

## No reggae vibe at city hall

Strike means Irie Music Festival will run only at Queen's Park this year

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The Toronto civic workers' strike has created a not so Irie vibe for one of Toronto's marquee summer music festivals.

Patrons converging on Toronto's downtown core next weekend, one of the city's busiest times of year, will notice a significant change caused by the absence of the TD Canada Trust Irie Music Festival from Nathan Phillips Square. The entire festival will be at Queen's Park this year.

Throughout its eight-year existence, hosting duties for the reggae-centred festival have been shared between Queen's Park and the city hall venue. The festival's artistic director, Phil Vassell, said that plan ended up in the bin as the strike dragged on.

The free festival was scheduled to kick off next Friday at Nathan Phillips, then go until Sunday at that venue, with performances at Queen's Park Saturday to holiday Monday.

"We were hoping to have two main stages this year again," Vassell said. "We were informed that until the strike settles we won't have access to Nathan Phillips Square."

Moving to one location left organizers scrambling to juggle the scheduling and lineup of artists.

"It is a huge task, but we have to make contingency plans," he said. "There will be an impact on a number of other festivals."

Vassell hopes the new setup won't deter any of the 60,000 people expected from attending. The urban-flavoured festival will dish out a healthy serving of everything from reggae to gospel music, poetry, salsa, African drums and dance performances.

"Caribana is to soca what Irie is to reggae," Vassell said.

Irie has featured such prominent reggae performers as Maxi Priest, Toots and the Maytals and Morgan Heritage, whose co-frontman, Gramps Morgan, will be one of the headliners this year, along with Fab 5 and Byron Lee's Dragonaires. There is also a substantial lineup of budding local performers.

Irie has managed to dance its way through the economic storm unscathed. Increased sponsorship from title sponsors like TD has helped it "to continue to do a lot of the things we wanted to do," Vassell said.

"Now the real issue for us is less about the corporate funding, because a much larger issue is the strike and how we deal with that situation given that there is no resolution at this point."



SUPPLIED PHOTO

*Gramps Morgan of Morgan Heritage will co-headline the Irie Music Festival.*