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FESTIVALS CULTURE DAYS 2011

‘There’s a bit of an artist in all of us’

MARSHA LEDERMAN
VANCOUVER

The hand-wringing in the arts community over what a Conservative majority government might mean for arts funding is no secret, but on Monday, the cultural community was all smiles amid the performance art, live painting and drumming at the announcement launching Canada’s second annual Culture Days.

“What we wanted to do when we first thought about [Culture Days] ... was try to better connect Canadians and Canadian artists,”

said Antoni Cimolino, chair of the event’s national steering committee (and general director of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival) at the national launch in Vancouver. “And maybe in the process we’d find out ... that there’s a bit of an artist in all of us. ... But the reason more than any other we wanted to do this was because we suspected it might be fun. And it was fun.”

Last year’s inaugural Culture Days saw more than 4,500 events, attracting millions of people according to Cimolino. The hope is that this year’s event surpasses

that. Even before its official 2011 launch on Monday, more than 300 activity organizers in 122 cities and towns had pre-registered.

There’s an emphasis on free, hands-on and behind-the-scenes events, so audiences in Toronto will be able to watch a professional ballet class for students at the National Ballet School; in Winnipeg, people will be able to create their own live action or stop-motion animated film at Freeze Frame Storyline FX; and the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company will hold an open house.

“The success of the arts ultimately lies not with governments but with Canadians and their connection with the arts themselves,” Cimolino said. “So this notion somehow that the arts are

an elitist activity couldn’t be further from the truth.”

Inspired by Quebec’s Journées de la culture event – celebrating its 15th anniversary this year – as well as Alberta Arts Days, Culture Days was initiated by The Canadian Arts Summit, Culture pour tous, the Canada Council for the Arts and The Banff Centre. Its objective is to raise awareness, accessibility, participation and engagement in the arts.

“Culture Days is to me an effort to start to scream at the top of our metaphorical and literal lungs: This is an artistic country,” said Jian Ghomeshi, host of CBC Radio’s Q and the event emcee (CBC is a sponsor of Culture Days, as is The Globe and Mail). “We’ve known that, but sometimes we need a little help with the brand management, you know?”

Culture Days 2011 will run Sept. 30, Oct. 1 and 2. For more information, visit culturedays.ca.

