Germany celebrates the 300th birthday of King Frederick the Great this year. A troubled, enigmatic man who espoused the Enlightenment, hated his father, barely tolerated his wife, and preferred French to German, the Prussian monarch also known in his day as “Old Fritz” reigned for 46 years. Major exhibitions, concerts, and the world premiere of a new musical called Frederick: Myth and Tragedy will explore his life and times. Frederick turned his lifelong military training into victorious campaigns that made Prussia a European superpower before he retired to his Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam to make music and engage in intellectual arguments with the likes of Voltaire. Today, vast areas of Potsdam, including that exquisite palace, enjoy UNESCO World Heritage Site status—a fitting memorial to an enlightened king.

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Once the newscasters of their communities, town criers still shout out their proclamations in towns and cities across Canada and around the world. And next summer you can expect a right royal yell-out when the World Invitational Town Crier Tournament comes to the Rideau Canal, the UNESCO World Heritage Site linking Kingston, Canada’s first capital city, with Ottawa. The Battle of the Capitals, set for July 26 to August 5, 2013, will trigger fun and games in communities all along the Rideau as criers, with their ringing bells and colourful costumes, raise their stentorian voices in the traditional “Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!”—“Hear ye,” from the Anglo-Norman for listen.

Okanagan Opals

Opals, the mysterious, fiery stones Australia claims as its national gemstone, are now being mined in Canada for the first time. Australia produces more than 95 percent of the world’s precious opals, but Opal Resources Canada Inc. has begun mining the stones in the Okanagan Valley some 25 kilometres (15 miles) northwest of Vernon, BC. And, for $50 a day, visitors can dig for their own opals at the site. The company also cuts and sets opals to create one-of-a-kind jewellery, which visitors can buy at the Opal Miners Gift Shop just north of Vernon.