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NTS DramaFest Celebrates 80 Years in 2026 with Province-Wide Youth Theatre Festivals Culminating in North York

Toronto, ON — February 5, 2026 — NTS DramaFest, Ontario’s largest youth theatre festival, returns in 2026 with district, regional, and provincial celebrations across the province, culminating in the 2026 Ontario Provincial Showcase in North York.

Founded in 1946, **NTS DramaFest** marks its 80th anniversary this year, celebrating eight decades of empowering young people through theatre. The festival is presented by the **National Theatre School of Canada (NTS)**, which is also celebrating its 65th anniversary during the 2025–26 season.

Engaging more than 12,000 secondary school students and educators annually, **NTS DramaFest** supports young people in the creation and presentation of theatrical performance—offering opportunities to explore creativity, empathy, and community through theatre. The festival’s mission is rooted in accessibility and inclusion, encouraging collaboration, curiosity, equity, safety, and celebration—values that have guided NTS DramaFest for eight decades.

*“For 80 years, NTS DramaFest has been far more than a celebration of theatre,” says **Fanny Pagé, CEO of the National Theatre School of Canada**. “It has empowered generations of young people, championed collaboration, storytelling, and community, and inspired artistic citizenship across Canada. I am deeply proud of the students and educators whose work continues to shape NTS DramaFest, and whose impact reaches far beyond the stage.”*

From Local Stages to the Provincial Showcase

NTS DramaFest District Festivals begin on February 17, launching a province-wide season that unfolds through **six Regional Festivals—North, East, South, West, Central, and Toronto**— typically running three to six nights each. From every region, two outstanding productions are selected to perform at the Ontario Provincial Showcase, which rotates host locations annually.

The 2026 Provincial Showcase in North York will bring together the province's most compelling student theatre, offering audiences a powerful snapshot of the voices shaping the future of Canadian performance.

“In its 80th year, the NTS DramaFest is proof that youth creativity is a key to nation-building. When students are given the space and support to tell their stories, they don’t just make theatre. They make a community,” says **Richard Lee, Co-Director of NTS DramaFest.**

While rooted in Ontario, NTS DramaFest also connects young artists across British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, reinforcing the festival’s national impact and its role in fostering a vibrant, interconnected youth theatre community.

Honouring Original Work and Playwriting

Over the decades, **NTS DramaFest** has championed student and teacher playwrights, publishing anthologies including *Concrete Daisy and Other Plays* (45th anniversary), a second volume for its 65th anniversary, and *Festival Voices: Plays by Students and Teachers for the Sears Ontario Drama Festival*, published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2010. These initiatives reflect NTS DramaFest’s enduring commitment to original storytelling and youth-driven creative expression.

“As we celebrate 80 years of NTS DramaFest, we’re celebrating more than longevity—we’re celebrating possibility,” says **Erika Kierulf, Co-Director of NTS DramaFest.** *“The festival continues to evolve because young people continue to challenge us with their creativity, perspectives, and questions. This isn’t just high school theatre—it’s young artists engaging seriously with the world around them.”*

Looking ahead, **NTS DramaFest** is in the process of formalizing a new partnership with the NAC English Theatre, with plans to relaunch *Festival Voices* in the 2026–27 season, further amplifying student and educator voices on a national stage.

Professional Adjudicators from Stage and Screen

This milestone year features an exceptional roster of adjudicators drawn from Canada’s theatre, film, and television communities. Highlights include Paul Sun-Hyung Lee (*Avatar: The Last Airbender, Kim’s Convenience*) adjudicating the East Toronto district, alongside artists such as Micah Jondel DeShazer (Durham) and Kaitlyn Riordan (York), among many others across the province.

By pairing emerging artists with working professionals, **NTS DramaFest** continues to serve as a vital bridge between youth theatre and the professional stage.

80 Years of Youth Theatre Leadership

Founded in 1946, **NTS DramaFest** has evolved under several banners and partnerships over the decades while remaining rooted in its core mission: providing young people with meaningful opportunities to create, collaborate, and connect through theatre. Originally established in Ontario, the festival has grown into a cornerstone of youth theatre education, sparking creative journeys for thousands of students and educators across the province.

Since 2017, **NTS DramaFest** has been presented by the National Theatre School of Canada, aligning the festival’s eight-decade legacy with one of the country’s most influential institutions for professional theatre training.

Together, **NTS DramaFest** and the **National Theatre School of Canada** form a continuum—from early exploration in high school theatre to professional artistic practice—nurturing voices that go on to shape Canadian stages coast to coast.

Supporting Canada’s Next Generation of Theatre Artists

NTS DramaFest's success is driven by a province-wide network of dedicated teachers, volunteers, artists, and community members who organize 19 District Festivals annually. These local celebrations serve as the entry point for students across Ontario to share their work, receive professional feedback, and gain recognition for their talents.

Each year, NTS DramaFest awards:

- Four \$3,000 Ken & Ann Watts Memorial Foundation Scholarships
- Up to four \$1,500 bursaries to graduating students pursuing careers in the performing arts
- A \$750 Playwriting Award bursary recognizing original student work

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