‘POETRY IS FOR EVERYONE’

A poet on a Mission. Meet Aurora Poet Laureate Ahja Fox
Jessica Brown, director of Aurora’s new Charles Burrell Visual & Performing Arts Campus, is shaping a unique educational experience for creative K-12 students: “An arts-integrated curriculum ensures that students with a passion for the arts are truly engaged in core content since they experience literacy, math, science, and social studies in a creative and inquiry-based way.”

Aurora’s Public Art staff were thrilled when they received the invitation to kick off the school’s first teacher planning seminar with a public art tour of the arts district on July 26. Staff created a special tour designed to introduce educators to iconic works in the collection that provide insight into the values of this community.

Over 40 educators participated in this unique program, which began at the People’s Building in the heart of the arts district and home to the mural “Art in Motion” by David Garcia. The tour extended west to Chris Weed’s “Unglued,” otherwise known as The Big Blue Chair, and north to City Park to see “Solar Winds” by Airworks, covering a total of 10 works, including murals and sculptures.

The tour encouraged conversations detailing new and inspiring ways of integrating educational disciplines, including astronomy, math, history, poetry, wind science, theatre, civil rights and culture, into Aurora’s emblematic public art and tapped into the city’s diverse cultural identity. After the tour, educators reflected on their thoughts surrounding Public Art, Aurora’s rich culture, community and caring.

Public Art staff saw this as an opportunity to expand upon the core value of accessibility of public art to all by providing high-level information, interaction, discussion, and curricular applications. A resource book was developed with insights from Aurora Public Library staff, that includes access to the Library’s collection to facilitate additional teacher inquiry and the ability to explore connections.

Art in Public Places staff also developed and presented two special interactive experiences for visiting youth from the Aurora Sister Cities International Youth program in July and August. This fun and playful activity encouraged students to locate and describe works from the Public Art Collection on the Aurora Municipal Center Campus.

For more about Aurora Public Art, visit AuroraGov.org/PublicArt.

The Aurora History Museum is proud to host “America,” an original art show coordinated by Tonos Latinos. The show will celebrate local artists’ art styles and traditions, representing North, Central and South America. This network of Latino American artists is deeply connected to their culture and community. Tonos Latinos offers multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary artistic events that bring together the visual arts, music, poetry, dance, written word, crafts, etc. They look to showcase each of their cultures’ richness and empower society. Their artistic projects traverse the realms of artistic delivery, often diffusing universal values like the richness and diversity of their roots and social integration. They hope to build community and open avenues of conversations toward understanding cultural diversity. This show is free-themed and representative of America. The exhibition will be displayed through Oct. 30. To learn more, visit AuroraMuseum.org.
Aurora native Ahja Fox is the city’s new honorary poet laureate. She was selected by a panel that included the two former city poets, Jovan Mays and Assetou Xango, and the State Poet Laureate Bobby LeFebre. Fox was recommended by the Aurora Public Library Board for appointment by the City Council, which took place in July, and sworn in in August for a four-year term ending in 2026. The Poet Laureate Program started in 2013 as an initiative of the Aurora Public Library to recognize a poet and writer and to advocate and promote poetry and literature. To learn more, visit AuroraGov.org/Poet.  

You have been writing poems since elementary school; tell us about your love for poetry, its importance in your life and its impact on those who read or listen to your work?  

My “poems” back when I was a child read more like free-writes as they lacked form, structure, poetic purpose, and so on. However, as I matured, I realized I didn’t want to just write about my feelings but about everything. I wanted to write about the new DNA discovered in crashed meteorites. I wanted to imagine how the shoes on my feet viewed life if they could speak. I wanted to protest, dismantle, build further upon, but I needed a totally safe and “unmessy” way to perform autopsy on the world I knew and the world I may never know.

“Curiosity killed the cat; but satisfaction brought it back” is exactly how I feel about poetry. Whether a poem is speaking to things real or imagined, I am searching for the earth-shattering truth. Poetry is important because it allows people reading it and/or writing it to be unashamedly curious. Suddenly, there is no wrong in investigating, no mouth to keep a secret, and no authority shooing you away from looking deeper. Poetry is great for exploring the inner self and the community as a whole since one can go as big or as narrow in scope as they please. They can also come from any time period, galaxy, perspective, age, etc. that they want. Think of poetry as a superpower. It is everyone’s birthright to use language (regardless of whether actual “words” are ever said) and that gift alone is so grand, but poetry gives you a model that is endless even in its form and apparent rules.

It is my wish to inspire others through my work, as cliché as it sounds. But when I say to inspire, I mean to stimulate or to incite an urge for the reader or listener to do some more exploring or research of their own.  

As the city poet laureate, you will have a different platform and a broader audience. What does it mean to you to be the city’s poet laureate?  

For me, it means province. By that I mean, my role includes carrying a world of poetry within a bigger, more complex world (Aurora, my city). Coming from a long background of writing and literature, this work has been transformational and even tiring, but it is special in that it can affect everyone. Who are we without our history, words, and teachings? Since I view words and writing in this way, I see it as its own entity worth acknowledging and preserving. As a city poet laureate, I have been given a gift and a big responsibility—to be there for my community and to be there for my work too. This is to say that I am still and will always be a poet even after this position is gone (so I have to take care in my proceedings to remain an ever-evolving poet), but as the position stands and as a native of Aurora, I will get to represent and talk to the place where I live on a big scale and that is an honor. Every writer wants their work to be heard far and wide and I was blessed by my city to actually do that.

What excites you the most about this role?  

The countless opportunities for growth! I expect growth in my writing, in connecting with the community and the community connecting with each other, growth in outreach with children and underserved groups, growth in mindset, innovative ideas, collaborations for Aurorans and more. This role is about more than representation. It has the potential to stir change and new beginnings.  

What can you tell us about your plans or projects?  

Other than sharing the love and art of poetry all over the city by reading for the public, I hope to develop more events and programming geared towards the public generating and showcasing their own poems. It is my belief that poetry is for everyone, so I have made it a mission to prove it so. More specific long-term plans or projects include working with Aurora’s public schools and various outreach programs to teach poetry classes and workshops and to potentially build a mentorship for folks who can’t pay to get the education to learn more about writing. I would also like to support the already existing writing community in Colorado by doing some collaborative projects with neighboring cities like Denver, Colorado Springs, and more. The overall goal is to share all the ways poetry can benefit a person and a community. The more everyone knows, the more we all soar.
SEPTEMBER

3
Colfax Art Jams (first Saturday of each month)
Saturday, noon to 4 p.m.
Fletcher Plaza, 9800 E. Colfax Ave.

13
Aurora Rhythms: Skean Dubh
Tuesday, 6:30 to 8 p.m. (pre-show at 5:45 p.m.)
Tallyn’s Reach Library
Registration TinyURL.com/AuroraRhythms

16
DAVA Youth Film Premiere
Friday, 7 p.m.
Aurora Fox Arts Center
Reservation: AuroraFoxArtsCenter.org

17
Aurora Fox Annual Gala $
Saturday, 6 p.m.
Heritage Eagle Bend Golf Club,
23155 E. Heritage Parkway
Tickets: AuroraFox.org

24
Cyanotype Workshop by Christine Nguyen
Saturday, 11 a.m.
Martin Luther King Jr. Library

OCTOBER

1
Colfax Arts Jam
Saturday, noon to 4 p.m.
Fletcher Plaza

4
Free Dotsero Concert
Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
The Stampe, 2430 S. Havana St.
Presented by Havana Business Improvement District

6
Pride on Your Side Exhibit Opening Reception
Thursday, 6 to 7:30 p.m.
Aurora Central Library

7
Futurity, a New Folk-rock Musical
Opening Night
Aurora Fox Arts Center

10
The New American Arts Festival
Opening Reception
Saturday, 5 to 8:30 p.m.
The House of Friendship, 9641 16th Ave. and Martin Luther King Jr. Library

11
Aurora Rhythms: Mollie O’Brien and Rich Moore
Tuesday, 6:30 to 8 p.m. (pre-show at 5:45 p.m.)
Mission Viejo Library

15 & 16
Aurora Symphony Orchestra -
2022 Fall Masterworks: American Voices $
Saturday, 2:30 to 9:30 p.m.; Sunday, 3 to 5 p.m.
Cherokee Trail High School Auditorium,
25901 E. Arapahoe Road
Tickets: AuroraSymphony.org

Exhibits

Botanical Illustrations Exhibit by Vanessa Martin
Through Sept. 30 | Tallyn’s Reach Library

America Exhibit by Tonos Latinos
Through Oct. 30 Aurora History Museum

Community Generated Photo Exhibit
Pride on Your Side
Starting Sept. 30 | Central Library

Mosaic of Cultures: Aurora’s Mexican Community
Through April 2023 | Aurora History Museum

Calacac Art Exchange Project
Life-size paper maché skulls (calacas) painted by local artists.
Sept. 15 to Oct. 22 | Aurora Public Library Branches

Workshops at Aurora History Museum
- Piñatas, Sept. 4
- Ojos de Dios yarn art, Sept. 25
- Day of the Dead Papel Picado for adults and Paper Flowers for youth/children, Oct. 9
- Day of the Dead piñata making, Oct. 23

All workshops run from 4 to 8 p.m.
Registration and information AuroraMuseum.org
Roshni presents the second edition of the New American Arts Festival, from Sept. 10 to 25, with the theme InterCulturalism. The festival will showcase multiple art genres involving more than 150 artists and performers and will take place in different locations, including Vintage Theatre, House of Friendship, Windsor Gardens, Heather Gardens and Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

“If love is universal, so is ‘grief,’ and in the stories we bring this year, we explore their interaction, intermingling and their consequent inter-connectedness,” said Deepali Lindblom, festival director and founder/artistic director of Roshni. “Grief, like love, needs to be fully embraced in order to heal and celebrate.”

Through 14 original performances and presentations, several involving multi-genre and multi-generational performers, the New American Arts Festival will present several first-time writers, actors, dancers, directors and creators.

Be a part of this festival. Browse through the exhibitions to see images that capture the beautiful and resilient human spirit. Watch original productions, each put together with grace, imagination and creative ingenuity. For the event schedule and more information, visit RoshnIsLight.org/Festival.

THEATRE/PERFORMANCE

**The Drowsy Chaperone $**  
Sept. 2 to Oct. 9 | Vintage Theater  
Tickets: VintageTheater.org

**The Piano Teacher $**  
Sept. 16 to Oct. 16 | Vintage Theater  
Tickets: VintageTheater.org

**Futurity, a New Folk-rock Musical**  
Oct. 7 to 30 | Aurora Fox Arts Center  
Tickets: AuroraFox.org

**Murder at the Museum: A New Interactive Mystery $**  
Sept. 11, 12, 18 and 19 | Aurora History Museum  
AuroraMuseum.org

THEATRE CLASSES

**Lemony Snickett: The Reptile Room (Ages: 7 to 13) $**  
Sept. 17 to Oct. 15, Sat., 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Code: 52584 | Tallyn’s Reach Library

**Stage Combat (Ages 10 to Adult) $**  
Sept. 17 to Oct. 15, Sat., 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.  
Code: 52583 | Central Library, Cultural Services Studio

**Greek Mythology (Ages 9 to 16) $**  
Sept. 17 to Oct. 15, Sat., 9:30 a.m. to noon  
Code: 52592 | Aurora Fox Art Center, Studio Theatre

YOUTH RECREATIONAL DANCE CLASSES

**Beg Ballet Central (Ages 7 to 12) $**  
Sept. 12 to Oct. 24, Mon., 4:45 to 5:45 p.m.  
Code: 57408 | Central Recreation Center

**Beg Ballet Central (Ages 7 to 12) $**  
Sept. 16 to Oct. 28, Fri., 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.  
Code: 57413 | Central Recreation Center

**Pre Ballet (Ages 4 to 6) $**  
Sept. 17 to Oct. 29, Sat., 10 to 10:45 a.m.  
Code: 57422 | Meadowood Recreation Center

**Beg Hip Hop (Ages 7 to 12) $**  
Sept. 11 to Oct. 23, Sun., 9:45 to 10:45 a.m.  
Code: 57434 | Central Recreation Center

**Tippy Toes (Age 3) $**  
Sept. 11 to Oct. 23, Sun., 10:45 to 11:30 a.m.  
Code: 57438 | Online

**Creative Dance & Stories (Ages 3 to 4) $**  
Sept. 17 to Oct. 29, Sat., 9 to 9:45 a.m.  
Code: 57419 | Meadowood Recreation Center

Register at CityOfAurora.PerfectMind.com
Aurora Dance Arts has been busily launching a brand-new season of dance training for the 2022-23 school year. The Continuous Children’s Dance Program is progressive dance education for students ages 3 to 20 years and consists of a comprehensive, nine-month program with classes currently in ballet, pointe, tap, jazz, lyrical, contemporary, choreography, conditioning and hip hop. Highly qualified instructors implement a syllabus for beginner-to advanced-level dance classes designed to grow with children. This program is designed to provide affordable and accessible dance education for Aurora’s diverse community. Classes in this fabulous program begin Sept. 6, and registration is still available by calling the Dance Office at 303.326.8308.

Aurora Dance Arts also has been dancing and rehearsing in preparation for its annual fall production. This year’s production, “Are We in Kansas, Yet?,” is a unique twist on the classic tale of the Wizard of Oz. Consider joining us “somewhere over the rainbow” as the team produces a timeless and imaginative story to be danced to life Nov. 4 to 6 at the Aurora Fox Arts Center. This production will bring together many age groups/levels, a variety of musical selections and myriad dance genres. This story was carefully selected for its many wacky and wonderful characters, and of course, the beloved nostalgia of the story. The last time Aurora Dance Arts took on this show was in the early 2000s before our current students were even trained in our program. We cannot wait to create this beautiful, new production this fall.

Follow the yellow brick road to our website and purchase tickets starting Oct. 1. at AuroraGov.org/Dance.
While the weather might be changing, that doesn’t stop Aurorans from experiencing free live music and performances at different library locations through December. The last four performances will continue offering complimentary refreshments, children’s activities and information about programs offered by the Library and Cultural Services Department. For more information and to register, visit TinyURL.com/AuroraRhythms.

**Pre-shows, refreshments and kid’s activities:** 5:45 p.m.
**Concerts:** 6:30 p.m.
Aurora Public Library is partnering with the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art (BMoCA) for two art exhibits at two libraries by artists Juan Fuentes and Christine Nguyen. Both artworks are to be created with contributions from the community.

Juan Fuentes is a Denver-based documentary photographer born in Chihuahua, Mexico. His work captures everyday life and tells stories of contemporary America, highlighting the immigrant and Chicano experience. His collaborative photography exhibit will include photos from Aurora community members reflecting their everyday experiences and showcasing their pride in the city. The art project focuses on celebrating Aurora’s diversity, uniting the city’s different communities by compiling community-generated perspectives and images.

In August, Fuentes taught two photography workshops at Aurora Central Library, where community members explored the joy of photography and were empowered to document their own experiences. Participants will be sharing their photos with Fuentes for the exhibit, which will be on display at Central Library, 14949 E. Alameda Parkway, starting Sept. 30.

Christine Nguyen is an Aurora-based artist born and raised in California. Her cyanotype (solar print) mural exhibitions have been shown nationally and internationally. For this project, Nguyen will present a community-created cyanotype mural and photo-based flags highlighting the natural world and celebrating the Aurora community through its individuals. Throughout the library, hidden objects will be waiting to be discovered as part of a scavenger hunt. The community will be invited to explore, interact and find the objects represented in Nguyen’s flags.

Nguyen will offer a free cyanotype workshop for all ages to participate in the creation of the cyanotype mural at 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 24, at Martin Luther King Jr. Library, 9898 E. Colfax Ave., the place where the mural will be exhibited. At print time, there was no set date for installation, but it is expected to take place in mid-October. To learn more about the project, visit AuroraLibrary.org.