

Hitting a high note Folk festival showcases Canadian talent

With its more than 6,000 members, the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance brought its 16th international conference to San Diego in late February 2004. The conference attracted some 1,700 delegates from Canada, the United States, Latin America and Europe.

Attendees included over 200 Canadian artists, representatives of national and regional music organizations and industry contacts. The Alliance estimated that some 20% of conference attendees were talent buyers, 5% record labels and 11% were print and broadcast folk media.

There were more than 1,000 showcases at the conference and five of the 18 official showcases featured Canadian artists. They included Ontario's **Arrogant Worms**, British Columbia's **The Marc Atkinson Trio**, Quebec's **Les Charbonniers de l'Enfer** and **David Francey**, and Manitoba's **James Keelaghan**.

The Canadian Folk Alliance organized a showcase that featured British Columbia's **Po'Girl**, Ontario's **Ember Swift**, **Samantha Robichaud** of New Brunswick, **Nathan** from Manitoba and Quebec's **Perdu l'nord**. A first-time collaboration of regional organizations from the four Atlantic

provinces, Quebec and Manitoba also produced a showcase, and many independent showcases featured a range of artists from across Canada.



British Columbia's Marc Atkinson of The Marc Atkinson Trio

Canada at the forefront

For over 20 years, the Canadian Consulate General in Los Angeles has had a strong relationship with the California Traditional Music Society and its Executive Director and President, Elaine and Clark Weissman.

In 1990, Pam Johnson, Cultural Officer at the Consulate General, participated in the creation of the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance. The Alliance includes members of the Philadelphia Folksong

Society, the Vancouver Folk Festival, Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, the International Bluegrass Music Association and the California Traditional Music Society. According to the Weissmans, the Alliance changed the way folk music and dance presenters, performers, agents, managers, media, and record companies do business in North America.

Elaine Weissman remarked that many of the conference participants were the "movers and shakers in the folk music world." They included bookers from major festivals such as the Philadelphia Folk Festival, media such as *Dirty Linen* magazine, the producers of the nationally-syndicated radio show "Folk Scene," recording contacts such as Canyon Records and Red House Records, influential presenters such as Dan DeWayne of CalState Chico, and managers such as Fleming Arts Management and Eye for Talent.

Derek Andrews, President of the Canadian Folk Alliance, remarked that many guests felt the Canadian event was "the high point of the conference." The Consulate General worked closely with the Canadian Folk Alliance and regional organizations to shape Canada's presence at this event, which turned out to be a great business networking opportunity for Canadian and U.S. industry contacts.

The next **North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance Conference** will be held in Montreal from February 24 to 27, 2005, and **Rendezvous Folk** will be held in Halifax from November 18 to 21, 2004.

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In its concept for a community in Tianjin, a city near Beijing, it incorporated public space with commercial, retail and residential developments while preserving the natural topography, green space and waterways of the area. Instead of razing the land, the architects worked around the terrain, using the different natural grades to guide the layout of roads and houses. They nestled buildings among native vegetation and kept existing canals and waterways to create continuity throughout the design.

Canada's green image

Canadian architects in China benefit from a perception that Canada is clean, natural and spacious. **Ekistics Town Planning Inc.** has capitalized on this image by emphasizing designs that are truly Canadian in both style and substance. An example is a luxury residential complex in Beijing, which meshes low-rise, low-density single family homes and townhouses with surrounding commercial and public space. The community has a distinctly North American feel, due in part to Ekistics' use of sunlight, moving water, vegetation and topography to create a sense of open, natural space.

Adaptability is critical

Canadian architects owe part of their success to adaptability. Because Canadian firms are generally smaller than their foreign counterparts, it is not unusual for their principals to have hands-on input into projects. The personal approach is useful in building working relationships with individual developers and in modifying designs to incorporate local elements.

The approach played a key role in **Ramsay Worden Architects'** master plan for a new community in Zhu Jia Jiao, a town outside Shanghai. Zhu Jia Jiao has become a showcase for Canadian sustainable design capabilities. It represents a fusion of leading-edge Canadian expertise in sustainable communities with elements of traditional and current Chinese housing and neighbourhood types.

Challenges remain

Despite the successes, China is still a young market for Canadian architectural firms, and some obstacles have yet to be overcome.

Payment, for instance, is a major challenge for Canadian design firms in China. The problem is not that Chinese companies do not pay but that the transfer of money is slow, due to inadequacies in the banking system.

Another issue is the small size of many Canadian firms. While smallness confers flexibility, small companies rarely enjoy the level of name recognition that is so crucial in China.

Chinese consumers are very brand-conscious, and a large company with a well-known brand name is a much



The Jiangjin Hotel by Vancouver's Nicolson Tamaki Architects

safer bet for a Chinese developer hoping to generate interest in a project.

A third challenge relates to the need for more cultural awareness. While Chinese developers comment on the skill and innovation of Canadian firms, they also point out that Canadian architects have much to learn about Chinese consumers, their lifestyles and values, as well as local building products. For instance, Canadian designers need to understand that while Canadian home buyers look for function first (e.g., number of bedrooms), Chinese consumers may be more concerned with prestige and creating a good impression with guests.

Working together

In September 2003, Joseph Caron, the Canadian Ambassador to China, met with a group of Canadian architects and designers at CMHC's Vancouver office to discuss issues facing Canadian firms in China. Participants welcomed the Canadian government's commitment to support Canadian design initiatives in China, in particular CMHC's work to develop a compendium of Canadian architectural achievements in that country.

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Alabama hosts military IT conference

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA — August 30 - September 1, 2004 — The **U.S. Air Force's 18th Annual Information Technology Conference and Exposition** is North America's premiere event for information technology (IT) companies wanting to gain access to well-funded U.S. Air Force buyers and decision makers. There is significant potential for companies that have leading edge technologies with applications in the military IT world.

For more information, and to register, go to <https://web1.ssg.gunter.af.mil/AFITC/index.asp>.