



Dancers leap across the stage during a 2009 performance of *A Musical Taste of Our Canadian Heritage*. Below the show continues with a variety of different performers.

Photos by Alan Dean

# Canadian musical history stands the test of time

## Performer perseveres through lean times

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For Nepean resident Deborah Davis, there was no question of giving up on her dream to teach children about our country's musical heritage.

Davis, founder of *A Musical Taste of Our Canadian Heritage*, has come a long way from playing all the female parts of a show that gives a lesson in music from Aboriginal performances to present day pop and rock.

Now the show sells out during their three-day run at the

Canadian Museum of Civilizations and includes 50 top-notch performers.

Del Anderson, a Canadian who returned home after decades working as a Hollywood producer, said the show was as good as anything Broadway.

"I returned to Ottawa and was taken to her matinee," she said. "It was amazing, I think I learned more about Canada in that one afternoon than I had in my entire life."

The concept for the show was born in 1998 and aimed to show the history of Canada and its music through an entertaining vehicle that would be educational but also appealing, moving, inspirational and memorable.

The idea was boosted by a \$9,900-grant from the government of Canada's Millennium Foundation.

"It really didn't pay for anything though, and we had no money left over for costumes," Davis said.

That's when she went to her

TD Canada trust branch and talked to then manager Cathy Jowsey about possible funding. She walked away from that meeting with a cheque for \$250.

"We used that money to buy the bolt of cloth that all the costumes were made of," Davis said.

In the ensuing years, Jowsey, now manager of community relations with TD Canada Trust, would call Davis offering more money from the bank. Last year, the contribution to *Odyssey Showcase* — the charity set up to maintain the projects led by Davis — received \$100,000. The money is used to underwrite the cost of the school children attending the show for \$5 or \$10 per head and for the creation of a 71-page manual for teachers about the history of Canadian music.

"I have been to the show and it is great how the children relate to it," Jowsey said. "They are very excited and can't wait for the next act."

Jowsey added that the educational element of the show is one of the reasons TD has continued to support it.

Davis began to be interested in children and music when she formed her show *Choonga Changa*, which was also a labour of love, that grew into a regionally-recognized hit with hundreds of performances.

She quit her career as an operational auditor in the government to stay home with her children and tried out a few home-based businesses before she hit the right tune with her musical career.

Her husband Louis — who can be described as Davis' biggest critic and biggest supporter — said that he has been amazed by the amount of work Davis has put into her musical endeavors.

"At first as she was learning, she had to perform in restaurants and bars and sometimes she was really bad," he said. "But after practice and hard

work, I could tell her that she was really good. I think it meant that much more because I had been honest before."

Louis supported his wife through the lean years where the bills kept coming and the sources of funding were few and far between because he believed in her dream.

He put up with basement performances, costumes in the living room and late nights going over scores and scripts because he believes just as much as Davis.

"I bet if you look back there are very few organizations that survived after receiving the money from the Millennium Foundation," he said. "But we are still here and thriving."

The performances will run from June 1 to 3, with a reception after the close hosted by Max Keeping to honour the show's milestone anniversary.

For information on show-times and ticket prices visit <http://cmof.ca>.

