

Orangeville Blues and Jazz Festival to feature 75 live acts over

By Sam Odrowski

Excitement is building for the return of Dufferin County's largest annual event.

The Orangeville Blues and Jazz Festival is returning June 2 to 4 for its 19th year with a full slate of fun activities and incredible performances across three stages.

Festival founder and organizer Larry Kurtz said he's eager to see the 75 acts performing. They include Rick Estrin and the Nightcats, Monkeyjunk, Shakura S'Aida, Barbra Lica and Toronto Mass Choir.

"I get excited when I get to bring in musicians from all over Canada, and some from the US," he noted. "I enjoy getting to hang out and meet the musicians, as well as just seeing what a good mood everybody is in throughout town that weekend."

Kurtz added, "People get together with their families and friends, and I really like seeing that. There's just a lot of positivity over the weekend."

The Orangeville Blues and Jazz Festival has a budget of \$276,000 this year, and it's heavily offset by government grants and private-sector sponsorships. This allows the festival to create incredible value for patrons without charging high prices.

The cost to access the main stage is \$10 a day or \$20 for the weekend – a price point Kurtz said would be hard to find elsewhere, considering the calibre of talent performing.

"The value is tremendous for the for the paid part of it on the main stage," he remarked. "We have acts coming into play here that you would pay \$100 anywhere else to go see them."

"You're also going to see some amazing artists who you may not hear on a top 40 station, but they are just hugely talented."

Kurtz said exposing Orangeville residents and visitors to musicians they may not have heard of before but will likely enjoy is one of the reasons he remains active in the festival's organization each year.

The Blues and Jazz Festival has grown exponentially since its inception in 2003.

Larry Kurtz, who founded the festival and remains active in its organization, said the first one had about 2,000 attendees, while last year saw some 40,000 people over three days.

The idea for Orangeville Blues and Jazz came to Kurtz when he and his were visiting Toronto for live shows on the weekends and wanted to create something closer to home.

"I just thought, wouldn't it be cool to bring some of our favorite people up to Orangeville?" Kurtz said.

He started promoting and organizing shows at bars in downtown Orangeville and that gradually evolved into the first Blues and Jazz Festival in June 2003.

Kurtz said he attended many similar festivals and took some of their best ideas to apply locally.

"I wanted it to be a free event to start, and we put on basically a full-fledged festival the first year," he recalled. "We had about five volunteers and put this on."

The first festival featured two stages with seven acts in Alexandra Park, and five restaurants got on board.

Kurtz found sponsors through his woodworking business, and the event was well-received in the community for the first year.

In 2004 the festival doubled in size and went from five volunteers to 50.

“Over the years, we've just gradually grown,” Kurtz said. “We used to meet in my living room” and now we have 250 volunteers.”

The Orangeville BIA has identified the festival as the town's top event for tourism and economic impact.

The last report on the event showed \$1.3 million in economic activity throughout the weekend.

Because of the event's significant impact on Orangeville, reputation, and level of high-quality entertainment provided, it has been named a top 100 festival by Festivals and Events Ontario for several years.

In terms of special events throughout the three days of Orangeville Blues and Jazz, the excitement starts on Friday, June 2, with the Blues Cruise from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The event sees over 250 classic cars set up along Broadway for a fun car show mixed with live bands at various pop-up locations. Performing bands at the Blues Cruise include CJ Lee, Big Dan & the Topside Band, and Gail Gunnis & The Dirty Roosters.

A change from last year is the location of workshops for the festival.

They will be held at Marion Hall (Covenant Alliance Church) on 3 Zina St. instead of the Orangeville Public Library.

On Saturday, June 3, Guy Belanger will run a harmonica workshop at 12 p.m., Dance Orangeville will offer a blues and jazz dance workshop at 1:30 p.m., and Brandon Isaak will teach blues guitar at 3:30.

Also on Saturday, the Downtown Ramble will take over Broadway and Mill Street from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. with live music performed along the streets by Orangeville Community Band and Nicole Robertson. Featured performances will also take place at the TD Broadway Stage.

The New Orleans Style Jazz March is just before the Downtown Ramble, starting at 12:30 p.m. along Broadway.

The Blues and Bikes event will feature over 500 motorcycles set up along Broadway and Mill Street on Sunday, June 4, from 12 to 5 p.m.

The event includes a custom show and shine as well as specialty vendors.

Jay Kipps and Flashback will be performing live music alongside the bikes.

The event is sponsored by Barrie Harley-Davidson and organized with Qwest Riders.

Orangeville Blues and Jazz Festival president Josh Leitch said he'd encourage all Dufferin County residents to visit the event from June 2 to 4.

“It's an opportunity to get out in the in the community, visit with folks you maybe haven't seen in a year or two, or who they don't see socially until the festival weekend,” he noted.

?With Broadway closed down and all of the activities that are going on there, there's something for everyone.?

Leitch said it's important to hold an event that the community enjoys and wants to support to ensure the festival can continue year after year.

?Every year could be our last year,? he told the Citizen. ?Without the community support? we couldn't do it.?

Leitch says he's currently working on grant applications for next year's festival, with special plans for its 20th year.

Orangeville Blues and Jazz is always looking for more volunteers. Visit volgistics.com/appform/1295336113 to fill out a form and get involved.