



Vital Arts

and Public Value



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ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Background

For more than 50 years, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) has played an essential role in supporting the growth and success of the province's arts community. Established in 1963, OAC was founded with a mandate to *foster the creation and production of art for the benefit of all Ontarians*.

Thanks to the Government of Ontario's long-term investment in OAC, this province has built an extraordinarily robust arts infrastructure, one that is highly regarded in many other jurisdictions. OAC's staff is responsible for more than 60 granting programs, while a 12-person volunteer board of directors, appointed by Ontario's Lieutenant Governor in Council, oversees OAC policies and governance.

OAC granting programs support arts disciplines, including craft, dance, literature, music, theatre, media arts and visual arts, as well as multidisciplinary arts. Other programs focus on particular kinds of arts activity – arts education, community arts – or on specific areas, such as skills development, audience development, touring, distribution and dissemination. Some OAC programs have distinct goals, such as Northern Arts, which is solely for artists and arts groups in northern Ontario, and Access and Career Development, which funds professional development activities for Aboriginal arts professionals and arts professionals of colour. OAC also has two offices that focus specifically on Aboriginal Arts and on Francophone Arts. An increasing number of Ontario artists and arts organizations are working across disciplines and moving seamlessly through various art forms. OAC's programs are inclusive and respond to arts organizations and individual artists who are developing new ways of working, creating and presenting.

OAC allocates public funds to the arts in a responsible and accountable manner, using a rigorous peer-assessment process. Every year, hundreds of working artists, arts professionals and community representatives from across the province help OAC evaluate funding requests. This peer assessment is conducted by juries, advisory panels and third-party recommenders. Grant applications are evaluated on artistic merit and impact, administrative viability and contribution to the arts and public in Ontario.

Violinists from the National Youth Orchestra of Canada play during a summer training program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. (Photo: Claus Andersen)

Cover (top): From background left: Jamie Maczko, Louis Laberge-Côté, Ana Groppler, Michael Caldwell, Daniel McArthur, Kate Holden, PJ Prudat, Brendan Wyatt and (foreground) Keith Barker in *A Soldier's Tale*, a dance theatre production conceived by Signal Theatre and performed at the Fleck Dance Theatre in Toronto. (Photo: David Hou)

Cover (bottom): A large audience takes in a performance by the Complaints Choir on the Redpath Stage at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto as part of Canada Day celebrations. (Photo: Roman Sekyrka)

Introduction

Vital Arts and Public Value builds on the work that began with OAC's two previous strategic plans, *Connections and Creativity* (2008-2013) and *Stability and Strength* (2003-2006).

The foundation laid by these two plans includes our commitment to specific priority groups.

OAC's Equity Plan, approved by the board of directors in October 2013, underpins the goals and strategies outlined in this plan. See full Equity Plan on page 26.

OAC's plan for the future is reinforced by our strengths:

- OAC has knowledgeable and dedicated staff, board members and peer assessors, all of whom are essential to achieving its mandate.
- OAC is committed to peer-assessment granting processes that operate at arm's-length from government and provide evaluation by knowledgeable and experienced artists and arts professionals.

Vital: The word "vital" has been chosen to reflect qualities essential to a healthy arts sector including artistic merit, relevance, impact, risk-taking and effectiveness.



Dancers from Ballet Jörgen Canada put on a Ballet 101 presentation for an audience at the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Library while on tour in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. (Photo courtesy of Ballet Jörgen Canada)



Brothers Hypnotic, a film by Reuben Atlas, is screened as part of Hot Docs' Docs at Dusk program in Toronto. (Photo: John Barduhn)

Mandate

OAC's mandate is to foster the creation and production of art for the benefit of all Ontarians.

Vision

We **envision** an Ontario where:

- people of all ages and communities experience, feel connected to and value the arts
- the arts sector is resilient and healthy
- Ontario artists and arts organizations are recognized locally, nationally and internationally for their work
- the arts reflect the diversity of stories of all of Ontario's people and communities

Beliefs

We **believe** that:

- the arts are essential to the quality of life, cultural identity, social well-being and economic prosperity of Ontario
- access to the arts enhances lives, fosters creativity and innovation and strengthens communities
- works of artistic merit are created by artists from all communities, regions and cultural backgrounds

Values

The **values** that guide our work are:

- leadership and responsiveness to the evolving needs of the arts community and the public
- transparency and accountability to the arts community, the government and the public
- equity and accessibility
- integrity, fairness and professionalism

Priority Groups

OAC is committed to ensuring equitable access for **all Ontarians**, with particular emphasis on the following priority groups:

- Aboriginal artists
- artists and arts organizations located in regions across Ontario
- artists of colour*
- Deaf artists** and artists with disabilities
- francophone artists
- new generation artists (18-30 years old)

Some of these priority groups have a unique history, identity and status in Canada, some have faced historical and/or systemic barriers, others reflect OAC's province-wide mandate and all are essential to the future of the arts sector.

OAC acknowledges that there are other population groups in Ontario that face barriers. However, we believe that the priority groups identified above are the appropriate ones for OAC to focus on at this time.

* OAC's definition of the term *artists of colour* is based on the Government of Canada's definition of "visible minorities," which is "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."

** OAC identifies Deaf artists as distinct from artists with disabilities based on the Canadian Hearing Society's definition of "Culturally Deaf," a term that refers to individuals who identify with and participate in the language, culture, and community of Deaf people.

Themes and Goals

The goals of the plan reflect the two themes of OAC's mandate – to serve both the arts community and the public:

THEME 1:

Foster the creation, production and presentation of art

Goal 1: Invest in Ontario's vital artists and arts organizations

Goal 2: Strengthen skills and share knowledge

THEME 2:

Foster participation in, and appreciation of, the arts

Goal 3: Support public engagement in the arts

Goal 4: Build public awareness of the value of the arts



Yanna McIntosh (centre) as Cleopatra, with (from left) Sophia Walker, Antoine Yared and E.B. Smith, in the Stratford Festival's production of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Tom Patterson Theatre. (Photo: David Hou)

THEME 1: Foster the creation, production and presentation of art

Goal 1: Invest in Ontario's vital artists and arts organizations

Underlying OAC's mandate as a public funder of artists and arts organizations is our responsibility to ensure the long-term sustainability – and vitality – of Ontario's arts sector. This includes recognizing the diverse and changing nature of the arts sector and embracing the need for OAC's funding to reflect and support this evolution. In doing so, OAC's role is to find a balance across the many and varied needs of the sector, in a way that will contribute to a vital, flourishing and sustainable arts sector. In support of this goal, OAC has identified strategies that will support existing artists and arts organizations who continue to be active and vital contributors and, at the same time, nourish emerging artists and arts organizations and support new ways of working, creating, producing and presenting art.

Strategies

- Ensure the distribution of OAC's funding reflects the current and evolving state of Ontario's professional arts sector and society.
- Provide fair and equitable access to OAC funding programs and processes, with particular emphasis on OAC's identified priority groups.
- Reallocate funding to ensure balance between existing and emerging arts activity, promoting both renewal and stability.
- Support new ways of creating and working, as well as new organizational models.
- Support opportunities for artists and arts organizations to present their work locally, nationally and internationally.
- Within programs that provide operating funding, prioritize the most vital arts organizations.

Goal 2: Strengthen skills and share knowledge

Strengthening skills, building capacity and sharing knowledge among Ontario's artists and arts organizations will help meet OAC's vision of a resilient and healthy arts sector. This is increasingly important in today's environment of rapid change, competing challenges and emerging opportunities, including new technologies and ways of working. The community consultations undertaken as part of the development of this strategic plan reinforced the sector's needs for professional development, capacity building and increased connections among artists and arts organizations. In support of this goal, OAC has identified strategies that reaffirm its role in addressing these needs and our role as a convener in bringing the arts community together to share information, build relationships and encourage collaboration.

Strategies

- Ensure artists and other arts professionals have access to learning opportunities.
- Enhance capacity of arts organizations, in particular new and emerging organizations.
- Convene, connect and promote collaboration within the arts community.



Albatross Omnibus, an installation by artist Derek Sullivan on display at The Power Plant in Toronto. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)



A pair works on a painting during the annual Hottest Yard Sale Under the Sun in Owen Sound, hosted by the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area in partnership with the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. (Photo: Kim Skene)

THEME 2: Foster participation in, and appreciation of, the arts

Goal 3: Support public engagement in the arts

Ontario's quality of life is enriched by arts experiences that are widely available, diverse and of high quality. These societal benefits are greatest when more people engage directly in the arts. To achieve this goal, artists and arts organizations need to further develop and deepen their relationships with audiences in innovative ways – particularly in response to changing demographics (such as an aging population and increased cultural diversity) and the new ways that people, especially young people, are seeking to engage with the arts. Arts education for learners of all ages also plays an important role in building engagement. In support of this goal, OAC has identified strategies that connect people to arts experiences, build audiences and support public participation in the arts.

Strategies

- Support opportunities for the public to experience the arts throughout the province.
- Support activities that increase, broaden and diversify arts participation and audiences, including attendees, visitors, viewers, listeners and readers.
- Encourage arts organizations to include board members, staff and volunteers from OAC's identified priority groups.
- Facilitate arts education and learning for people of all ages.

Goal 4: Build public awareness of the value of the arts

The public benefit that results from supporting Ontario's arts sector is a fundamental part of OAC's mandate as a provincial government agency. However, in today's complex and fast-changing environment, the value of the arts to society often gets lost. There is a need to highlight the strong contribution of Ontario's dynamic arts sector in terms of intrinsic impacts, quality of life, economic growth, attracting tourism and investment, social cohesion and community building. In addition, there is a need for increased awareness that public funding makes possible the wide range of artistic activity enjoyed by Ontarians across the province. OAC's leadership role in building public awareness of the value of the arts was reinforced and affirmed in the community consultations undertaken as part of the development of this strategic plan. In support of this goal, OAC has identified strategies that promote awareness of Ontario's rich artistic identity, document the value of the arts and demonstrate the reach and impact of public funding of the arts.

Strategies

- Promote Ontario's identity through the arts.
- Collect and share stories about the diversity of artists and their work.
- Gather, analyze and share research on the contribution of the arts to Ontario.
- Demonstrate the crucial benefit of public funding of the arts to Ontarians.



Actor and acrobat Andree Rainville in a Créations in Vivo workshop of Vertical State. (Photo: Stéphane Guertin)

Context

With 13 million people, Ontario is Canada's most populous and culturally diverse province and is home to vibrant francophone and Aboriginal communities. Half of Canada's immigrants live in Ontario. Ontarians report more than 200 ethnic origins, and 3.3 million Ontarians identify themselves as a person of colour. This number represents one quarter of Ontario's total population and more than half of Canada's people of colour. Over 300,000 Aboriginal people live in Ontario – the largest Aboriginal population in Canada – and the majority live in urban areas. Ontario's francophone population is the second largest in North America, and of Canadian francophones who don't reside in Quebec, more than half live in Ontario. There are 2 million "new generation" Ontarians aged 18 to 30. Fifteen per cent of Ontarians – 1.7 million people – live with disabilities.*

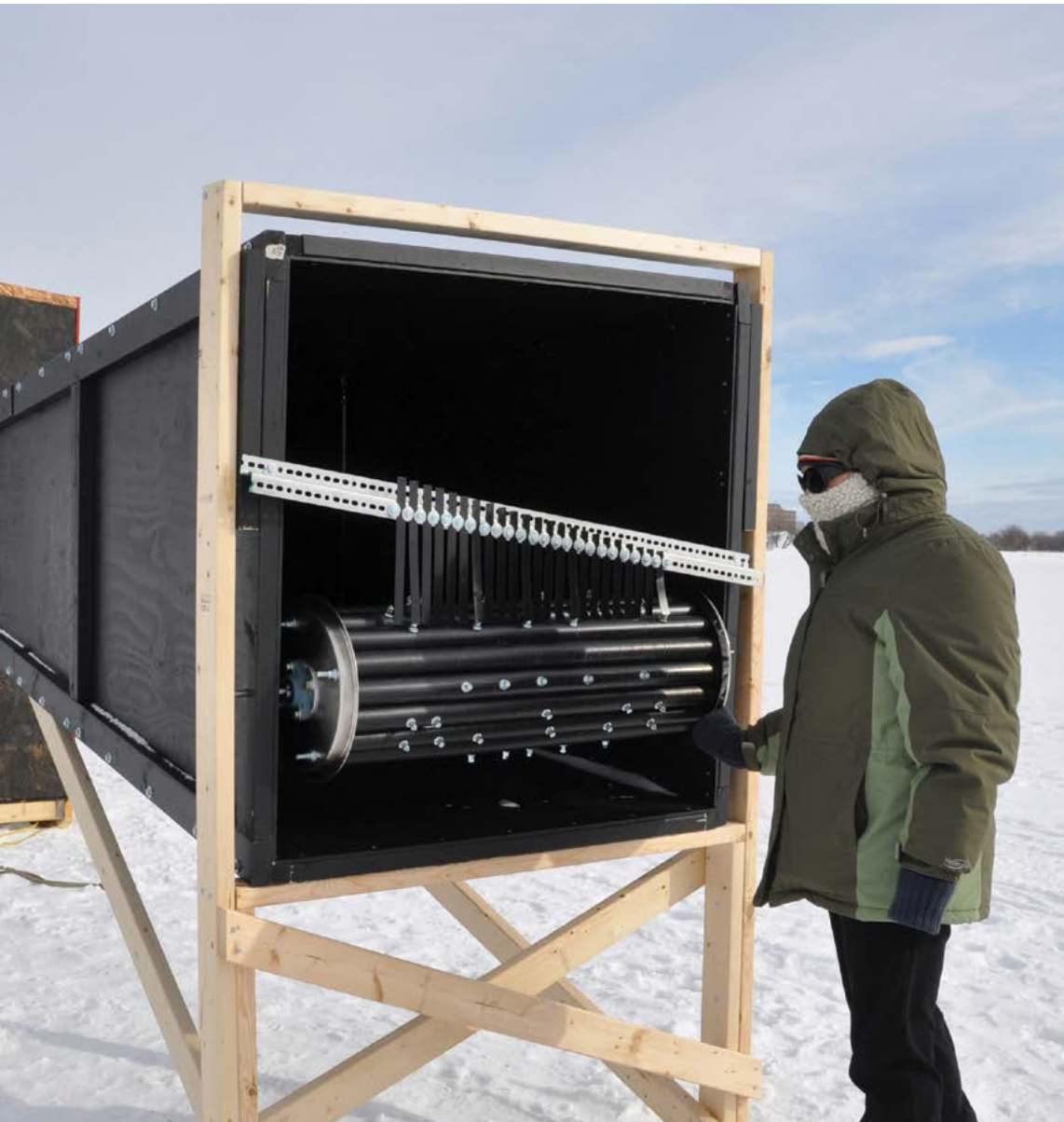
Ontario's artists and arts organizations are based in communities large and small throughout the province. They contribute immeasurably to the quality of life in their communities and across Ontario, as well as nationally and internationally. With more than 58,000 professional artists, Ontario's cultural sector contributes \$22 billion per year in economic impact to the province's GDP.

The environmental scan that was commissioned as part of OAC's strategic planning process identified three major drivers that affect the arts in Ontario – demographic change, economic uncertainty and technology. These issues, along with more sector-specific trends, have an impact on how the arts are created, produced, disseminated and promoted, as well as how people participate and engage in the arts. (The environmental scan is available in the Strategic Planning section of OAC's website.)

* The term *person of colour* is based on the Government of Canada's definition of "visible minorities," which is "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."



Canadian author Kenneth Oppel reads to an audience during the Telling Tales Festival at Westfield Heritage Village in Rockton. (Photo: Tim Bermingham)



Sound Booth, an interactive acoustic sound sculpture created by Barry Prophet and displayed on frozen Lake Nipissing as part of Ice Follies, presented by W.K.P. Kennedy Gallery in North Bay. (Photo: Barry Prophet)

CONTEXT

Over the past 50 years, Ontario's arts infrastructure has been built by artists and arts organizations that today are the backbone of an increasingly multifaceted arts community. Ontario artists carry Canada's standard throughout the world and bring visibility to the vital arts activity that has been nurtured here. Ontario's arts organizations, and the gifted individuals who work with them, create, produce and present high-quality art for the benefit of the public. Many organizations have fully integrated arts education into their activities, introducing young people to the transformative power of art. Some young people inspired by these arts education experiences, fuelled by Ontario's dynamic mix of cultures and languages and empowered by the constant evolution of technological possibility – go on to create exciting and innovative new art forms and arts practices. Others go on to become dedicated attendees, supporters, volunteers and advocates.

The flow of people moving to and from Ontario from other parts of Canada, and from countries all over the world, infuses our province with fresh energy and ideas. These influences invigorate an already vibrant arts scene, as world cultures shape art forms from hip hop to opera, bhangra to ballet, klezmer to Kathak plus samba, salsa, dub poetry, tabla, animation, Aboriginal beading and porcupine quill work – and a host of others. There is tremendous potential for blossoming art forms and activities that OAC accommodates through existing or new programs.

There has been strong artistic growth in Aboriginal communities in the past few decades, with wider recognition and greater appreciation of both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art forms and the extraordinary contributions of Aboriginal artists to our cultural landscape. This is in spite of the historical legacy of colonization, which has created social and economic challenges in Aboriginal communities. Art-making traditions are woven into the fabric of Aboriginal societies and reflect the significant diversity within them.

Ontario's francophone population is culturally diverse and includes people from countries all over the French-speaking world. For many francophones, the arts are a critical link between language and cultural identity, and Ontario's francophone artists are deeply valued by their communities.

CONTEXT

Because francophone individuals and communities are dispersed throughout Ontario, fundraising and audience development remain significant challenges for francophone artists and arts organizations.

Ontario's regional characteristics can exert strong influences on artists. For example, some northern Ontario artists are powerfully influenced by a strong connection to the land, and this aesthetic often emerges in their work. At the same time, artists and arts organizations in the north face particular challenges, for example: higher costs for equipment, material and travel; less access to non-government sources of revenue; and fewer opportunities for professional development.

OAC recognizes that Deaf artists and artists with disabilities have unique stories and offer unique contributions, yet face barriers and challenges. This was identified through our Equity Plan and Accessibility Plan focus group sessions as well as at the Front and Centre: Disability and Deaf Arts in Ontario conference in June 2011. OAC is responding to the presence and work of Deaf artists and artists with disabilities by providing greater access and identifying them as a strategic priority. A basic requirement of accessibility is the ability to acquire services and support that respects people's individual needs and treats them with dignity. OAC's efforts in this area are congruent with the Government of Ontario's goal to make the province fully accessible for people with disabilities by 2025.

Artists who have felt excluded or marginalized by systemic barriers and regional disparities sometimes require additional support in order to connect with other artists, reach audiences and be assured that public funders recognize their art forms and practices.

Over the past decade, OAC has undertaken outreach to improve access and to make artists from all regions and cultural communities more aware of our programs. OAC juries and advisory panels reflect the cultural and regional diversity of the province to ensure decision-making from a broad perspective. OAC has also developed its list of priority groups in order to ensure that OAC programs and service delivery are widely accessible to *all* Ontarians.



From left: Robert Chartier, Renata Soutter and Phil Charbonneau in Cycle 8, a Propeller Dance production choreographed by Renata Soutter and performed at Richcraft Theatre in Ottawa. (Photo: Keane Shore)

Strategic Planning Process

The process to develop this strategic plan began in the spring of 2013, with an environmental scan that focused on external issues and trends currently affecting the Ontario arts sector and those anticipated in the future.

The main component of the external consultation was a comprehensive online survey launched in June 2013. The survey was designed to provide a large number of stakeholders with the opportunity to provide input on a variety of topics that had been identified in OAC staff and board sessions as relevant to OAC's strategic planning. Topics included: key needs and issues facing the arts sector, those that OAC should address, OAC's roles, the appropriate focus of OAC's activities, public value and OAC's goals over the next few years. OAC sent a link to the online questionnaire to the 28,000 people who regularly receive OAC's newsletter – individual artists, organizations receiving operating grants from OAC, other funders and stakeholders in the arts. This also included a request to forward the survey link to others who have a connection to Ontario arts. Additionally, the survey was tweeted by OAC and others and posted on OAC's website. A video version of the email was available in American Sign Language. A total of 1,858 individuals responded to the survey, resulting in 1,460 completed questionnaires.

Data gathering culminated with a one-day focus group session on July 12, 2013, with 50 people (who had been peer assessors on OAC grant review panels over the previous 18 months and/or participants in OAC's Equity Plan focus groups), to dig more deeply into key themes that emerged from the survey. The participants represented a broad spectrum of diversity, including artistic disciplines/practices, gender, age, language and people with disabilities, as well as OAC's then-current priority groups (Aboriginal, francophone, culturally diverse/persons of colour, new generation and regional).

The findings from the environmental scan, survey and focus group session are provided in the *Summary of External Consultation Phase*, available on OAC's website.

Informed by these consultations, OAC board and staff participated in several facilitated sessions over the fall and winter of 2013-14, which led to the development of the strategic plan.

OAC worked with the following consultants during the strategic planning process: Robyn Jeffrey Writing & Editing Services completed the environmental scan; The Monarch Park Group Inc. facilitated the internal and external consultations held in the spring and summer of 2013; and the team of Consulting Matrix and Ginder Consulting facilitated OAC staff and board in the development of the strategic plan through the fall and winter of 2013-14.

It's clear from the number of individuals who took the time to complete the online survey or participate in the focus group session that people care deeply about the arts in Ontario and about OAC. The respondents and participants – including a diverse mix of artists, arts organizations and others from across the province – shared their candid views about what OAC might consider addressing or fulfilling over the next six years. Their thoughtful opinions, responses and ideas helped shape OAC's new strategic plan, and we are grateful to all for their valuable input.

Underpinning this plan is recognition of the need for OAC's internal systems and infrastructure to keep pace with technological change in order to support achievement of the goals outlined in this strategic plan.

Ontario Arts Council's Equity Plan

Vision

We are inspired by and value Ontario's artists, who help shape our thriving and diverse society and express the richness of our stories, histories and cultures. Therefore, as a public agency, funder and employer, OAC will lead and be responsive and inclusive in supporting diverse artists, artistic practices, arts communities and our own organization.

Values

Leadership: OAC will integrate equity principles into its policies, practices, programs, partnerships and services; continue to address systemic barriers and historical challenges; and develop and adequately resource annual equity plans within the context of the current strategic plan.

Inclusiveness: OAC will foster a welcoming, barrier-free environment and build relationships with communities not traditionally involved with OAC.

Responsiveness: OAC programs and services will meet varied needs of the diversity of artists and arts organizations from across the province.

Diversity: OAC board, staff, applicants and assessors will reflect the diversity of the public as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Code and Section 35(2) of the Constitution of Canada.

Objectives

OAC is committed to attaining the following specific equity objectives over time, as resources allow:

1. Provide fair and equitable access to OAC funding, services and partnerships, with special focus on artists and arts organizations that continue to face systemic barriers and historic challenges.
2. Enhance diversity in OAC staff, board, hiring committees, peer-assessment committees, vendors and suppliers.
3. Make OAC communications vehicles accessible and reflective of Ontario's diversity.
4. Help develop the capacity of diverse artists and arts organizations that continue to face systemic barriers to achieve their goals and strengthen their ability to succeed.
5. Meet or exceed the requirements of all applicable equity and human rights-related legislation.
6. Strengthen OAC's work culture through the application of equity and diversity principles in internal communications and staff contribution to decision-making.
7. Continually increase OAC's knowledge of effective equity and diversity practices to enhance individual and organizational performance.
8. Allocate adequate human and financial resources to pursue equity and diversity objectives.
9. Regularly track, measure and report on OAC's progress toward achieving its vision of equity and diversity.

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Carman Chu and Justin Lui of Little Pear Garden
Collective perform on the Redpath Stage at Harbourfront
Centre in Toronto as part of the Fortune Cooking Festival.
(Photo: Victor Tan)