

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Number of events grows at Grassroots Festival

By Katie Hartal

The Ottawa Grassroots Festival is introducing two new events to its celebration this year: a Franco-Ontarian night and the Grassroots Soundtrack Showcase, a video montage of moments from the past three festivals using original audio submitted by locals.

Scheduled to take place from April 23-26 at the Royal Canadian Legion Montgomery branch on Kent Street, organizers say they're hoping the festival attracts the largest and most diverse crowd yet.

"Our mission statement is to cultivate community," says Grace Smith, publicity and communications manager of the festival. "We think that these two projects are in line with those goals."

The Ottawa Grassroots Festival is a not-for-profit, 100-per-cent volunteer-run organization that plans an annual spring weekend of family-oriented concerts and workshops.

It focuses on folk music, dance and spoken word.

This year, the festival will launch on Thursday evening with its first Franco-Ontarian night. Respected francophone musicians from Ontario will be performing including Stef Paquette, who won Song of the Year at the 2005 Franco-Ontarian Music awards.

"In Ottawa there are two societies, the anglophone and the francophone, and that fact has bugged me for years," says festival producer Bob Nesbitt. "Introducing the franco theme into our festival will help break down barriers between the two solitudes."

Sarah Bradley, an esteemed francophone musician based in Ottawa, will be the evening's opening act.

"I had to choose whether I wanted to write and perform in French or in English because in reality it's difficult to build a fan base in both the franco and anglo scenes," says Bradley.

"Events like the Franco-Ontarian night allow a space for bilingual musicians to express themselves."

Also new to the 2015 Grassroots Festival is the Soundtrack Showcase. Organizers have prepared a silent, three-minute montage of footage from the past three Grassroots Festivals. Community members are challenged to download this video, create an original audio track for it and then upload their personalized version to YouTube. All submissions will be presented at the festival.

Nesbitt explains the Soundtrack Showcase was initiated with the aim of attracting youth to the Grassroots' free concerts and workshops.

"If young people start to get in-

involved and participate hopefully they will want to come to the festival as well," he says.

Ensuring the festival is open to all cultures and ages is important to the Grassroots' mandate of inclusion, says Nesbitt.

They strive to make content accessible for everyone, especially young families and new Canadians.

Last year, the Grassroots Festival collaborated with the Centretown-based Catholic Centre for Immigrants to help connect newcomers with their community through volunteering, performing and attending events.

"Many people walk into our office and say 'I want to volunteer,'" the centre's Anneke van Nooten said at the festival's launch party on March 11. "They want to contribute, be part of a team, be part of something that is bigger than themselves and Grassroots is ready to help make that happen."

Although many activities are free, ticketed performances will also take place each evening. Saturday night features Connie Kaldor, a three-time Juno award winner from Saskatchewan. Nova Scotia's Chris Luedecke, another Juno-winning musician, will be performing.



Courtesy Grassroots Festival

The Grassroots Festival prides itself on having free community events, such as this Intro to Gardening workshop for kids.

"Live music is so important because it does bring people together," says Luedecke. "I have been

able to find many homes around the world playing for people at events like this."

Straightforward · Caring · Dedicated

Janny, Jeff & Shan

Catherine McKenney
Councillor, Somerset Ward

613-580-2484

Catherine.McKenney@Ottawa.ca

