helped shape their own musical destinies.

"This is kind of like a childhood dream come true," say Desire's Gord Sobota. "We totally grew up with them and they were a huge influence on us. We even covered one of their songs at one point, so that is pretty amazing and we'll be a little starstruck there."

As mainstays of the Town's Concerts in the Park summer series, Desire considers Aurora "like a home away from home" and they're eager to reconnect with the community through song.

"It's almost like a tradition coming back to Aurora. Everyone welcomes us with open arms and we're happy to be back," he says.

Desire, in its latest configuration, has been together for 15 years now, but their roots go back far longer to when members were nine- and ten-years old growing up on the same block.

Each member picked up their own musical instruments, developed their own talents, and when they finally came together as a group in high school, they did so as a heavy metal band "a bit removed from the music of U2."

"As time went on, in the 90s, we became a Top 40 cover band and everyone kind of went their different ways again," Sobota explains. "When we regrouped in the early 2000s, we said, why don't we try something different? I took my wife to see U2 around 2001 and I was completely blown away by them and gained a lot of love for them later on in life."

"Because we were a heavy metal act, we steered away from U2 in the 80s but I loved them from that point on. Although it was a 25-year-old band it was like a new band for us. It was a breath of fresh air. That's how it all began and we started that in 2005, spending the next two-to-three years perfecting the sound, image and everything else. If you're going to do a tribute band, you have to do it right or not at all. By 2008, we finally had our first show and I guess you can say it's been History ever since."

It's also history that has proved popular as Desire has performed all around the world.

Earlier this year, for instance, they were flown into Dubai for a single show in January and had the chance to spend six days out there taking in the area, including ATV treks into the desert, and visiting all the popular local landmarks.

"We get to spend some pretty cool moments in different parts of the world we otherwise wouldn't be able to or couldn't afford to go to. That's part of what makes it appealing and great. And you're doing it with your own high school buddies. Other than going with your family, how much better can it be?"

"Ribfest is very energetic without the music, but bringing in the bands adds extra spice to it."

For a full lineup for Ribfest 2024, which runs at Machell Park beginning this Friday, August 23, and running through Sunday afternoon, visit aurora.ca/ribfest.

By Brock Weir