

Are time honoured community events like festivals and fairs (the PNE and May Day) destined to disappear?

After 149 years the people of New Westminster had come to believe that their cherished May Day would go on forever, as predictable as Christmas or New Year's. The May Queen would always be crowned and the May Poles would always be found arrayed in Queen's Park stadium ready to greet hundreds of school children eager for the ancient dance music to begin.

Then one day, it all stopped.

The schools grew tired of the annual labour to prepare May Day and somehow of its traditional character. Then along came COVID-19, silencing the speeches and music and snuffing out the pomp and pageantry.

The jeopardy facing May Day is common to traditional cultural observances and practices the world over.

Recognizing that cultural phenomenon like dance, music, costume, and a myriad of other artistic endeavours are increasingly subjected to the pressures of globalization, migration, mass communication and a diversity of human experience the United Nations Educational, 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The object of the Convention is to extend to arts and culture the kind of protections afforded to places and buildings such as UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

UNESCO extends guidelines, resources, frameworks and recognition to thousands of expressions of cultural heritage around the world. Like the US, Canada is a hold-out in signing on to this convention and as such communities across the country cannot avail themselves of the resources nor the significance that recognition by UNESCO affords. Canada's Ministry of Heritage provides funding on a sporadic basis that must be vigorously competed for each year but it falls far short of the gravitas and legitimacy bestowed on the cultural expressions of other countries by UNESCO. UNESCO's list of safeguarded Intangible Cultural Heritage recognizes the vast diversity in cultural expressions found in other countries but not in Canada.

The New Westminster May Day Community Association believes that long-standing traditions and festivals like May Day should be afforded sufficient resources and recognition by governments at all levels to survive. In the meantime, hundreds of volunteers and supporters across New Westminster are keen to keep this tradition going.

MAY DAY

With teachers and schools so integral to this expression of living heritage having bowed-out can the festival survive?

Can a fledgling community group with limited resources but much heart and spirit somehow maintain the complex intricate and labour intensive spectacle?

Can New Westminster do the impossible and restore its prized place as host and organizer to the longest continuously celebrated May Day in the British Commonwealth of Nations?

www.nwmayday.com

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