

SPEAKEASY

By Jane Taylor & Reccia Mandelcorn

Our Speakeasy broadcast opened to the contemplative sounds of Eric Satie
? perfect for getting us in the mood to chat with photographer Gary Johnson.

Gary has always lived the life of a ?Creative?. He has been a film and video writer and producer, spun jazz selections on air and has a book of poetry out. His upcoming exhibit, Photographic Abstraction, opens May 13 in the Colleen Abbott Gallery at Aurora Public Library and we were very interested in hearing the back-story to the exhibit.

Gary's work is abstract, photography with a beautiful painterly quality. His love for words and images crosses genres - hunting with his camera, looking for random views off the beaten track, creating textures, colours, scenes and out-of-the-ordinary juxtapositions; often adding a few lines of verse to further engage the viewer.

Gary is a thoughtful man, and that comes across in his art and his writing. He mused about looking at life through a different perspective than he did as a young man. What was then impressive no longer rings true; he looks back at a life that has been lived knowing there are only so many years ahead.

The exhibit is rich, featuring abstract images ? something Gary, like many artists, only fully embraced as he matured in his craft. We think this will be an exhibit that will stay with you long after you leave. Photographic Abstraction continues through June 15.

Moving into the dance groove of R&B, Motown, Funk and Disco was the energetic Steve Falk of Soul Benefit. This band of 12 musicians has contributed to the musical landscape of Aurora for over 20 years.

Soul Benefit, formally known as The Thursday Night Jam, started when a few musicians got together at local jam nights and decided that they would get together on a weekly basis and form a band. Over the years, about 55 musicians have passed through Soul Benefit, some professional, others just loving the joy of performing.

Steve sings lead vocals, plays guitar, harmonica, occasionally flute and recently has picked up the trumpet. Although there was a piano in his home, Steve didn't take to formal lessons. But he loved to play music and formed a harmonica band in Grade Three with instruments purchased at Second Hand Betty.

What is really unique about this group of musicians is their giveback to our community. Soul Benefit makes itself available to local charities about every six weeks during the year, taking a break in the summer. Steve estimates that they've played over 100 fundraising gigs that have raised over two million dollars for charitable organizations.

Check out their website (soulbenefit.band) or follow them on Facebook. Their next fundraiser will be at the Aurora Legion in support of Commons Coffee & Catering on

June 15, 7 pm. Tickets are now available.

With spring in the air, we captured some of our seasonal favourites in a round-up of 'must-experience'.

Merlin's Hollow, David and Dierdre Tomlinson's 1,500-plant English flower garden, opens to the public the second Saturday of May and June (for full schedule, call 905-727-8979), the Aurora Farmers' Market happens Saturday mornings in Town Park from 8 am - 1 pm; and the York Chamber Ensemble presents 'The Age of Elegance and Romanticism' on Saturday, May 11 at the Trinity Anglican Church. Not to be missed is the Spring Documentary Film Festival at Aurora Public Library, Wednesdays at 7 pm, and artist Daniel St-Amant invites you to experience his artistic process and even take part in the creation of a new painting at the Aurora Cultural Centre on May 11, 12 pm.

There is so much to see and do in Aurora this month, we're definitely not leaving Town.

Jane Taylor is Communications & Events Manager at the Aurora Cultural Centre, and Reccia Mandelcorn is Manager of Community Collaboration at Aurora Public Library. They co-host The Speakeasy on the first Wednesday of each month on 102.7 CHOP-FM.