

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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## FESTIVALS

### Starting this September, national Culture Days to happen across the country

BY JAMES BRADSHAW

"A cultural *Hockey Day in Canada*."

That's how CBC Radio host Jian Ghomeshi described the new national Culture Days initiative while emceeing its launch in Toronto yesterday.

Kicking off on the last weekend of this September, Culture Days is born of six years of strategizing to try to nationalize the success of the existing *Journées de la culture* in Quebec, which began in 1997 and now attracts some 300,000 participants to thousands of events in more than 300 cities and towns on a single weekend each year.

The goal of Culture Days is to inspire broader participation in and appreciation for the arts by encouraging as many artists and creators as possible – professional or amateur – to offer free, hands-on events on one weekend across the country, from the biggest cities to the smallest towns.

"It's not an easy thing to describe before it actually takes place," said Janice Price, CEO of the Luminato Festival and chair of the Ontario task force.

National Arts Centre president Peter Herndorf and Toronto International Film Festival director Piers Handling are credited with giving seed to the idea, which now

has an embarrassment of cultural heavy hitters driving it, many of whom packed Tuesday's launch at Toronto's Distillery District.

This year's Culture Days are Sept. 24-26 in most of Canada, the exceptions being Alberta, which already has Alberta Art Days slated for the previous weekend, and Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, which have yet to announce dates.

Louise Sicuro, the president and CEO of Quebec's *Culture pour tous*, which organizes the *Journées*, said the proof that the idea is more than "a simple marketing ploy" is that more than 80 per cent

of her artistic partners said the *Journées* made them more connected to their neighbourhoods.

Another measure of success would be rising participation year to year, Price said.

About 50 events already confirmed in Ontario include an open house at the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony and the Art Gallery of Peterborough's annual Kawartha Autumn Studio Tour. Organizers are stressing that pretty well anything goes, so long as it "brings creators and the public closer together," and that their role is to gather and publicize the events, not to curate them. Culture Days is volunteer-

driven, expected to run on an annual budget of about \$1-million raised from private sponsors and the Canada Council for the Arts. Artists won't receive money to mount events, but there will be mentoring and logistical support, and there will be a national media campaign to get the word out. (The Globe and Mail is a media partner.)

Picking up Ghomeshi's thread, Price said she hopes Culture Days will encourage Canadians to enjoy and revere the arts they way they do sports. Added Ghomeshi: "This is a particularly artistic country, and I think we can start to say that out loud."

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