

ARTS

Luminato cooks up some food for tots

JONATHAN FORANI | 13/06/05 | Last Updated: 13/06/05 11:09 AM ET



The chef converts the fold-up table into a thick plate of dough. He warns of the hot oil on the staffroom counter, and lays out the circular dough-cutters. As he introduces a bowl of chocolate to the mix, the bright young eyes in the room grow brighter.

These are inner-city school kids in Toronto's Regent Park, but for Luminato 2013, they're master chefs.

On June 15 and 16, Toronto's Distillery District will be transformed into the "crazy kooky aesthetic" of a child's dreamscape. Luminato and Mammalian Diving Reflex will revamp the brick-paved décor of the Distillery District for the **Future Tastes of Toronto: At the Kids' Table** event. Though chefs will take the reins cooking the food, involving kids from Toronto neighbourhoods like Regent Park and St. James Town is the focus this year.

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"It is definitely a bit of a departure, an elaboration on a tangent, from the Luminato angle," says chef curator Joshna Maharaj. "It's not just about who makes the most delicious thing, or who has the prettiest display."

This year, it's about the kids. Chef Maharaj, who works on food access programs across the city, says food is one of the best methods of therapy for underserved communities like Regent Park and St. James Town, areas many of the Future Tastes children call home.

"The beautiful thing about food is that it has the power to reanimate a community," she says. "It literally can bring a community to life."

Though he's now in the business of community-based cooking at Regent Park's Paintbox Bistro, Chef Tallis Voakes, who leads the chocolate-glazed doughnut workshop, comes from the world of fine dining. The move to community-based restaurants was a big shift for Voakes, but the fulfillment is different, he says. He's seen many struggling people transformed by social programs in the kitchen, and hopes the Future Tastes kids will be similarly inspired at Luminato.

"I think they're going to get a sense of anybody can cook, anybody can be in the kitchen. I think that's the biggest thing," he says. "If you want to be a cook, all it takes is drive and want."

At the festival, Chef Voakes plans to make different varieties of doughnuts like the ones he made with his fourth-grade apprentices.

This is the sixth year the Luminato Education and Community Outreach program has teamed with schools in the Regent Park community. The fourth-graders at Lord Dufferin Public School are some of the first to take such a participatory role at the food event.



The class has been meeting chefs and preparing with Mammalian Diving Reflex, a social performance-art collective whose most well-known project is Haircuts For Kids, where the group put adults in the barber shop chair and scissors in the hands of kids. Through a series of workshops focused on developing their culinary and communication skills, the Future Taste kids have prepared with Mammalian for the Luminato festival. Over two days at the Distillery District, they will assist the chefs, socialize with guests, and even judge an *Iron Chef*-type cooking contest.

“I think it creates big opportunities that they might not have outside of school to see where they could go in their futures and what they could achieve,” says Lord Dufferin teacher Shelley Lowry of her fourth-graders. “These chefs are talking about where they went to school, and how they became chefs, and how at a young age they were interested in it. I think, if they didn’t get to meet the chefs, some of them would never think that they could do it as well.”

Even though the Future Tastes program offers a less sophisticated option than the typical arts festival installation, Luminato 2013 isn’t without its highbrow concepts — at least in the blue prints.

Jorn Weisbrodt, Artistic Director since the 2012 fest, calls “Gesamtkunstwerk” the festival’s key concept this year. That’s “total work of art” translated from

Wagner's German. In other words, focusing on every step and component to this year's programming (like the more than 50 Future Tastes workshops) is key to the process and final product.

"I really want to sort of seduce people to open up their horizons and experience many different things," says Weisbrodt.

The perfect match for his vision was Darren O'Donnell of Mammalian Diving Reflex.

"He's a really lovely guy, but there's sort of this slight wickedness about what he does, too," jokes Weisbrodt, noting Mammalian's Haircuts for Kids project. "He likes the idea that he creates these projects and the adults sort of suffer a little bit."

At Luminato, the Lord Dufferin fourth-graders and other children will run the Future Tastes event, guiding patrons around the Distillery District as they sample chef creations.

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"I guess it's mostly a slight impatience with the general hypocrisy that most people operate on," says O'Donnell about the "wickedness" Weisbrodt joked about. "A simple situation is the utter disrespect for children and their rights, and their rights to partake in the sort of civic engagement and the civic sphere of life."

More than just reaching out to underprivileged communities, O'Donnell hopes the Luminato event will flip expectations on their head, as with other Mammalian Diving Reflex projects.

"Those events are mostly targeted at, and mostly people who participate in it are a pretty narrow slice of the population," says O'Donnell of festivals like Luminato. "Those events, I think, benefit quite a bit from other points of view."

Particularly the point of view of children from areas in which our Grade 4 doughnut cooks reside, he says. The food is secondary to goals like these. Ultimately, it's about the kids.

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