

Celebrate Culture Days with a month of programs at Aurora Public Library

Culture Days has grown significantly across Canada since it was established in 2010, and Aurora has kept pace with the rest of the country.

This month, the Aurora Public Library (APL) will roll out a wide array of programs to mark Culture Days 2023, from film screenings, to art exhibitions, to writing courses.

“Over the last 13 years, Culture Days has grown to be a month-long celebration and this year it will be from September 22 until October 15, and will include many more organizations, including the Town of Aurora,” says Reccia Mandelcorn, APL's Manager of Community Collaboration. “Our Culture Days is more than one day now or one weekend. It's a month-long of art, music, writing, to really expose our community to culture 365 days a year.”

Fittingly for an organization like the APL, programming will kick off with a “celebration of the literary arts” with a writing workshop hosted by local author Marnie Maguire. The workshop will take participants through the creative process of character, setting and prompts through the use of historical sources like archival newspapers and advertisements.

“She brings a whole different vibe to the writing process, really making it a magical learning experience,” says Mandelcorn.

Also on September 30, recognizing National Day for Truth & Reconciliation, artist Todd Jamieson of the Oneida Nation of the Thames will lead a workshop on Birth Totems. Introduced at the APL virtually at the height of the pandemic, and proving popular with participants, this is the first in-person workshop on Birth Totems to be hosted by Jamieson and APL.

“Culture Days really encourages hands-on participation,” says Mandelcorn. “Birth Totems is a storytelling and drawing workshop that is going to be operating on Saturday morning, September 30, as part of our programming. [Jamieson] will lead participants in creating their own Woodland-style drawing based on their personal birth totems, from whatever culture they're from. Todd is an educator and storyteller as well as being a very respected artist. Through the process, Participants will learn about Indigenous culture and history.

“Continuing on with Indigenous programming, through our partnership with the National Film Board of Canada, we are going to be able to offer our community a 24-hour link to view the film adaptation of Thomas King's brilliant dismantling of North American colonial narrative, *The Inconvenient Indian*. It is important to view the film not only as a cultural touchpoint but as part of hearing the powerful voices of those who continue the struggle of Indigenous resistance. The film is really interesting because it had a troubled history as it was temporarily withdrawn from active distribution after the director's Indigenous identity was called into question, so it was a series of consultations involving many Indigenous participants whose stories the film represents. When a path was found forward for this film, the distribution of the film was then permitted.”

After community watches the documentary from the comfort of their own home through the 24-hour link, APL will host a post-screening discussion the following week on October 2 led by Nelia Pacheco, Chair of the Aurora Film Circuit, who also serves as APL's acting Community-Led Initiatives Coordinator.

“I know she will [facilitate] fabulous conversation about the subject matter of the film but also the whole background of what led to the controversy because I feel this is an important conversation to have.”

On the final day of September, in concert with the APL's One Book One Aurora program featuring the novel *Finding Edward* by Sheila Murray, the Library will host Juno-nominated singer and guitarist Glenn Marais and percussionist and vocalist Craig Riley presents *Sounds of Reggae*.

Music will continue on October 14 at 2 p.m. when the York Chamber Ensemble, in partnership with APL and Theatre Aurora,

present Stravinsky's A Soldier's Tale in the Library Living Room.

"The Soldier's Tale is a dark, Faustian fable about a deserting soldier and the Devil who eventually possesses his soul," says Mandelcorn. "The music is so interesting because even though Stravinsky is always at the outer edge terms of his style, what is interesting in this particular piece is it brings in elements of Jazz and Tango rhythms which, for classical composition, is very strange, especially at that time. I think it will be a treat for our audiences.

"The York Chamber Ensemble has got this unique gift of making classical music accessible to audiences of all backgrounds and ages and it is really important for us to have these concerts in our living room because I have watched children who are dancing to the sounds of a concerto, teens stopping their gaming to stand up and clap, and adults from all musical traditions are enthralled by the experience of listening to classical music and for many people it is their first opportunity to hear classical music."

Bringing visual art into the mix will be Aurora-based artists Eva Folks and Judy Sherman with an exhibition called Visual Storytelling. Taking over APL's Colleen Abbott Gallery, the show will run the length of Culture Days, "stimulating the eye and the imagination."

"I hope people will realize that modern libraries are cultural agencies that enrich our lives in so many ways. While books and a love of reading will likely always remain an integral part of our identity, we stretch and expand in new and exciting ways, most especially with the performing arts partnerships we've been able to grow in our community," says Mandelcorn. "I hope people will see that Culture is integral for the human experience and it is something that happens 365 days a year. We want people to come and have a taste of culture during Culture Days 2023 and see where this may lead them at other times.

"What's really special about the library is while not every visitor comes to the Aurora Public Library specifically to engage in cultural experiences, there is a serendipitous effect of watching someone come across an art exhibit or enjoying a concert or participating in a workshop. They come for one thing and they've walked away with something that is greater than the whole. To me, that is one of the many reasons why I can't think of any place I would rather be. I hope that our community considers what Culture means to them and will be able to see it all around them."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter