

ARTICLE



The Princeton Traditional Music Festival by Rika Ruebsaat with intro. by Stewart Hendrickson

The Sixth Annual [Princeton Traditional Music Festival](#) takes place in [Princeton, B.C.](#) Canada this August 16-18. The whole town of Princeton comes out to support the festival. Near-by "locals" come from the Okanagan area, and others come from Vancouver, other parts of B.C., Washington, Oregon and points even further away. The main focus of the festival is the traditional music and folklore of British Columbia, but it also includes traditional music, liberally defined, from other areas. This will be my fourth time at the festival - I am drawn back again by the friendly people and the small-town atmosphere of [Princeton](#). *Stewart Hendrickson*

The Princeton Traditional Music Festival - 2013. Anyone walking down the streets of Princeton, B.C. Canada, on the weekend of August 16-18th shouldn't be surprised to hear fiddle tunes wafting across Bridge Street. Looking west onto Veterans Square they'll see a big tent with a stage and people sitting in chairs tapping their feet or maybe even dancing in the street. Walking down Vermilion Avenue towards the Museum they may hear accordions or ballads, or perhaps a song about sailing on the tall ships.

All of this and much more is the kind of music featured at the Sixth Annual Princeton Traditional Music Festival. Over 160 musicians will be in town that weekend, some of them local, many of them from the coast, and some from as far away as California.

The Festival begins on the evening of Friday, August 16th with the opening ceremony followed by an Irish country dance on Veterans' Way beside the Legion. The dance will feature a live band with fiddle, guitar and concertina. Everyone is welcome. There will be a caller to teach the dances so no experience is necessary and people don't even need to bring a partner. On Saturday and Sunday there will be music from 10 am until 6 pm on two stages – one on Veterans Square and one in front of the Museum.

And it's all free! No admission will be charged. The reason for this is that the Festival is run entirely by volunteers and the musicians are donating their talents.

The seeds of the Princeton Traditional Music Festival were planted in 1972 with the first Seattle Folklife Festival. Folklife is a free multicultural festival held every Memorial Day weekend at Seattle Center, the site of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. No admission is charged and the performers donate their talents. Jon and I have been performing at Folklife every year since 1975. In those days it was a cozy event with about ten stages and lots of spots for jamming and socializing. It was impossible to walk across the site without meeting people you knew and the evening singing sessions were ecstatic, drunken blowouts. These days Folklife has exploded into an overcrowded melee with over 6000 musicians, and crowds so thick you have to fight your way from stage to stage. But the evening singing sessions are still ecstatic, although nowadays white beards and the odd cane are part of the landscape.

In the early 1990s a few of us from the Vancouver Folk Song Society thought that a free festival along the lines of Folklife would work in Vancouver. This was how CityFest was born, a free, multicultural, volunteer-run festival that ran for about seven years.

When Jon and I moved to Princeton in 2007, Ed Muckle was organizing a cultural festival to tie in with Racing Days and Canada Day. He called it "Sounds of Our Heritage" and invited Jon and me to organize the music for one of the stages. We quickly contacted all our musical friends from the coast and invited them to camp in our yard and spend the weekend making music. We had a wonderful time and wanted to do it again.

Having participated in Seattle's Folklife Festival and having been involved in organizing CityFest, we thought we had the skills and resources to run a festival here in Princeton. We modeled it on Folklife – no admission fee and performers donate their talents. These two criteria were essential for a number of reasons. Most music festivals charge over \$100 for a weekend of music. Our goal was to make the festival accessible to everyone and many people in Princeton couldn't afford such expensive tickets. Selling tickets also means you need fences and security, thus creating an atmosphere of exclusion rather than of community togetherness. Not paying performers was also central to our vision. From a practical standpoint, paying performers requires a huge budget, which necessitates charging admission. We also wanted there to be no distinction between performers and audience. We feel that singing and making music belongs to everyone. If one group of people is paying another group of people to make music for them, the music becomes a commodity that you buy rather than something you share together. It's the difference between buying a meal in a restaurant and sharing a meal with friends or family.

The first Princeton Traditional Music Festival took place in August of 2008. Most of the musicians who came were musical friends from the coast. One of our goals has been to increase the number of performers from BC's interior and we are succeeding in this. As word of the Festival spreads we are attracting more musicians from both the Princeton and Okanagan areas and from farther afield.

~ [Rika Ruebsaat](#)

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