

CLARKSON TAKES CANADIAN CULTURE "UP OVER"

The Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, recently made state visits to Russia, Finland and Iceland. With a delegation that included some of the country's most dynamic writers, playwrights and other artists, promoting our modern ties wasn't the only item on the viceregal agenda.

When Canadians think of their neighbours, they tend to look to the United States and Mexico. This is not surprising, given that the majority of Canadians live within an hour's drive of a U.S. town and often holiday on sunny Mexican beaches. Equally close, but a little harder to reach for the average Canadian, are those countries dotted around the Arctic Circle.

These northern neighbours may not be as important economically as those to the south, but they share many things with us: geography, climate, a sensitive environment and indigenous peoples who have an important contribution to make to northern societies. For these reasons, they play an important role in the "northern dimension" of Canada's foreign relations. They are also prime markets for Canada's complex and varied culture.

Since her appointment in 1999, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson has placed great emphasis on the promotion of Canada's north as well

as highlighting the country's dynamic novelists, poets, playwrights, musicians, filmmakers, dancers and visual artists.

On her latest tour, from September 23 to October 15, 2003, the Governor General addressed both of these priorities. The delegation included such prominent cultural figures as choreographer Edouard Locke, playwright René-Daniel Dubois, award-winning writers Michael Ondaatje and Yann Martel and filmmaker Denys Arcand. Among the many cultural events was the commercial premiere of Mr. Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares* at the Central House of Writers in Moscow.

"All of the delegates gave up their time to travel with her to show the world the creative face of Canada through performance, discussions and interviews in the host countries," says Stewart Wheeler, Press Secretary to the Governor General. "Some are from the world of the arts, some from the fields of business, architecture, wine-making and education. What they have in common is that they are all known nationally—and many internationally—for their wide-ranging achievements."

These distinguished leaders in their fields help create new interest and excitement about Canada's modern identity, something that may not be achieved as easily through standard diplomacy.

"We Canadians have come to see, to learn and to get to know this new Russia, and for you to get to know us better," Mme. Clarkson told a



Governor General Clarkson and filmmaker Denys Arcand (seated) appear with host Andrei Kozlov on a nationally televised Russian talk show to discuss Canadian and Russian filmmaking and to promote Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares*.

state dinner in Moscow given by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation. "Because of the geographic distance between us, we risk losing sight of where, and in what ways, our societies are evolving, our aspirations changing, our cultures adapting to the new circumstances of the modern world. But we should not ever lose sight of one another—certainly not as friends, as fellow northerners, as peoples of vast lands and open spaces."

In 2004, the Governor General will continue her theme of the modern North with state visits to Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Greenland. ❁

You can learn about the Governor General and state visits, read about circumpolar countries and participate in an online forum called the "Quest for a Modern North" at www.gg.ca.