

Musical reunion will bring international flair to Family Day



Warm up to sizzling international sounds this Family Day as the Aurora Cultural Centre hosts a world of sound at The Armoury and Trinity Anglican Church.

As part of their Family Day offerings this February 20, the Aurora Cultural Centre is bringing together alumni from their popular Aurora Pops Up! musical series for a special reunion that will inspire minds and keep toes tapping.

The Aurora Pops Up! series was launched by the Centre in 2021 and, since its inception, has presented live "pop-up" musical performances at various venues across the community, from seniors' residences, to parks, and even to food banks and bakeries.

The program has allowed the Centre and artists alike to tap into new audiences, and for listeners to sample sounds classic, contemporary, and out-of-the-ordinary.

"Tapping into musical instruments and genres that literally span the globe, this series featured local musicians and those from around the GTA," say organizers. "The performers brought the public safely together outdoors at a time when live music was particularly missed. Now we celebrate! We're bringing many of these musicians back to perform throughout Family Day at two Aurora locations. In addition, we'll have family art activities at Trinity for all ages [and] these drop-in events are free to all."

Among the artists set to perform at the reunion are Indigenous and French-Canadian roots singer Mimi O'Bonsawin and Hasheel, who specializes in Bansuri (Hindustani Flute).

Speaking to The Auroran ahead of this Monday's event, O'Bonsawin joked this will be a nice return to Aurora as her previous two pop-up events were held in the blazing sun of 2020.

"This time I will be bringing my band with me," she says. "I always have a really good time in Aurora, so it kind of feels like home in a way. This time will be different as it will have a band, and it will be in a beautiful space, not outside. I like playing outside, but I just don't like it when it is 38°C!"

Hailing from Northern Ontario, O'Bonsawin says her roots are "integral" in her music, with the landscape "creeping into" all of her songs.

"I am very much a land person and connecting to my roots on the landscape where I come from, it just naturally comes through my music. What I hear a lot at concerts is people are able to relate to their roots, to their landscape, where they're from, whether it is this country or another country. To have that connection to the land is something I hear resonates through our music. It's just really fun."

These roots are reflected in her new album, *Willow*, which comes out at the beginning of March. Everything that makes her who she is, she says, is "100 per cent woven through the album" nature sounds, textures, emotions, stories "these are songs I carried with me for a few years and have played a lot on the road. I am with my husband, who is a drummer, percussionist and we really like to groove, so even if it's a song that's a bit of a slower pace, I always like to have a pulsing heartbeat through all my music. Rhythm heavy, steeped in stories" I often talk about where the songs come from and what they mean to me between songs; I have heard people describe our live sound as very organic, very uplifting, and very easy to enjoy."

Organic sounds are a theme for Hasheel as well.

Ready to play an hour-long set with a fellow artist with whom he hasn't played before, Hasheel says they're planning to meet for the first time on the Armoury stage.

"Every time we come together it is something magical, unique and different," he says. "We have never played it before and we will never play it in that way again, either, and that's the power of live classical music for us" at least Indian classical.

A huge fan of electronic music, Hasheel blends classical sounds with music that is decidedly more modern.

"It felt like an educational moment for a lot of the folks who were listening because some of them hadn't heard [the instruments] before or heard it in a specific combination. It was a nice way of introducing Indian classical music to the local Aurora folk," he says of his first time being a part of the Aurora Pops Up! series. What I liked is we made it interactive. The audiences themselves were pretty keen to interact with us. They were more excited about the interactive elements than it just being a concert. It is definitely family-friendly in that format and it worked out really well.

"What I am looking forward to in this particular set is we're going to start a bit more acoustic and connect to classical, traditional, and then build a set" we will add our guitar player midway through and the latter half of the show will add in my percussionist. We'll get a nice transition between classical and more modern Indian fusion. We're going to meet on stage and let the magic happen because that is essentially how our art form is, the creation happens on stage. Because I am able to improvise and just play it by ear, I can really jam on top of any genre of music."

The Aurora Cultural Centre's Magical Family Day program begins at The Armoury (89 Mosley Street) with a song circle from 10 to 10.50 a.m. featuring Glenn Marais, James Brown and Sina Bathaie.

The program shifts over to the Aurora Pops Up! Live Music Reunion at 11 a.m., starting with George St. Kitts, followed at 11.45 a.m. by folk duo Basset, at 12.25 p.m. with country performer Jessie Servier, mridangam (South Indian hand drum) artist Yanchan Rajmohan at 1.05 p.m., Hasheel at 1.45, Kora artist Sophie Lukacs at 2.25 p.m., saxophonist Justin Massey at 3.05 p.m., and concluding with O'Bonsawin at 3.45 p.m.

Over at Trinity (79 Victoria Street), programming gets under way with a Wizard Wand-Making Workshop from 10 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. Meanwhile, music will ring out throughout the church starting at 10 a.m. with Bryan Holt and Bora Kim on cello and violin, at 10.40 a.m. with Rebekah and Jurecka Violin Duo, and Sailbruntha, offering Carnatic Music, at 11.20 a.m.

The music circle will move over to Trinity for a performance from 12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m.

For more, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

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