

Rifest gig will be 'family affair' for headliners Dwayne Gretzky



Machell Park is set to sizzle this weekend when Rifest arrives once again to reclaim its crown as the Aurora's tastiest event.

Set to run from August 25 - 27, headlining the opening night will be popular Toronto-based band Dwayne Gretzky which, over the course of the last decade, has built a huge following with their interpretation of classic favourites.

An expansive and diverse group of musicians, the group promises a high-energy show that will get crowds up on their feet through 'joyous, dancy fun.'

'Sometimes we get a tiny bit silly, but on the most part it is heartfelt, sincere, joyful and we invite everyone on for the ride,' says Dwayne Gretzky founding member Tyler Kyte.

A native of the GTA, this Friday's concert will be something of a homecoming for Kyte.

'I have family in Aurora, so I have been visiting [the community] my whole life and it will be great to play our first public show in Aurora - I have some nephews who are future musicians, so I am excited for them to see us on stage!'

As a band, Dwayne Gretzky has been on stage for more than 12 years.

They got their start as a disparate group of musician friends who just wanted to get together and play. They didn't have a particular vision for the band other than just getting together to jam to songs they liked - 'just like when you're around a campfire and people just know the chorus of a song but not the whole thing - but it's more fun when someone knows the whole song,' says Kyte with a laugh.

'We started learning all the tunes for fun with no vision, no long-term plans or anything and before we knew it, after about three years, we kind of had a catalogue of 30 songs that were pretty fun that we all connected with - anything from Elvis Costello to Bruce Springsteen, The Cars, Fleetwood Mac - and we just started booking shows for this band that didn't even have a name, a purpose or anything like that. But we connected with our audience in Toronto pretty quickly.

'The name Dwayne Gretzky just happened on stage one night. We were playing with no name and someone asked, 'Who are you?' Nick, who helps run the band, said, 'We're Dwayne Gretzky,' into the mic as a joke. I ended up seeing that clip on YouTube under the name 'Dwayne Gretzky' and thought, 'We should actually make a go of this and should start this band.' Somehow Dwayne kept going and we thought it would be a good opportunity for work for lots of musicians and everything just started organically. If you

told me I would still be doing that today, I don't know if I would have believed you, but at this point we have exceeded our expectations so many times ? it's a matter of let's see how long we can do this, how big we can go and make this show as dynamic and fun as possible. And we're grateful to have the opportunity as it's a pretty fun job!?

As an ?organically grown? band, sometimes it is hard for members to pinpoint just what defines Dwayne Gretzky and, as Kyte explains, how it is defined is by the people who play in ? and the talents they bring to the table for each gig, and sometimes each song.

?Because we're a 10-piece band and have an even bigger community of musicians we're gigging with quite regularly, we're kind of a good audience just within ourselves as to what is going to work,? he says. ?We're able to gauge everyone's interest and excitement level at any given song. The first time we ever did the Horseshoe Tavern, I remember our manager was like, ?We should book the Horseshoe. I remember thinking that was too big. It was too big a room for us and it sold out. It sold out in advance. I couldn't believe it. We got on stage and everyone had this united energy and they were ready to dance, have fun and it felt like we were on to something special then and that spirit has just continued to grow since then.

?When we're all together and at our best, we're all present at the same time and there's no feeling quite like that. It's hard enough to get a group of musicians together on the same page for anything, but when we're all together, connected and just present and in the moment, it's a really special, wonderful feeling and we share that with the audiences we're with, which is amazing. As long as we have that feeling, we're going to keep going.?

For a complete lineup of this weekend's Ribfest entertainment, including Saturday night's headliner, April Wine, visit aurora.ca/ribfest.

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