

# MEDIA RELEASE



*For Immediate Release*

## Back by Popular Demand! Arts Commons Brings Free, All-Ages Outdoor Performance Spectacle Squonk: Hand to Hand to Olympic Plaza This August

**June 27, 2022 - CALGARY** – The unconventional, unexpected, and unforgettable Squonk Opera makes a highly anticipated return to Olympic Plaza this summer to bring joy and uninhibited play to families of all ages. Celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Squonk is a Pittsburgh-based performance art troupe known for their fun, interactive, over-the-top outdoor performances. Squonk’s latest show *Hand to Hand* invites audience members to control two giant purple hands, rigged like sailing ships, as the Squonk band plays their signature rock music in an all-ages experience like no other. **Squonk: *Hand to Hand*** runs for seven hour-long performances from **August 29 - 31** on **Olympic Plaza** for **free!** **Learn more at [artscommons.ca/squonk](https://artscommons.ca/squonk).**

Calgary audiences first experienced Squonk when they debuted as the centerpiece of the 2015 Calgary International Children’s Festival, packing Olympic Plaza with viewers of all ages and skyrocketing the festival’s attendance to 50,000 people. This year, anyone and everyone is invited to put down a picnic blanket, pull up a festival chair, and enjoy the spectacle for Squonk’s anticipated return to Calgary.

Squonk combines catchy rock tunes with huge, inflatable art pieces that expand, wave, and dance to the music. *Hand to Hand* was inspired by the wish to reach out and reconnect in an isolated and divisive time. Squonk asks, “What better way to do that than with a pair of puppet hands the size of a house?”

“Our show will end with ropes of many colors being passed out to audiences, each moving a different finger, a web of connections,” says Jackie Dempsey of Squonk. “Audience members will come together to grab the rigging, each individual powering a larger movement. We want to encourage participation rather than consumption, dialogue rather than monologue, shared discovery, no labels, no pre-judgment, no words, just people face to face, festive, and making a community of the imagination. All hands on deck!”

Since their first big show in a Pittsburgh junkyard, Squonk’s productions have taken the group to Off-Broadway, Broadway, *America’s Got Talent*, Europe, Asia and all over the United States. The group has released nine albums of its progressive rock, a blend of styles featuring driving rhythms and hypnotic riffs. Squonk’s productions have been seen by over one million people live, and by over 14 million on network TV. Critics have lauded Squonk as “a multimedia troupe of infinite jest with an imagination to match” (The New York Times) and “Playful! Imaginative! Fun and outlandish!” (Pittsburgh Quarterly).

“Squonk made an unparalleled impact when the troupe last performed in Calgary back in 2015 and we can’t wait to welcome them back,” says Jennifer Johnson, VP of Programming at Arts Commons. “Their newest show celebrates what it means to be together as a community, and that’s a beautiful message worth sharing. The fact that we can offer it for free, to Calgarians of any age, from 0 to 99, is the icing on the cake.”

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This is the second year that Arts Commons has shared a large-scale music event in Olympic Plaza to bring the summer to a close. Last season's *Showtime: A Live Music Celebration* packed the Plaza with people for a free outdoor concert of local singer-songwriter Amelie Patterson and a Classic Albums Live performance of Creedance Clearwater Revival's *Chronicle Vol. 1*. These accessible events combine a love for the performing arts with a devotion for the outdoors that is intrinsically Calgarian.

**What:** Squonk  
**When:** Monday, August 21 at 7 p.m.  
Tuesday, August 30 at 12 p.m., 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.  
Wednesday, August 31 at 12 p.m., 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.  
**Where:** Olympic Plaza  
**Who:** Arts Commons  
**Tickets:** Free! No tickets required.

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For media inquiries, high resolution images, or more information contact:  
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**Arts Commons** is the largest performing arts centre in Western Canada located in the heart of downtown Calgary. For over 35 years, it has been a key contributor to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of Calgarians. It is home to six resident companies, including Alberta Theatre Projects, Arts Commons Presents, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Downstage, One Yellow Rabbit, and Theatre Calgary. It houses six gallery spaces, five theatres, and the Jack Singer Concert Hall, and promotes local, national, international, emerging and established artists with a focus on inclusion, diversity, accessibility, and equity.