

# Expect the unexpected at the Toronto Fringe

City's largest theatre festival hopes to draw 60,000 people

By MADALINA HUBERT  
Epoch Times Staff

TORONTO—As the Fringe Festival kicks off in Toronto this week, 150 small theatre companies are vying for the public's attention in Canada's most multicultural city.

This is the Fringe's 21st year of featuring inexpensive, independent, and often unconventional productions—all for under \$10.

"The Fringe is certainly one place that people of all kinds of backgrounds find each other to share stories and ideas," said Gideon Arthurs, the festival's executive director.

With a mission to produce accessible plays that are unrestrained in terms of form, content, and style, Fringe Festivals have become a popular trend among theatre goers looking for more unconventional entertainment.

Arthurs, who first became involved in the festival at the age of 16, highlights its importance for emerging artists.

"My friends and I would try anything we could to be part of what seemed back then as the ONLY place that we could have our work seen and appreciated by a wide and open-minded audience," he said.

From the United States to India, Fringe theatre festivals have sprung up around the world, more than 50 years after the first Fringe opened in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1947. The Edinburgh Fringe remains the world's largest.

Since the Edmonton Fringe Festival—Canada's first—was launched in 1982, Canada has welcomed 19

festivals, making it the country with the largest number of its kind. The Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals now has 25 festivals, including six from the United States. However, this does not include unofficial ones, such as those held by universities.

"All Fringe Festivals share the same core values in Canada—they are not chosen by jury, they never interfere with the artistic content of a show, and most importantly they return 100 percent of the box office to their artists," explained Arthurs, adding that last year the Toronto Fringe was able to return \$415,000 to the theatre companies.

"Though [Toronto] isn't the largest in audience size yet—although it's getting there—it has the most participating artists, which really demonstrates what a hotbed of creativity Toronto is," Arthurs said.

Fringe Festivals also distinguish themselves through their commitment to ensuring artist and audience participation. At the same time, the organizers have little control over what is presented. In Toronto, Fringe productions are chosen by lottery.

"Audiences never know what they are going to get," said Arthurs. This is part of the Fringe Festival philosophy of having audiences decide whether the plays are good or bad. So on July 12, the last day of the festival, the most well attended performances at each venue are welcomed back for an encore.

Most of the participants at the Toronto Fringe are local theatre companies; however a fair number also come from other Canadian and U.S.



George Bernard Shaw's "Candida" performed by Burning Passions Theatre company at the Toronto Fringe Festival. COURTESY OF BURNING PASSIONS THEATRE COMPANY

cities, as well as from countries as far afield as Australia and Kuwait.

This year for the first time, Le Phénix bleu, a Paris based theatre company will perform a French language play—L'enfant et l'homme' (The Child and the Man) at the Toronto Fringe.

Like other Fringe Festivals, Toronto features both emerging and established performers, and the productions range from premieres to plays that have won awards at other Fringe Festivals. This year's line-up includes classical productions such as Molière's "The Sicilian," George Bernard Shaw's "Candida" and Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest," as well as well as a variety of unknown plays.

Some plays are also explicitly educational, such as "After the Crash: A Play About Brain Injury." Developed as a research project between a theatrical company called The Ruckus Ensemble, the University of Toronto, and the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, the play uses theatre to educate audiences about the challenges of overcoming traumatic brain injuries.

While many of the plays at the Fringe are not intended for children (parents should be careful to read the play's descriptions), the festival also features FringeKids!, a series of performances specifically for children. Parents wishing to introduce Shakespeare to their kids can go see "As You Puppet," an adaptation of "As You Like It," while others may enjoy following the adventures of "Chicken Licken" or see British writer Rudyard Kipling's "Just So Stories."

For schedules, venues, and a complete listing of Fringe Festival plays, visit [www.fringetoronto.com/](http://www.fringetoronto.com/). The festival runs until July 12.



A detail of an ancient mosaic that was discovered in the town of Lod, Israel, near Tel Aviv. GENEVIEVE LONG/THE EPOCH TIMES

## Ancient mosaic to be displayed at Metropolitan Museum of Art

By Genevieve Long & Dalia Hartaz  
Epoch Times Staff

Lod, ISRAEL—An archaeological treasure from in Israel will make its maiden journey for display to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art in March. The Lod Mosaic, as it is dubbed, is an extraordinarily rich and detailed mosaic that was discovered 13 years ago in the city of Lod in central Israel.

It has been undergoing excavation and is now being prepared for transport to labs where it will be cleaned and restored. The work's next stop after that will be New York City.

"In our land, this mosaic is unique," said Jacques Neguer of the Israel Antiquities Authority to the press during an open viewing of the piece. "It's extremely rich composition."

Neguer will be responsible for overseeing the detachment and transfer of the mosaic, which dates to the late-third or early-fourth century. Paneled sections of the artwork will then be cleaned, restored, and sent by cargo plane to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The mosaic is 180 square meters (215 square yards) and is composed of coloured carpets that depict in detail mammals, birds, fish, hunting scenes, a variety of flora, and the sailing and merchant ships that were used at the time. The purpose of the building in which the mosaic floor was placed is not known. The creator of the artwork is unknown, but according to Neguer, whoever created it had a high level of skill.

"The master [who created the mosaic] was very high-level," said Mr. Neguer, adding that the art is Roman. "The team who did the mosaic was very skilled."

The Lod Mosaic was originally discovered by archaeologist Miriam Avissar on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority in 1996, when a street in the area was being widened. At the time, about 30,000 people from around the country visited the site during one weekend when the display was open to the public.

"The mosaic is in marvellous condition," said Ms. Avissar as she stood by the masterpiece in Lod last week. "None of the stones fell out, [but] what's interesting is what's here and what is not here." A small center portion of part of the enormous mosaic is missing. Avissar speculates it could have been something like a water pitcher.

While the Lod Mosaic spends two years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a visitor's center will be built at the site in Israel to permanently intern the artwork.

"It's a marvellous place to build a visitor's center," said Ms. Avissar.

## Finnish quartet plays Nordic cool at Ottawa jazz festival

Wayne Shorter delivers despite the rain

By SUSAN HALLETT

A fresh breeze from Scandinavia swept into Ottawa for the 29th annual Ottawa Jazz Festival as the four-piece from Finland comprising the Ilmiliekki Quartet wowed the audience with their unique brand of Nordic cool.

The concert July 2nd at the National Arts Centre Fourth Stage was the perfect venue for this quartet, made up of trumpet and melodic player Verner Pohjola, pianist Tuomo Pratala, bass player Antti Lotjonen, and Olavi Louhivuori on the drums.

According to notes from the Finnish Embassy, since the group's formation in 2002, the Ilmiliekki Quartet "has garnered almost every jazz award Finland has to offer." The quartet was named Group of the Year in 2003 and 2004, and Pohjola was named both musician of the year and best trumpet player in 2004.

To listen to Pohjola's hard-driving solo style, it is easy to see why he stands out from the crowd. But without the compelling bass and drum combination of Lotjonen and

Louhivuori, rounded out and nicely anchored by pianist Pratala, the music would not be as melodic or as captivating.

This exciting Finnish group loves to improvise. They do not, however, "take off on traditional jazz tunes" but like to tackle classics by Radiohead, Tom Waits, Bjork, and other luminaries.

Hopefully the Ilmiliekki Quartet will be back next year for the 30th anniversary of the jazz festival so we can see more of their unique style of music.

Also on July 2nd, enthusiastic jazz lovers hoisted umbrellas in teeming rain at Confederation Park as the "Concert Under the Stars Series" featured the brilliant saxophonist Wayne Shorter and his fellow jazz musicians.

Shorter worked with Horace Silver, Art Blakey, and Maynard Ferguson in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but it was when he joined Miles Davis' classic quintet in the mid-1960s that he made his mark as one of the most gifted players and composers in jazz.

Although Shorter is in his 70s, his style is amazingly contemporary. The group had a superb stand-in for pianist Danilo Perez in the very accomplished piano player Geoffrey Keezer, along with regulars Brian Blade on the drums and John Patitucci on bass.

Risk-taking is part of Shorter's musical life. The group plays in a way that fuels an interactive style. The result is nothing short of brilliant, challenging acoustic jazz. They have dropped the style of traditional jazz which includes solos, opting for a more back and forth style of four equal partners, interacting with each other.

If not for the downpour this would have been an electrifying event. As it was, Ottawa jazz enthusiasts who braved the weather certainly got their money's worth and more.

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Photo: ilmilieki quartet  
caption:Members of Finnish Quartet OTTAWA JAZZ FESTIVAL

## The Hongi: A traditional greeting recaptured

By RAIATEA TAHANA-REESE  
Epoch Times Staff

Eyes closed, they touch nose-to-nose, forehead to forehead, the two embrace in a traditional greeting peculiar to the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori.

The salutation is known as the "hongiri" typically thought of by non-Maori as rubbing or pressing noses, an intermingling, and exchange of breath, the "ha."

But for me, a daughter of the Te Arawa tribe that settled in the thermal regions of the North Island, this description of the hongiri is a denigration of an ancient and sacred tradition.

I recall as a young child strolling down the street clutching the hand of my grandfather when we chanced upon an old friend that he hadn't seen in a while.

Eyes smiling in recognition, the two men drew close arm extended as if to shake hands. The gesture only drew them closer and then forehead to forehead, nose touching nose, with

a hand on each others' shoulder, they embraced, not a word exchanged. Yet within the silence, a volume of words was spoken.

The longer the two men held the position, the higher the esteem was shown. Then as their feelings deepened, tears of regret and sorrow would flow as they remember unshared moments stolen by time that has slipped them by.

The head is regarded by Maori as "tapu," the most sacred part of the body and as the process deepens those that have since departed this world are remembered and grieved.

Their foreheads touching, the two become as one bonded by their ancestral ties and they enter a still deeper level. The connection to their ancestors reminds them of who they are, where they come from and whence they will return and in making this connection they honour each other, thereby honouring themselves.

Embodied within the sacredness of the hongiri are their primal parents, Ranginui, the sky father and Papatuanuku, the earth mother,



Wife of Samoan head-of-state receives a hongiri in Wellington, New Zealand. MARTY MELVILLE/GETTY IMAGES

back to the supreme god known to Maori as Io Matua. But that is natural to the Maori bearing, needing no mention.

In bygone days, the name Io Matua was considered too sacred to be spoken. But today, we pay homage in

songs and chants and recite genealogy for future generations.

However, it was not until each level of the hongiri was felt and acknowledged, was the hongiri considered finished and the two could talk freely.

The image of this meeting between the two men, the "aroha" (love) and respect that flowed, will be forever etched in my mind and up to this day, never have I seen nor witnessed anything so powerful and dignified.

Back then, the hongiri was known to last from a few seconds up to several minutes, depending upon circumstances.

The Maori stems from a world steeped in spirituality, the word Maori itself meaning ordinary, according to H. W. Williams' Dictionary of Maori Language.

Elders believe the word was derived directly from the gods to make a distinction between being human and being divine.

It is also believed the hongiri was god-given, but in today's world many perspectives offered by non-Maori tend to undermine its sacred form.

Performed mostly on formal occasions at the "marae"—the ancestral home of the Maori where the spiritual well-being of the tribespeople is maintained—the hongiri signals that formalities are over and guests and hosts are able to freely mingle at their

own leisure.

On these occasions, at the "powhiri" welcoming ceremony, the hongiri is imparted with a light touch of the nose, maybe once or twice and a handshake between men, and a peck on the cheek between women called the "hariru." A long line of people file through to be properly welcomed with hongiri, after which visitors are free to mingle freely no longer regarded as guests.

The hariru is usually followed by a "hakari," a celebratory feast usually cooked in a "hangi," best described as an earth oven.

However, living outside of the marae environment in a foreign country, nothing gives me more pleasure than seeing this centuries-old tradition carried into the new millennium by Maori people, young and old alike.

Especially at times when strolling down the street they chance to meet and greet with the traditional Maori hongiri, a gift from the gods.

But unfortunately, as the years roll on, few Maori witness the spirit of the hongiri the way that I had as a little girl. Though still kept alive by many, the full meaning of hongiri is lost, compromised by Westernization, as more regard the greeting about as meaningful as a handshake, or a kiss on the cheek.