

Youth take centre stage in lead-up to Aurora Winter Blues Festival

By Brock Weir

Blues are often seen as coming from the depths of life experience, but that is not the case for youth participating in the 2015 Aurora Winter Blues Festival.

Young bands, many of whom have formed in conjunction with The Arts Music Store, will showcase their talents in 'pop up' performances in the lead-up to this month's festivities as well as at the Aurora Winter Blues Fest's (AWBF) second annual 'Blues Bash', which takes over the Aurora Cultural Centre on February 19.

Aurorans got their first taste of these pop-up performances Saturday at the Aurora Public Library, beginning with the more seasoned notes of a trio led by Councillor John Abel, followed by new up-and-coming talent.

'This is just building now to our February 19 function, the Blues Bash kickoff,' says Jamie Macdonald, co-founder of the AWBF.

These bands underscore the Festival's Youth in Music program. In partnership with The Arts, the program aims to provide mentorship, training and performance opportunities for young bands.

The all-female teen band Wanderlust takes the stage for the Blues Bash. Their performances are 'something to behold,' says Mr. Macdonald.

The trio have their roots in The Arts. More specifically, however, Charlotte has her roots in the drums, having first picked up the sticks at the age of five. It wasn't until she was seven, however, that she realised music was something she wanted to commit to. After going to music camps, a passion for music truly kicked in at the age of 10.

'I think it was more of a look,' said Charlotte last year on what attracted her to the drums. 'I think it just looks cooler than some of the other instruments and I gravitated towards that. I had never really seen any girl drummers when I was little and I liked the fact you could just bang on them. Now, I know it is not unusual to see a girl drummer. I watch for them and it is really cool to watch their techniques.'

Charlotte will have the chance to see another girl drummer close at hand at the Blues Bash 'and a recent Juno-nominated one at that' as the 24th Street Wailers headline the Blues Bash, which also serves as a springboard to highlight two charities benefiting from the AWBF, CHATS and Blue Door Shelters.

From here, Mr. Macdonald would like to see others in the community become more involved with the Youth in Music program. Discussions are underway with the Optimist Club of Aurora, for example, to form a partnership, and organizers also hope to expand the program back into local schools. They have also brought on a 'young volunteer' to help boost exposure and reach a younger demographic.

Until then, however, the focus is on the Blues Bash and the festival itself, which continues on February 20 and 21.

'The Blues Bash is one of the few functions going on in the community in the wintertime here,' says Mr. Macdonald. 'It is a party, it is a dance party, but with great local talent, with the youth artists we're showcasing, and it just shows you the type of musical acts that are willing to come here.'

For more on the AWBF, visit awbf.ca.