

Junos return to the start of the journey

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Eight years ago, the Juno Awards went from "a show that happens on Sunday night" to a movable music feast.

That's how Junos impresario John Brunton sums up what has happened since 2002, when the Junos moved from CBC to CTV and left town.

An event that had for years been held in and around Toronto (with occasional sojourns to Vancouver) invaded St. John's, N.L.

The show was set in Mile One Centre, on several stages, with the best seats filled with fans. Barenaked Ladies hosted, and Great Big Sea opened the show.

"We had problems leading up to the program," Brunton recalls. "With the pyro on that show, we set on fire a bunch of equipment in rehearsal with Nickelback.

"So they almost burned the arena down."

This year, after stops in eight provinces and every region but Quebec, the 2010 Juno Awards show comes back to Mile One Centre on Sunday, April 18. CTV will broadcast it live.

"We're going back to the scene of the crime," Brunton says. "In part, it's because the city and the province wanted us back so badly. Like relationships, you go back to the person who loves you, and they had such an exceptionally great experience the last time around."

The show has come full circle in an eight-year odyssey that saw it touch down in Ottawa in 2003, followed by Edmonton, Winnipeg, Halifax, Saskatoon, Calgary and Vancouver.

"It's been an incredible adventure," Brunton says. "In many ways, the success of that first show set the tone for the adventure that was to cross the country."

And in those eight years, there have been some very memorable moments.

In 2003, there was Shania Twain hosting in Ottawa in a series of NHL-themed gowns she designed herself.

"There was a time -- this was 20 years ago -- where it was impossible to convince people to host the show," Brunton says. "And for the biggest star, not just in Canada but in the world at the time, Shania Twain, to say, 'I'd love to host the show.'"

"And not only does she host the show, but she designs all those gowns, and she completely has fun with it."

As Brunton points out, Twain is also responsible for what is probably the funniest double entendre in awards show history: "I think I just sat on a Swollen Member."

In a similar vein, Alanis Morissette lampooned Janet Jackson's Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction."

In 2004, in Edmonton, she hosted the show in a body stocking -- with fake nipples and pubic hair, which she removed and tossed into the crowd.

"The next thing you know, there's a picture of Alanis in every newspaper in the world," Brunton says.

This year, the show will be handled by a rotating group of emcees, and scheduled performers include Metric, Blue Rodeo, Michael Buble, Billy Talent, Justin Bieber and Drake.

And for the first time, there will be a street party, with festivities spilling onto the city's famous George Street.

"There's nowhere else in Canada like George Street," Brunton says. "There's something like 57 bars in a block and a half. In so many ways, it's representative of St. John's but mostly of their love of music.

"So we're going to create a monster party on the street, and have some performances, and do some of the hosting among the 8,000 or 9,000 people on the street."

The street party is a logical progression, when you consider that over the past eight years, the Junos have evolved into what Brunton describes as "a long Grey Cup weekend."

"Musicians from all over Canada, from the Wednesday to the Sunday, take over bars all over the city."

The style of the show has varied with the styles of the hosts, ranging from the unflappable Brent Butt to bombshell Pamela Anderson to comic Russell Peters, who said he knew nothing about music but hosted for two years anyway, in 2008-09.

But what was perhaps the most dramatic moment came in 2005, at Butt's show in Winnipeg, when the focus was to be Neil Young's return to a city where he spent much of his youth.

Just days before the show, Young collapsed on a street in New York with a ruptured artery in his thigh -- two days after having had brain surgery. He was rushed back into the hospital near death and had to cancel.

"Neil ended up watching the show at the consulate house in New York," Brunton says. "And we talked to Neil's camp about us doing a bit of a tribute to Neil. And k.d. lang stepped up and sang 'Helpless' -- 'There is a town in North Ontario.'

"It was really, really sad to not have Neil there. But the upside was that k.d. lang tipped her hat to Neil and brought the house down."

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