

Music to Our Ears

From the [Sky High Blues Festival](#) in Rock Creek to the Salmo River Ranch for the festival fueled by "Shambhalove", summer in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region literally brings music to our ears.



Last year, when polled, over half of resident respondents in the region said they attend music festivals at least once per year, with 21% attending music festivals two to four times per year, and 5% going to five or more.

The [Kaslo Jazz Etc. Festival](#), famous for its floating stage and world class performers, celebrates its 25th year this July. Like many festivals in our region, this music festival is run almost exclusively by volunteers. "To this day over 300 volunteers support the festival, with a core group of approximately 40 taking key managerial roles", said Kaslo Jazz Etc. Festival Executive Director Paul Hinrichs. As the festival and society grew, they were able to support a paid Executive Director, and, as an active member of the regional, provincial and national arts community, the festival has received support and mentorship over the years. The society now serves in a leadership role for other festivals and events in the Kootenay region.

However, a reliance on volunteers has its challenges. For example, [Starbelly Jam](#), another popular long standing music festival in Crawford Bay, is taking this summer off after 16 years. The society is facing challenges filling the important volunteer managerial roles which are so critical to a vibrant, safe and well organized event.

Alongside old favorites, new festivals continue to emerge. One of the younger festivals in our region is the now annual [Tiny Lights Festival](#) which takes place in Ymir, usually in June. Along with luring incredible musical talent, the festival is designed to examine, celebrate and learn about the elements that make a community sustainable. This coming weekend is [Unity Music Festival](#), on the beach at Slocan, bringing international and Canadian artists, joined by talented local musicians, dancers, and colourful characters.

Music festivals contribute to the rich cultural well-being present in our region. While a celebration of music, life and community for residents, these festivals also play a role in the economy, and an increasing emphasis in economic development strategies. From about 1500 people at the [Wapiti Music Festival](#) in Fernie, to a crowd of 3000 to 5000 in Kaslo, these events bring in large numbers. The [Shambhala Music Festival](#) hosts 10,000 people every August - practically a pop-up city. While many residents enjoy the annual festivals, cultural tourists are also a key driver to festival success. The

Wapiti Music Festival, for example, estimates that about 40% of attendees come from outside the Elk Valley, while about 70% of the Kaslo Jazz Etc. Festival are tourists.

The Columbia Valley recently developed their "Tapestry of Place: A Place-Based Cultural Tourism Strategy". Initiated by the Columbia Cultural Tourism Association, whose mission is to acknowledge and enhance the quality and economic importance of arts and culture to the Columbia Valley, the strategy seeks to steward the strategic development of cultural tourism as an adjunct to the valley's recreation-based tourism economy. As noted in their [consultant's report](#), "cultural tourism is a wealth generator. It generates wealth for other sectors within the tourism economy, and, through subsequent rounds of spending, for the community or region as a whole".

Hills Strategies in their recent [Arts Research Monitor](#) discusses the economic benefits of culture, noting that, according to Statistics Canada, in British Columbia, the direct contribution of culture industries to GDP was \$7.2 billion in 2014, with 87,800 jobs directly related to culture industries. The GDP of culture industries in BC is larger than the value added of agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (\$4.4 billion), utilities (\$4.7 billion), and accommodation and food services (\$6.3 billion), but not as large as that of education services (\$11.3 billion), transportation and warehousing (\$10.0 billion), and construction (\$16.8 billion). The value added of culture is over seven times larger than the sports estimate (which is \$979 million).

Whether for the celebration of art and music and Kootenay life, or a welcomed economic contribution, music festivals are music to many people's ears.

In 2014 the RDI mapped festivals and special events, as rural development 'assets', across the Columbia Basin-Boundary region on the RDI's [Digital Basin](#). It is recognized that festivals change and new festivals pop up so please also check regional tourism websites, and community and festival websites for the latest information. If you have related, updated information that should be included on the RDI Digital Basin please [let us know](#).

Photo credit: Nick Diamond and Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism



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