

Unravel the mystery of the Stradivarius with special concert next Friday

By Brock Weir

Musicians and music buffs alike have pondered the mystery of why the string instruments produced by Stradivarius seem to have personalities all their own.

For over 300 years, different theories have been offered, embraced by some and dismissed by others, but next Friday, May 4, you can have a chance to draw your own conclusions as cellist Cameron Crozman brings a 1696 Stradivarius cello to the stage of the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Crozman and his unique instrument will feature in the latest instalment of the Great Artist Music Series, this time featuring James Campbell & Friends.

Campbell, a Canadian clarinetist, is renowned for his contributions to our musical landscape, as well as his international career as a solo and chamber musician.

During this concert, Campbell will share the stage not only with Crozman but also pianist Leopoldo Erice.

According to the Aurora Cultural Centre, the concert will feature "a once in a lifetime opportunity to hear a cello crafted by 17th century Italian instrument maker Antoni Stradivari."

"The cello received its name after the amateur 19th century Parisian cellist Abel Bonjour, who owned it until sometime after 1885," says Jane Taylor of the Cultural Centre. "The instrument is now part of the collection of the

Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank, thanks to an anonymous donor who passed the \$12 million instrument to the institution in 2000. The Instrument Bank competition offers Canadian musicians the opportunity to borrow some of the world's finest stringed instruments to play for a period of three years, often performing on the international stage. This is the first-ever time the Aurora Cultural Centre has featured an instrument with such a valuable heritage and story, which will be played by Cameron Crozman."

Crozman was the lucky winner of the competition in 2015 and got first pick.

His choice, he says was clear from the outset.

"There is something about older instruments, particularly by certain makers," he explains. "They do all these studies where they try to compare these old instruments which, of course, cost a lot of money - millions of dollars, sometimes - and they try to compare them to modern instruments to see if modern instruments sound better, and they are often inconclusive. Even if it is not quantifiable, I think there is something very special about playing on instruments that are very old.

"The instrument I play is from 1696. I think that is the big thing for me, being able to handle this antique. I do think the older instruments offer a personality and are really like people in that they have a certain way they want to be played, days where they are happy and days where they are not as happy. That is sort of the joy of it all."

So, what makes it unique?

"That is the mystery that everyone tries to solve: why do Stradivarius instruments sound better; or do they even sound better?" he says. "The theory I like right now, although there is not a whole lot of proof, there was a mini ice age in Europe at the time and the wood he might have used was more dense than we have nowadays and that might have affected the sound, but that is the mystery." Less of a mystery is Crozman's love of music. The son of a flautist and violin and viola musician, he says he was "sort of expected" to play musical instruments as well. His eye was first caught by the double bass, the largest of the string instruments, but it turned out to be pretty unwieldy for a seven-year-old. So, the cello was the next best thing.

"What I really love about music is its ability to share something with other people," he says. "What is so powerful about music is it is language that can transcend words, sometimes. Sitting listening to music, everyone experiences goose bumps because there is a moment that was just really special. That fuels my passion, trying to make people feel that."

The Great Artist Series continues on Friday, May 4. Prior to the 8 p.m. concert, Crozman will host a pre-concert talk and demo offering a behind-the-scenes look at the heritage cello. For further information, including tickets, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca or call 905-750-1742.