

Jam in Jubilee Summer Concert Series: An Invitation for Partnership

Factor Sponsorship

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Jam in Jubilee: An Abbotsford Phenomenon with Youth Ownership

The Atangard Community Project Society (ACPS) has been directing the Jam in Jubilee Summer Concert Series (JNJ) for 4 years. The ACPS has been active in the historic downtown of Abbotsford, British Columbia, for over 4.5 years as a non-profit group whose constitution provides that it will 'foster community spirit through organizing and supporting events within the downtown and greater community of Abbotsford [and] promote artists and musicians in the community through exposure, events, and other initiatives.' Formerly, the Abbotsford Downtown Business Association directed Jam in Jubilee (then called 'Jammin' in Jubilee'). In 2010, the Association handed off control of the series to the ACPS, which then formed a committee (JNJ Committee) that included various members of Abbotsford's downtown arts community.

Since 2010, JNJ has evolved from a modestly attended summer concert series into a celebrated multi-disciplinary, multicultural festival that is offered without admission cost to community members. The festival's mandate is to '[promote] awareness of Abbotsford's local arts community by providing an outdoor performance venue for musicians and artists to perform and grow.' During the four years the JNJ Committee has directed the festival, community participation, revenue creation, and attendance has increased dramatically. Over the course of the series, a cumulative 6,000 (approximate) attendees experience an artisan's market, multi-media art installments, and performances by a line-up of musical acts that are carefully selected to appeal to a multi-generational, multicultural audience. A typical night at JNJ treats festival-goers to a Bhangra act (Abbotsford's population is 20% South Asian), a popular and family-friendly folk performer, a local indie rock band, a short film festival featuring local videographers, and an array of vendors, selling everything from handmade jewelry to tie-dyed baby clothes to gourmet hotdogs.

JNJ specializes in representing the art and music of a younger demographic. Many JNJ acts are poised for greater national and international recognition among music fans between the ages of 15 and 30. Jam in Jubilee alumni such as You Say Party, Teen Daze, Oh No! Yoko, Joshua Hyslop, and Jordan Klassen are now internationally celebrated independent acts, ambassadors of Canadian art. This festival provides a crucial stepping-stone for young musicians from Abbotsford, a city with a sizeable population (141,000), a large proportion of which is under 30 years old (over 50% according to 2013 census results), and a regrettable dearth of cultural infrastructure. The lack of performance venues and legitimate opportunities for musicians to showcase their talents to the broader community is a well-documented reality in Abbotsford (see the Abbotsford News story 'Abbotsford's music scene: Underground or out of town', printed September 30, 2011, in the Appendix). Most of the Fraser Valley's most notable musical talents cut their teeth playing illegal and underground shows. JNJ provides an alternative: an above-ground, community-supported hub for artistic showcases. The JNJ experience is part of a more streamlined path to establishing a viable music career. Highly talented artists are being left by the wayside due to a lack of venue space. The JNJ Committee is passionate about supporting and showcasing vulnerable artists with strong artistic and commercial potential.

Perhaps the strongest indicator of JNJ's relevance to the people (especially the youth) of Abbotsford is the enthusiasm and dedication of its volunteers. JNJ is entirely directed

and operated by unpaid volunteers, many of whom devote hundreds of hours to managing various aspects of this festival. JNJ is a labour of love, but in order to be sustainable and continue engaging more of the community, more financial support is needed to supplement the contribution of its many devoted volunteers and to pay fair fees to performers of a caliber appropriate to the festival's rising profile.

Strengthening the Lower Mainland's Arts & Music Community

The JNJ Committee has defined the key objectives of the festival as follows:

- a. To restore the identity of Abbotsford's downtown as a source of community and cultural expression.
- b. To incorporate a diverse blend of musicians and genres to welcome Abbotsford's varied demographics and cultural groups.
- c. To provide venue space for musicians, small market-place booths, community organizations, artistic media, and event sponsors.

JNJ has a successful track record of meeting these objectives. The Lower Mainland of British Columbia undoubtedly has a healthier, better-connected arts community as a result of the festival. The following is just three ways in which JNJ is meeting its objectives and creating a stronger arts and music culture in the Lower Mainland and British Columbia in general:

a. Profile-Raising Performances & Support For Up-and-Coming Artists

JNJ enables a very wide variety of local artists to gain exposure to an equally varied audience. There is no other event in Abbotsford that provides its local musicians with a comparable platform, and with exposure to the type of audience that the festival attracts. JNJ provides artists with an extremely educational opportunity. Many acts featured are on the cusp of attracting a broader audience, but lack performance experience, especially the specific experience of performing outdoors to a festival crowd. Canadian artists who will mature and begin to reach national (and international) audiences must frequent festival circuits.

This year, the Committee is extremely excited to be working more closely with the City of Abbotsford and its business community to promote the city's young talent. The City has asked the Committee to curate a special 'Jam in Jubilee' mainstage show for its Canada Day festivities. The Abbotsford Downtown Business Association has also agreed to sponsor two similar 'Jam in Jubilee' side-stages for its Berry Beat Festival. The Berry Beat Festival is attended by approximately 30,000 people each year and is without a doubt one of the highest-profile and most popular public events available to people living in the Fraser Valley. Participating in these events will provide tremendous exposure for JNJ artists also increase community awareness of the festival itself.

JNJ is a critical and strategic step in an Abbotsford artist's progression. JNJ is an event in which music industry-affiliated people (independent label employees, booking agents, bloggers, etc.) are specifically hosted and given backstage passes, so that the festival can operate as an industry forum where critical connections are made. JNJ Committee members and You Say Party band member Stephen O'Shea is also hosting an evening

hang-out/seminar to participating JNJ bands so that he can share his considerable knowledge about building a career in independent music.

In 2014, the Committee is taking more formal measures to track the positive career outcomes JNJ artists experience as a result of their participation in the festival. JNJ Alumni will be recorded in a database. The Committee will reach out to JNJ alumni at six-month intervals in order to interview them and collect measurable data about their career trajectories. The Committee will be interested in learning about measurables such as industry contacts made, touring contracts and/or connections secured, and units of recorded music sold and/or distributed.

A list of JNJ alumni reads as a veritable 'who's who' of local musicians who are making a big impact on the international independent music scene. Bands such as You Say Party, Oh No! Yoko, Teen Daze, Jordan Klassen, Joshua Hyslop, and We Are The City have all graced its stage. JNJ aims to become more and more geared towards enabling Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley to mature as a viable arts community and a serious contributor to Canadian musical culture.

b. Complementary Relationship-Building

JNJ allows actors from Abbotsford/the Fraser Valley's arts and civic- and music-industry-related communities to come together and forge supportive and strategic relationships. Abbotsford is especially lacking in forums for its younger arts community. JNJ fills this void. It is a place where artists and civic-minded individuals gain support, information, and inspiration from one another. JNJ truly facilitates the exchange of local ideas, narratives, or issues that engage community participation. (See letters of support from the Abbotsford Arts Council and CiVL Radio in the Appendix.)

For example, the University of the Fraser Valley's student-run CiVL Radio is heavily involved in the festival, from promotion to day-of operations. Programmers from CiVL are inspired and influenced by the performances at JNJ, and JNJ enjoys crucial support from CiVL, as the station broadcasts music and information related to the festival. The festival is also a natural setting for independent music industry networking. The Committee typically attracts volunteers whom have involvement in different levels of the industry and independent music culture, and their participation has always heavily shaped the character of the festival. Committee members like Stephen O'Shea (member of Paper Bag Records signed band You Say Party), and volunteers like Tyler Johnson (booking agent at Turner Music) have ensured that the festival is a destination both for performers and for those who are invested in learning about the Lower Mainland's up-and-coming talent. In fact, Joshua Hyslop, a JNJ alumnus, was actually signed to Nettwerk Records via Tyler Johnson's recommendation after Tyler and Josh connected. This year, the Committee plans to offer even more learning and networking opportunities to participating bands by hosting an evening seminar/hang-out with Stephen O'Shea, who will share about his 10+ years in the international independent music scene and offer advice to budding music professionals.

JNJ is full of productive relationships. It simply makes Abbotsford a more vibrant, collaborative, and sustainable arts community.