Say farewell to Tragically Hip at Town Park on Saturday

By Brock Weir

The seeds of being a Tragically Hip fan were sown early in Aurora student Jack Davies.

He recalls seeing them perform live in Oshawa when he was just ?four or five? and he has been a fan ever since.

Now, preparing to enter Grade 11 next month at St. Andrew's College, the budding musician is preparing to open for one of his favourite bands this Saturday ? well, sort of.

Jack, a bass player, is a member of The Spencer MacKenzie Band, a local youth band that will provide live entertainment before Aurora simulcasts the Tragically Hip's final concert at Town Park this Saturday.

All Aurorans are invited to head out to Town Park on August 20, to take part in The Tragically Hip: A National Celebration starting at 6.30 p.m.

?This is a fantastic opportunity to watch a once-in-a-lifetime performance from a historic Canadian band,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe in a statement. ?We are pleased that the Town, the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, community volunteers and the CBC could come together to present this outdoor screening to our residents.?

Jack certainly remembers where he was when he heard the Tragically Hip for the first time and, as part of the opening act, he will certainly remember where he was the last time he heard them perform live. This is a feeling Councillor John Abel, one of the key drivers behind the community celebration, says he believes will be shared far and wide.

?[It is one of those moments] where people remember where they were,? said Councillor John Abel. ?I am dating myself, but I remember where I was in 1967 at City Hall celebrating Canada's 100th, the Canada-Russia series, Man on the Moon, Joe Carter's Home Run, Mike Weir when he won the Masters. This would be one of those moments: where were you when the Hip were playing?

?It should just be a great event. It is something that came to my attention during the evening where everyone was expressing frustration [over the tickets] in late June.

?Once [the CBC simulcast opportunity] became confirmed, I came to Mr. Mayor and our CAO to say this was a great idea. I talked to Councillor Mrakas prior to that meeting saying things had been moving in that direction and he thought it was a great idea. By

then, the momentum across the nation has taken on a whole meaning as to this great event and I am very pleased to bring it forward.?

While the simulcast itself is set to begin at 8.30 p.m., the event will feature food whipped up by the Optimist Club of Aurora and live music provided by the Spencer MacKenzie Band, among others.

?I love the Hip's music,? says Spencer. ?I haven't seen them in concert, but I love a lot of their main hits and have a little bit of a Hip influence but [the Farewell] saddened me because they are such a great group.?

The group came together last year when Spencer was assembling musicians for a gig in Memphis, TN. Many of the group are from the Hamilton area ? Spencer hails from Fort Erie ? Jack came into the group with his bass, and they gelled from there.

A big fan of Rush, Jack first picked up the bass trying to emulate Geddy Lee, one of his personal heroes, as a Grade 6 student in SAC's Music Program. Required to choose an instrument to study, the bass seemed like the obvious choice.

?At that point, I realised that was the closest I will be to being related to Rush in any way,? says Jack. ?Last September, I was involved in a Blues Festival youth event at Mississauga Blues Fest. I sat in with the house band and Spencer Mackenzie was there as well. We just met there and he so happened to need a bass player for a gig in Memphis and we stuck together ever since. It has been a full year now.?

Adds Spencer: We all have the same ambition. We all want to pursue music and we're all helpful of each other. It's not like we're all cocky or want to do better than one another. We always want to help each other and that is why we gel. We have ideas and we're not afraid to throw them out there, and we never really down each other, which is quite an amazing thing when you're in a band.?