

New event celebrates Island's arts, culture

DAVE STEWART

The Guardian



Harpist Jill Harris performs at the unveiling of Culture Days, a free event celebrating arts and culture in every province and territory. Guardian photo

"Our culture, our voice are the heart and soul of this province, of this country."

That's how Hugh MacDonald, P.E.I.'s poet laureate, describes the latest cultural event which will grace Prince Edward Island's calendar this year.

Culture Days was launched at an entertaining news conference in Charlottetown Tuesday, complete with a performance by Acadian duo Chuck & Albert and Melissa Peter-Paul, a jingle dress dancer from Abegweit First Nation.

"Comment ca flip?" Chuck Arsenault repeatedly asked the audience, a question that has become a staple of Chuck & Albert.

"Ca flip pretty good," the audience roared back.

Culture Days will be a free annual event inviting people to celebrate and explore arts and culture in every province and territory. P.E.I., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario unveiled their plans on Tuesday. It represents the largest-ever collective public participation campaign undertaken by the arts and culture community in the country.

Culture Days will take place Sept. 24-26. Each speaker at Tuesday's news conference called on the province's arts and culture communities to offer activities inviting people to participate in hands-on, interactive experiences.

Darren White, executive director of the P.E.I. Council of the Arts, describes Culture Days as a pan-Canadian volunteer movement.

"This isn't about mammoth events or big-ticket items or length of stay," White said, referring to what most people expect from tourism-related events — convince people to come and spend their money.

"It's not even about putting bums in seats. It's about putting Island bums in Island seats, in local art galleries, in local halls, in kitchens and schools. It's about arts and culture in all of those places and it's all free."

White talked about the advantage he has of touring the province each year and seeing what the arts and culture community has to offer. Now, it's about taking that talent and letting everyone know how to find it.

Interested artists and organizations can be a part of Culture Days by registering online at www.culturedays.ca. Those who register activities will benefit from a national marketing and communications campaign as well as access to materials to help promote activities within their communities.

Tourism Minister Robert Vessey says the importance of the event goes beyond economic spinoffs.

"This speaks to who we are," Vessey said. "Culture is what makes us unique in Prince Edward Island."

White said Culture Days was inspired by the 13-year success of Quebec's annual Journées de la Culture event.

"It's to show us off to ourselves," White said.

Just the facts:

— Culture Days launches in September and is a free annual event designed to invite the public to celebrate and explore arts and culture in every province and territory.

— Celebration takes place Sept. 24-26.

— There is an open call for people, groups, municipalities and arts and cultural organizations to join the movement and offer free participatory and interactive arts and culture during Culture Days. Everyone is encouraged to join — professionals and amateur artists, educators, animators, historians, curators, architects, designers, groups, venues and organizations.

— Anything goes. Organizers are looking for anything that brings creators and the public closer together. Examples of activities could include a museum opening its restoration workshop to the public, a local theatre inviting visitors to a dress rehearsal, an architect and a historian organizing a guided tour of a neighbourhood or choreographers offering a dance class.

— On the Net: For more information, go to www.culturedays.ca.

<http://www.theguardian.pe.ca/index.cfm?sid=337286&sc=98>