

## Discover art-world secrets

Three days to get involved in Culture Days - for free

BY LENA SIN, THE PROVINCE    SEPTEMBER 30, 2011



? Richmond playwright Lucia Frangione will be doing readings from a selection of her work tonight on a rooftop garden in Richmond as part of Culture Days, starting today until Oct. 2.  
**Photograph by:** Les Bazso - PNG, The Province

### SPECIAL EVENT

Culture Days

Where: Various locations across B.C. Visit [www.culturedays.ca](http://www.culturedays.ca) for details

When: Friday-Oct. 2

Info: [www.culturedays.ca](http://www.culturedays.ca)

Lucia Frangione, a Richmond playwright with 23 plays under her belt, will let you ask her anything you want about writing, acting and the art of storytelling.

Curator Rebecca Forrest is going to let you inside the storage vault of the Richmond Museum for a day. And artistic director Susanna Uchatius of Vancouver's Terrific Theatre is inviting you to three hours of freeplay and scene composition.

Coincidence it's all happening this weekend? Not quite.

All across B.C. - and in every province across the country - artists will be opening up their doors and minds to the public from Friday to Sunday for the second annual Culture Days, a free national event aimed at increasing the accessibility and participation of the community in arts and culture.

With the emphasis on "engagement," it seems fitting that most activities are less about watching and more about doing, giving the public glimpses behind the scenes and a free pass into the creative process.

"I think people get a kick out of seeing behind the scenes and talking to the actual person who wrote the story, it's not so isolated. We get our stories on the DVDs and sometimes novels and there's that great distance. But when you actually have somebody sitting in front of you reading a story that they created, probably about your town or country, there's something really magical about that," says Frangione, who will be reading from a selection of her plays on a rooftop garden in Richmond tonight.

There are several reasons why closing the gap between audience and artist is good for communities. Some are tangible: The interaction can give rise to new ideas and inspiration for artists. It can also help build an audience - always a good thing, especially in uncertain economic times.

But some are not so tangible: Like the idea that the arts enriches our wellbeing and forms the soul of a city.

It's the latter that Howard Jang, executive director of the Arts Club Theatre and vice-chair of the Culture Days' B.C. Task Force, is concerned with.

"I think it builds a community of respect and understanding and empathy. To hear stories told or see a visual art installation or be involved in a site-specific work and just understand the connection of the arts to community, to nature, it just builds a stronger community. I think it feeds very much into the very exciting work done in the '90s by [author] Richard Florida when he talked about the rise of the creative class because what he talked about was building a community around its artists because that's what makes a community thrive and survive," says Jang.

Measuring the relationship between the public and the arts and culture industry is not an exact science. But a 2008 Statistics Canada study indicated that support in B.C. is relatively high.

In 2008, 2.44 million people in B.C. attended a performing-arts event (excluding free events), ranking third amongst Canadian provinces after Ontario (4.16 million) and Quebec (3.87 million), according to the study. While these numbers are not strictly comparable as populations differ between provinces, B.C.'s support for the performing arts is relatively high when you consider Ontario's population was nearly three times that of B.C. in 2008.

The idea for Culture Days was hatched about five years ago at the Canadian Arts Summit, an annual meeting of arts leaders from across Canada.

These influential leaders had seen the success of Quebec's Journées de la culture, which is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, and wondered if they could bring the same concept of democratizing culture by holding free events across the country, says Jang.

In 2010, Culture Days was launched simultaneously in every province and about 700 cities, relying on artists to volunteer their time and create their own events, says Jang.

This year's open call yielded a response from about 100 individual artists and arts and culture groups across B.C.

In Vancouver, the Orpheum and Vancouver Playhouse will be holding open houses while the Arts Club Theatre on Granville Island will be doing a reading of the new play *Henry and Alice: Into the Wild*, followed with audience feedback. Richmond is holding a slew of events, including a lesson on baking bread with chef Ian Lai, a cheese and wine tasting at Lulu Island Winery and an invitation to join the Richmond Singers for a rehearsal. Events are also being held on Vancouver Island, the Okanagan, the Fraser Valley and throughout Metro Vancouver, not to mention in towns and cities all across Canada.

"It's been a lot of coordination and a huge volunteer effort," says Jang. "I'm excited to see it take root."

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