

ABBAMANIA and free family fun at the Canadian Tulip Festival

By Jane Whiting

After a particularly long winter, Ottawa families will welcome more than ever the kaleidoscope of more than three million tulips at this year's Canadian Tulip Festival from May 2 to 19. To make this annual spring event even more popular, all tulip events are free as the "festival without fences" concept continues along with the Celebridée theme of a celebration of ideas.

To extend the celebration this year, the International Pavilion at Major's Hill Park will be free for the full 18 days of the Festival with over 25 participating countries and featuring enhanced international entertainment at noon hours and selected weekend evenings. Children are freely invited to join in a wide variety of arts and craft activities from around the world.

Free International Pavilion activities for the kids include: Create fun crafts out of recycled goods at the Costa Rica exhibit; See the 2008 Olympic mascot display and meet Chinese paper artists from China. Stop by Germany to color tulips and post them on a SMART car! Prepare a sign with your name in Hebrew-Biblical font when you stop by Israel. Visit Turkey and paint Ottoman tulips and make traditional paper puppets and hats, and learn how to wear the traditional dress of Indonesian; Come take a look at cool musical instruments from Ecuador and get your free balloons when you pass by the European Union; Build paper tulips and learn about brush painting, calligraphy, kite-making and traditional Japanese toys at the Japan exhibit. Don't forget to stop by and join in traditional Thai games over at Thailand; Attend the children folk dances and traditional handcraft workshops offered by Peru; and finally, check out the Korean games including see-saw and "Too-ho."

Free entertainment for the whole family will take place on three consecutive Saturdays at 11 am on the Friendship Stage in the International Pavilion. On May 3, come and spread the joy of old-time music and dance with Sheesham and Lotus, as they sing in the old-style clear mountain harmonies and ragtime tunes. Using simple instruments, their concerts appeal to all ages. Let them teach you how to "Ham-bone" and recall a time when families entertained themselves with dance, music, simple songs and stories to unwind at the end of a day.

Mister Marc's show is a must see for children of all ages on May 10. A local musician, "Mister Marc" has made quite a name for himself in the Ottawa area as a children's entertainer and with his first children's CD "Marvelous Melodies." He sings about everything from trains and cookies to recycling, saving water, being happy, being sad, and even about that time of day when mom gets to put her feet up.

On May 17, Ottawan Chris McKhool takes the stage with "Celebrate! Holidays of the Global Villages." Hailed as a "children's musical star" and "Canada's greatest eco-troubadour for young people," Chris McKhool is one of Canada's hottest children's musicians. He celebrates the multicultural mosaic of our country in Celebrate! by providing young audiences with a glimpse into the different customs, celebrations and festivities enjoyed in Canada.

In addition, families will love all the entertainment and activities at the other main Festival sites:

Major's Hill Park will host a new spectacular 2008 addition to the Festival with the **Tulip Festival Mirror Tent**. Coming from Belgium, the Tulip Festival Mirror Tent recreates the renowned European art nouveau days with lavish interiors of carved wood, polished mirrors, crystal, leadlight and luxuriant furnishings and will be open daily for lunch, dinner and snacks. Now in addition to presenting the Celebration of Ideas program, the Tulip Ball on May 10 and five Cabaret Nights, the Tulip Festival Mirror Tent is adding the highly acclaimed show, "**ABBAMANIA**" to its family entertainment line-up.

The fast-paced ABBAMANIA presentation is backed by a live band and performs many of the greatest ABBA hits. There will be a live Matinee Show, presented on six afternoons in the Tulip Festival Mirror Tent, starting at 1 pm on May 3, 4, 11, 17, 18 and 19. And the good news is that admission is free for children 12 and under (accompanied by an adult), \$10 for students and youth under 18, and \$20 for adults. Advance ticket purchase is recommended, especially for the show on Mother's Day!

Major's Hill Park will also feature several stunning tulip beds as well as the collection of 150 five-foot tulips, each of which is a work of art painted by Ottawa and area visual artists. Music in the Tulips and Artists in

the Tulips are also presented in Major's Hill Park and Buskers in the Tulips perform on weekends.

Commissioners Park at Dows Lake will showcase 300,000 tulips in cascading tulip beds and also features the NCC's Tulip Legacy, the story of the Gift of Tulips, as well as Music in the Tulips where school bands and choirs play throughout the Festival. Artists in the Tulips demonstrate their talents and sell their paintings in the Tulip and Art Boutique. Buskers in the Tulips entertain on the weekends.

Parliament Hill, where the Gift of Tulips was first planted in 1945, presents a stunning array of tulips in front of the Parliament Buildings and the Peace Tower. Across the street, **Capital Infocentre** will provide visitors with all they need to know to make their excursion to the Festival and the Capital truly memorable.

Visitors will be able to enjoy a-taste-of-the-world experience by purchasing an **International Pavilion Passport** that will include food sample coupons that can be used throughout the Pavilion. Tickets for select Celebridée events, including ABBAMANIA, are available through Capital Tickets at: www.capitaltickets.ca. Tickets for National Arts Centre performances at: www.nac-cna.ca. For more information and details on the Canadian Tulip Festival and events visit: www.tulipfestival.ca.

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