



Welcome to the Chinese
Year of the Rabbit

Description

Centaur Theatre stages Wildside Festival and Infitheatre revives a past gem

By **Byron Toben**

January 23, 2023

The **Chinese New Year**, like the Jewish and Arabic New Year, is based on a **lunar calendar** and thus changes its beginning date each year. This year, it began on **January 22**. Like the western Gregorian calendar, it has twelve months which it uniquely names after various animals, and 2023 is the year of the rabbit. The other eleven are the year of the tiger, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, pig, rat and ox.

The Chinese new year is observed in neighbouring countries – Tibet, Korea, Viet Nam and Okinawa as well as countries with significant overseas populations of Chinese origin – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand.

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The Chinese New Year (originally called the Spring Festival) can last for fifteen days (compare to twelve days of Christmas) during which families and friends meet and celebrate with feasts, gifts and well-wishing of longevity and prosperity. Its ancient origins incorporated ancestor worship and praise of deities. Local practices varied from north to south, and during various dynasties such as the Han, Jin, Tang, Song, Ming or Qing dynasties.

During the Cultural Revolution of 1967, attempts were made to modernize the practice but its persistence led to its reinstatement in 1980.

The philosopher/poet **Wang Ansi** wrote a poem called simply...

New Year

*Amid the sound of firecrackers a year has come to an end
The spring wind has wafted warm breath to the Tuli wine
While the rising sun shines over each and every household
People get rid of the old couplets and set up the new ones.*



Dragon Dance in New York's Chinatown – Image: [Patrick Kwan, New York](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Firecrackers and red ribbons

In ancient times, there was the myth of a monstrous beast called the **Nian**. It lived underwater or in the mountains. It would emerge to raid villages and eat people, especially children. One day, an old man came to a village and promised to thwart the Nian. He did so by placing red ribbons on doors and windows and exploding firecrackers. This worked as the beast hated the colour red and the noise. Thus today, we have the lion or dragon dance initiating the Chinese new year and gifts of money in red envelopes.



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In Canada, where it sometimes seems we have only three seasons – Winter, Summer and Winter, I propose – and cultural appropriation be damned – a made-in-Canada New Year of the Moose, the Beaver and the Caribou. Failing that, welcome our theatre New Year by attending:



Les Bonnes – Image: Phanier Ethier

Centaur Theatre's annual Wildside

In past years, the **Wildside** consisted of six or seven short pieces, some drawn from the **Fringe**. This year, under the curatorship of **Rose Plotek**, it focuses on partnerships with other groups in scheduling:



The Sighlence of Sky

January 16 to 28 – *Wildfire* – Staged at La Chapelle, translated from the Quebec hit and performed by Talisman theatre.

January 26 to 29 – *Project; Les Bonnes* – Adapted from the French classic, The Maids.

February 1 and 2 – *Theatre For One* – In-house screening of six plays, six actors, three directors.

February 8 to 11 – *Planting an Apple Tree* – A timely play involving Ukraine.

February 11 – *Confabulation presents: Me, My Selfie and I* – Storytelling about technology sometimes gone astray.

centaurtheatre.com

Infini theatre remounts a past gem

January 31 – *The Sighlence of Sky* – Anana Rydvald repeats her META award-winning non verbal mask and mime performance from 2021.

infini theatre.com

Featured image: Hong Kong New Year fireworks display, by [Michael Elleray from England, United Kingdom, CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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Date Created

January 2023