

Event helps swing open the doors of organizations dedicated to culture, arts

PETER BIRNIE
Postmedia News

The name is as boring as anything ever invented by social planners in the Soviet Union. Culture Days evokes thoughts of mass demonstrations of physical fitness, or the precision display of thousands of flash-cards that give us a glorious image of Dear Leader Kim Jong-il.

Yet the event that's about to break out across Canada this weekend, from sea to sea to sea, isn't boring at all.

In just its second year, Culture Days has become a massive annual three-day grassroots attempt to engage us all in understanding that arts and culture form a fundamental part of life, here in the land that stretches across 5½ time zones.

From Tofino to Torbay, people involved in all the many areas of the arts and attendant cultural organizations are throwing open their doors to welcome anyone interested in music, dance, visual arts, theatre, new media — or becoming a pirate. Be in Victoria's Centennial Square on Saturday and Sunday for that one, as the Maritime Museum of B.C.'s Pirate School sets sail.

There are only two rules for any Culture Days event. It must

be free to the public, and it must include a "behind the scenes" component that helps people understand the how, why and where of what's going on.

At Pirate School, for instance, you'll learn why the letter that comes after Q is so important to buccaneer culture.

Culture Days was kicked off last year by the nation's top cultural mandarins at the Canadian Arts Summit, the Canada Council, the Banff Centre and Culture pour tous in Quebec.

Culture pour tous is the creator of les Journées de la culture, now in its 15th year in Quebec, and the inspiration for Culture Days everywhere else.

The 2010 event was relatively small, with "only" about 700 Canadian cities and towns taking part. We won't know until events wrap up on Sunday just how much bigger this year's weekend was, but just a glance at @culturedays on Twitter brings up hundreds of notes about what's on offer.

The spirit of Culture Days seems to demand we switch off the TV, pry our posteriors from the sofa and set out in search of a play reading, or a facilities tour or a crafts demonstration — in Flin Flon, for instance, the fine art of caribou hair-tufting will be presented.

The CBC will be acting as a kind of connective tissue to link us all, as only the Mother Corp can do, and on Friday night, a rock concert in Vancouver will be broadcast live across the country.

Dubbed Midnight Music, because that's when it will air in eastern markets, the hour-long show kicks off on the West Coast at 8 p.m., with performances by indie rockers The New Pornographers (don't forget to wish a happy birthday to drummer Kurt Dahle), The Midway State and Stars.

The crowd in Vancouver will then be treated to another hour of live music by the three bands.

CBC goes all-out on Saturday, when virtually every CBC/Radio Canada outlet in the nation celebrates the broadcaster's 75th birthday by following the Culture Days mandate and hosting an open house.

Catch yourself on camera, record a radio message, or peer inside the mysterious satellite truck.

In Victoria, the CBC Radio 75th Anniversary Open House runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the CBC station at 1025 Pandora Ave.

For a complete guide to Culture Days events across Canada, go to culturedays.ca.

