

## THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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### National arts initiative launched

By James Adams

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#### *Culture Days program aims to increase Canadian awareness of the arts*

A new, national initiative is under way to heighten Canadians' awareness of the arts, their accessibility to art and artists, and their "participation in and engagement with" the activities of the cultural sector.

The initiative, called Culture Days, may result in the dates of other cultural events being moved to run at the same time. Details are sketchy at this point but the initiative, set to make its debut next September, has already lured some of the country's top arts mavens onto its steering committee. Serving as chair of the 19-member body is Antoni Cimolino, general director of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Other participants include Sarah Iley, vice-president of programming for the Banff Centre, Peter Herrndorf, president of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and Janice Price, president of Toronto's Luminato arts festival.

"The idea here is to put a spotlight on activities and events already taking place and to build on that," including the creation of new events, says David Moss, former general director of the Opéra de Montréal. He's been working as the paid project director of Culture Days since this past December, thanks to the provision of some seed money from the Canada Council for the Arts. The council, in fact, is one of the four primary institutional "instigators" of the initiative, the others being the Canadian Arts Summit, the Banff Centre and Culture pour tous, organizer of Quebec's highly successful annual Journées de la culture that has occurred province-wide for more than 12 years in late September.

Moss calls the Journées, which he helped get off the ground, one of the "major inspirations" for Culture Days. Last year's three-day event involved 2,500 organizations and municipalities and drew hundreds of thousands to a variety of mostly free, often "behind-the-scenes" and participatory arts activities. It was the success of Journées that two years ago prompted the Canadian Arts Summit (since 1998 an annual get-together in Banff of the country's 50 major non-profit arts groups) to hire Moss to conduct a study to determine if the Journées event was feasible as "a model or at least reference point" for a national initiative.

Another inspiration, Moss said in an interview yesterday, is the ParticipAction fitness campaign started in the 1970s. "The benchmark there was that Canadians were less fit than those in other comparable countries. The goal was to increase the level of fitness and ultimately health and to take a level of pressure off government in funding in order to cure people. ... Culture Days is a sort of a parallel for arts and culture, a grassroots way to increase support of the arts, whether its moral, financial or volunteer."

To date, working groups have been set up in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia to prepare the way for the inauguration of Culture Days in each of those provinces in September, 2010. Talks also have commenced with arts organizations and artists in Yukon, Newfoundland and New Brunswick to secure their participation in the debut.


Moss calls the concept "a movement of the willing. We're not forcing anyone to do anything." However, since it is about "bundling around a national campaign of collaboration and solidarity," there's a "strong possibility," he said, that some arts events that have occurred in months other than September will be repositioned to run under the Culture Days umbrella. In Toronto, this might include moving Scotiabank Nuit Blanche from the October berth it's had for the past four years. Similarly, spOtlight, an Ontario Arts Council pilot project that's been running in Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, Cambridge and Stratford for the past two years, could see its three-day festival moved from June, as might Alberta Arts Days, which had its premiere in June this year and involved more than 100 communities.

"Funding-wise," Moss added, "we are reaching out to national media, corporations, on a level of civic responsibility - that this is something that can shift a bit the paradigm and people's perception and appreciation of the role of culture." So far The Globe and Mail, Sun Life Financial and St. Joseph Communications, publisher of Toronto Life, Canadian Family and Quill & Quire, have confirmed their support, "with more in the pipeline."

The hope is to begin a national awareness campaign later this year or in early 2010 "to sensitize the public that Culture Days is coming." A promotion and marketing initiative would commence in the five to seven weeks "leading up to the September launch."

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