

The Ottawa Citizen  
Saturday, June 29<sup>th</sup> 2006

## **Ottawa is hardly “a dead city” for culture**

[Jessica Ruano says people who believe Ottawa is an arts wasteland should work harder at discovering the rich variety of events occurring each week in the city.]

I recently encountered an elegant young woman, a newcomer to Ottawa from Montreal, at a downtown bus stop. When I asked her how she liked living in the capital, she replied that she found Ottawa a “dead city”.

On average, I attend one play a week; participate in two poetry events a month; and discover three new arts organizations a year. So when I am told that Ottawa has nothing to offer culturally, I feel my ears ringing with an acute annoyance.

But perhaps I should give this young woman a break. In comparison with Montreal, Ottawa would seem like a petite district void of entertainment. Then what about our native Ottawa population? This is far from the first time I have heard that there is nothing to do on weekends except rent a Blockbuster movie.

If you want to know about the arts in Ottawa, then take a look around the downtown area. There are posters in every store and every pole down Elgin Street and Bank Street. There are handbills and fliers scattered around every coffee shop. Or simply open up your newspaper to hundreds of event listings across the city: from theatre, to chamber music, to rock concerts, to salsa clubs, to children’s activities.

And if you are not yet convinced, read on. Last Sunday, the Ottawa International Writers Festival concluded a truly inspiring week that featured authors and poets from across Canada. In June, the Ottawa Fringe Festival celebrates their tenth anniversary with theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and street performers. Next season, I eagerly anticipate thrilling new work from Third Wall Theatre Company, the Great Canadian Theatre Company, Le Groupe Dance Lab, and the National Arts Centre. And have you ever attended a poetry slam? If not, you have no idea what you are missing.

Honestly, I could go on for pages. And I am only a nineteen year old university student with a fraction of knowledge about what Ottawa has to offer. I think it is time that the people of this city take entertainment into their own hands. Try volunteering for a new arts organization; visit the Arts Court building downtown; watch a play in a different language; and keep your ears open for new and exciting things to do. Believe it or not, Ottawa does have culture.

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