



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

Music unites us

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

BY ANDY WOLFF

THE foundation of any successful community, culture or lifestyle is built on diversity, respect and open-mindedness. I believe that music is a powerful tool that unites people regardless of their background or beliefs. Without question, one of the positive things on our waterfront is the Summer in the Parks music series. This event alone draws thousands of people together weekly, to enjoy the wide variety of music.

Generally speaking, the history of popular music proves diversity and open-mindedness has introduced us to a wide range of styles that otherwise might never have happened.

In the 1950s, a new musical style was being born. Rock 'n' roll owes its roots to the rhythm and blues of black Americans combined with the country and western music of white Americans. Regardless of the segregation laws, black and white teenagers united at concerts and on dance floors to enjoy this new music.

In the 1960s, the perception was that Motown music was primarily played by black musicians. In fact, half the session musicians were white. This is further proof that diversity works well.

The British Invasion was led by The Beatles who credited many of their influences to both black and white rock 'n' roll artists. However, they didn't stop there. They continually experimented with other music forms, including those with strong East Indian influences.

Throughout the 1960s, many more of these successful British artists reintroduced us to 1950s rhythm and blues artists that were all but forgotten.

With a strong history of powwow, drumming and singing, First Nations people have a history of influential musicians such as Buffy Saint Marie, Robbie Robertson and Shania Twain.

As well as a uniting factor, music can be a salvation to some. People find solace in music and many feel that it has saved them from a life of drug abuse and destitution.

Learning to play music is a positive step toward self-esteem and accomplishment. Playing music with others enforces the concept of teamwork and uniting everyone towards a common objective, regardless of cultural or ethnic background.

As a member of Thunder Bay's Advisory Committee on Anti-Racism, it is my expectation that we will successfully accomplish the objectives set out in the work plan. Thunder Bay is growing into a more diverse city with people coming from various parts of the world and our remote northern communities. Many are youths looking for positive activities to be involved in and to have a sense of belonging.

Our committee's goal is to "Encourage and involve youth in activities that promote anti-racism and inclusion." One of the activities we have proposed is "Rock Around the Block" musical concerts throughout the summer in various neighborhoods. Anyone interested in forming or offering their services, or assist in these events can reach me at 683-7670 or email awwolff@lycos.com.

Andy Wolff is a citizen representative for Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee.

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