

SHOWCASING CANADIAN CULTURE IN ASIA

Canadian culture is finding new openings in Asia Pacific, bringing diverse talents, contemporary creativity and Canada's wider interests and priorities to the region.

In South Korea, a little Canadian turtle helps schoolchildren with their studies.

Books featuring Franklin, the plucky character created by

Winnipeg-born author Paulette Bourgeois, are used in classrooms across the country to bring English-as-a-second-language (ESL) lessons to life.

Indeed, South Korea orders large numbers of almost all of the titles that publisher Kids Can Press produces, notes Barbara Howson, Vice-President of Rights the Toronto

company. "They buy our books and create ESL programs around them," she says.

The success of Canadian children's literature is one example of the many cultural products from

Canada that have a markedly increased presence in Asia Pacific. Changing patterns of immigration combined with globalization, an increased interest in Western culture and greater openness within traditional societies mean that

Artistic niche: Canadian animators such as Cookie Jar Entertainment of Caillou fame are making significant inroads in Asia.

Canadian artists are finding new opportunities in the region.

Those entry points mean more than an expansion in trade or a boon to Canadian cultural industries. The arts can convey deeply held values, concerns and aspirations in ways that appeal more intimately than official transactions, in the process extending understanding and warming diplomatic relations.

Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and International Trade Canada (ITCan), through missions abroad, help to showcase Canadian artists not only to expose them to an international public, but also because it supports Canada's wider interests and priorities, whether political, economic or governance-related. As one veteran foreign affairs observer puts it, "a generation ago, culture was having a Canadian pianist come to a diplomatic ball." With today's popularity in Asia Pacific of such diverse Canadian talent as singer Avril Lavigne, theatre director Robert Lepage, filmmaker Denys Arcand and author Austin Clarke, we have come a long way.

And while Canadian books, animated films and recordings carry many admirable qualities, so does the country they come from, Howson adds. "Publishers from other countries come to us because we're viewed very positively, and our books are multicultural."

Canada's cultural offerings in the region are diverse. La La La Human Steps' 2002-2004 world tour of its acclaimed creation, *Amelia*, included

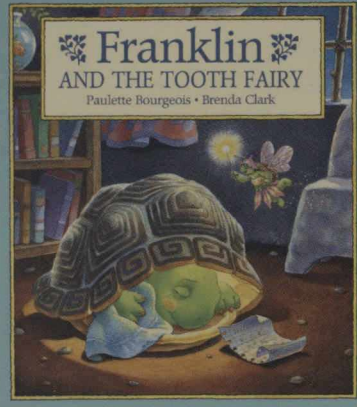
performances in South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

Alberta Ballet visited China twice in 2004, and had further offers to return even before completing its six-city tour of *Carmen* there last Christmas. "Whenever our name comes up as Alberta Ballet in China, the word 'Canada' comes with it, and that has a huge impact," explains Harry Patterson, Director of Production for the Calgary ensemble. Patterson first travelled to China with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in 1982, and notes that the receptivity today is far greater. "You can see it by the attentiveness of the audience."

Two decades on, the latest trends in electronic music are equally captivating young Chinese audiences. Scratch DJ Kid Koala performed with great success in Beijing and Shanghai last summer. Indeed, a Numark CDX was recently advertised in a Beijing magazine as allowing users to "scratch like Kid Koala."

Asia offers some ready-made showcases for international culture, the largest this year being Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. Canadian Heritage will manage a major pavilion for Canada at the event, which runs from the end of March through late September.

The Design Exchange in Toronto will be among the many Canadian arts organizations there. "We plan to present an overview of 15 Canadian design firms and set the stage with a discussion on Canadian design," says



Franklin the turtle helps children in South Korea learn English—and helps Canada's reputation in the region.

