

Winter Blues Fest delivers a classic with salute to Cocker and Russell

By Brock Weir

There is a misconception that blues weighs down the soul, but when you get 15 people up on stage creating something that gives them joy, this joy can be contagious.

That's the driving force behind producer/arranger Lance Anderson who is preparing to bring a growing roster of exceptional Canadian musicians to Aurora on Saturday, February 24, for the grand finale of the 2018 Aurora Winter Blues Festival.

Anderson's all-star line-up will assemble at St. Andrew's College's Wirth Theatre from 7 ? 10.30 p.m. with Mad Dogs & Englishmen ? The Music of Joe Cocker and Leon Russell, with special guests The Dan McKinnon Band.

Recreating the magic of the award-winning 1970s tour by the iconic musicians, the assembled group of singers will be backed by a nine-piece band, including two drummers, horns, and a Hammond organ.

While the evening will be a tribute to Cocker and Russell, Anderson stresses that this is not a ?tribute show.?

?It is not a tribute show, but more of a ?celebration' because, in the industry, ?tribute show' means someone is coming out and impersonating Joe Cocker, but that is not what we're doing,? he says. ?We're celebrating that music and wonderful arrangements with a proper-size ensemble and everyone will get a chance to shine ? and these are some of the best singers in the country and an all-star band with the best players in the country.

?There is something about having 15 people do something together that creates this energy and it is really contagious. Leon Russell was from Oklahoma where he grew up with tent revival shows coming to town. That kind of energy, spirit and soul is in this music. You get that in front of an audience on Saturday night and you can't help but get involved.?

Organizers promise the February 24 show ?creates a freight train which will pick you up and drop you down at the Filmore East in NYC in 1970. It is part revival meeting, hippie love-in and part R&B and Soul history that will raise the roof.?

In addition to the Mad Dogs & Englishmen fare, the line-up also includes the Dan McKinnon Band as the evening's opener.

?Dan was the winner of the Toronto Blues Society's 2017 Talent Search event this past summer,? say organizers. ?The Aurora Winter Blues Festival is always pleased to showcase for our audiences talented and upcoming bands on the Canadian Blues Scene. Mixing equal parts musical scholar and tattooed rock n' roll rebel, Toronto-based guitarist McKinnon is not your average blues rocker. While the foundation of his music is rooted in the sounds of Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Guy and the three Kings, McKinnon also incorporates jazz, hip-hop and fuzzed-out rock to create a sound that is uniquely his own.?

However each musician approaches the music on Saturday, February 24, producers believe it will be a unique night on the whole, one that will leave you warmed ? and buoyed ? on a late winter night.

?I just want people to feel good,? says Anderson. ?I want this to warm their souls and lighten their hearts. This is what blues is all about. Some people think the blues is a negative sort of thing, but it is exactly the opposite. It was born out of oppression and people singing about the incredibly bad state of their life, but it is about triumph over that. It is completely uplifting and that is what I want the audience to take away.

?I know they will be impressed by the artistry, but the true talent is to make people feel better and lighter to their knees.?

For more information on the 2018 Aurora Winter Blues Festival, including tickets, visit www.awbf.ca.