Social challenges of language diversity

by Yusheng Cai

When Andy Yan was born in Vancouver, his parents made the decision to teach him Cantonese, their heritage language, as well as English. Bilingualism, which wasn’t common at the time, turned out to be an asset for Yan. Now a senior city planner, Yan fills the gaps between Chinese and English-speaking communities.

Few have the same luck as Yan. In 2016, the number of people across the country who reported an immigrant mother tongue rose from 6.8 million in 2011 to 7.7 million, according to Statistics Canada. In Metro Vancouver, Chinese dialects, including Mandarin and Cantonese, outpaced Punjabi and became the fastest growing language, followed by Tagalog, Korean and Farsi.

In order to catch up with the broader society, however, immigrant families prioritize English or French over other languages. “Social cohesion depends on social communication. And obviously, if people are unable to communicate, that makes social cohesion much more difficult. So the extent to which people can learn English as a second language is very important,” says Dan Hiebert, a UBC geography professor.

Bridging two communities

“A variety of institutes are impacted by increasing immigrant languages and this calls for more productive translation services,” Hiebert says. “For example, libraries have to attempt to keep up with the populations that they serve. You can extrapolate that eventually people that are coming from these different linguistic groups are going to need things like health care and services for the elderly. City planners who deal with social issues have to pay attention to this.”

The reality is that resources aren’t always readily available. Among highly-educated Iranian-Canadians, many end up jobs unrelated to their education or professional experience due to lack of language services for them.

See “Language Diversity” page 8.

Social cohesion depends on social communication. And obviously, if people are unable to communicate, that makes social cohesion much more difficult.

Verbatim

An urban perspective

by Léa Tricoire

“When you first arrive in a town, you see streets in perspective. Rows of nondescript buildings. Everything is unknown, virgin territory. A day will come when you’ll have walked those streets, gone to the end of the perspectives, come to know those buildings, interacted with the people. Living in this city, you’ll have walked along that street ten, twenty, one hundred times. After a while, it will belong to you because you have lived here.”

This famous excerpt from L’Auberge Espagnole (The Spanish Apartment) could not better illustrate the way I felt when I took my first steps in Vancouver, a city whose streets I had traced about ten times on a map. For a whole year, I had time to picture a setting and conjure up architecture while wondering in which district I would like to live. I imagined how I would go to such and such a street to meet friends and go down another to go to work – a sort of blueprint I sketched according to the whims of my imagination.

I was living in Nantes, France, at the time, settled in a life that suited me perfectly. I had a pleasant job in an art gallery, I lived in a nice apartment and spent most of my evenings with friends. However, I had an irresistible itch to discover other things and try another kind of life. And then, fiction became reality. My first steps in Vancouver meant feeling my way, discovering the eccentricity of Commercial Drive and the dizzying heights of downtown. Whatever I had imagined no longer existed, rows upon rows of streets created unknown perspectives without landmarks. Did I like the city at first sight? I don’t know.

See “Verbatim” page 8.

In order to catch up with the broader society, however, immigrant families prioritize English or French over other languages.
Underrepresented youth tell their stories

by JAKE MCGRAIL

DisPLACEment, a media arts program run by the Access to Media Education Society (AMES), looks to give young people in marginalized communities the tools to represent themselves and tell their stories.

Founded over 20 years ago, the Access to Media Education Society’s goal is to provide access to media training and technology for people misrepresented or invisible in mainstream media. One of their current programs, disPLACEment, brings together young people who identify as indigenous, refugees or migrants and gives them the space to express themselves and tell their stories through film. A series of videos created and produced in teams of 3–5 over three consecutive weekends in October will be presented at a public screening at Robson Square on Dec. 8.

“I think that a lot of the myths and biases that hurt marginalized communities are perpetuated through mainstream media,” says Debekha Guin, the Executive Director of AMES. “This is about giving young people the tools to represent themselves and set control over their own stories.”

Their stories matter

The program started in late September when the 24 young people involved in the project went on a three day trip to Galiano Island, where they shared their stories with each other and learned about some of the issues facing different communities, as well as filmmaking.

New arrival in Canada, the experience of getting here, and what people face once they get here, whether that’s generalized racism or just trying to make a way in a country where they might not speak the language or have family connections.

There will also be videos from the perspective of youth with indigenous backgrounds, who after generations are still feeling the effects of the colonial oppression of their homeland. While each of the young people involved in the program brings different stories to the group, the overriding message that Guin wants this program to instill in them is the same.

“Your stories matter. Your perspectives matter. You have the capacity to convey them in a way that people are interested in seeing or listening to. I want people to walk away having more compassion and understanding for what some other communities are going through, as opposed to fighting over limited resources.”

Feeling the effects

That message has resonated with the young people taking part in the program.

“For me, disPLACEment is not only about sharing stories and sparking dialogue for those who watch the videos, it’s also about the work that takes place within the group,” says Denomme. “I really feel a part of a team.”

Probably the most important thing that it is that you provide a platform for self-expression that is not necessarily available for everyone. “We all have brilliant stories to tell,” says Denomme. “We are all artists. Creating a safe bubble where we can nourish and create art, that is very important. We all have a lot to say and everyone needs to hear stories that are diverse and different. If we don’t create space for that, then that’s another layer of silence.”

“I am a newcomer to Canada,” says Yan Pan, who moved from Iran in 2016. “I had a lot of experience with bad things in my life. Before this, I could hardly find someone to hear my story, but now I’ve been feeling better because I can see that there are people who care and understand.”

Pian heard about disPLACEment through a mentor he had worked with on a different film program, and is focused creating the soundtrack for his group’s film.

“The biggest aim of mine is to bring the problems that everyone has as a good life here, but that’s not necessarily the case for newcomers, indigenous people and others.”

For Danica Denomme, another one of the youth involved in the program, disPLACEment is not only about sharing stories and sparking dialogue for those who watch the videos, it’s also about the work that takes place within the group.

“I really feel a part of a team,” says Denomme. “It’s about filmmaking but it’s also about building relationships and working in collaboration and producing something that we’re proud of. I want everybody to succeed and I’ve seen that happen.”

Probably the most important thing that it is that you provide a platform for self-expression that is not necessarily available for everyone. “We all have brilliant stories to tell,” says Denomme. “We are all artists. Creating a safe bubble where we can nourish and create art, that is very important. We all have a lot to say and everyone needs to hear stories that are diverse and different. If we don’t create space for that, then that’s another layer of silence.”

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“Spark”ing conversations about diversity

By COLLEEN ADDISON

Julie Ann Crommett wants to raise awareness about the lack of women and minorities both in front of and behind the camera.

Crommett tells a sad story: access the entertainment industry, women and minorities are being under-represented. Yet, she says, there’s hope.

“A lot of times, we’re defaulting to stereotypes or to the easiest shortcut for our brain around who’s the leader or who’s the most talented person,” says Crommett, a long-time employee of entertainment giants such as Google and Disney. “We need to be aware, so people can take action.”

Crommett plans to help bring this awareness to Vancouver in a talk given for SPARK Animation 2017’s Business Symposium, held at VIFF Vancity Theatre on October 27. Her talk, Unconscious Bias, which begins at 4:30 p.m., will explore the reasons why being aware of how we think will play a crucial role in helping more women and minorities become part of the entertainment industry.

Unconscious bias

It’s people’s unconscious, rather than overt racism or sexism, Crommett points to as a major obstacle in the hiring of women and minority ethnic groups. “Unconscious bias is the result of shortcuts that our brain takes because of the amount of data we have to process at any given moment,” Crommett clarifies.

She adds that in order to cope with the overwhelming amount of information, our brains process most of the data unconsciously.

By knowing about these biases and understanding how they influence our choices, people can create change. Crommett cites the example of Orchestra Philharmonic, which altered their audition process to make sure women were given an equal chance.

“The Philharmonic had the bright idea of putting carpet down on the stage. It was the sound of people’s shoes that had unconsciously triggered the judges,” says Crommett. “Then it was about 50-50 hiring. And that is now the standard practice at all Philharmonic Orchestras around the world.”

Crommett emphasizes that now is a great time to combat these types of biases. As more women are graduating from art and animation school than men, Crommett wants to ensure that these female graduates have a fair chance in the industry.
For weeks now Vancouver has been covered in ads urging us to “Fight for Beauty,” promoting a so-called exhibit downtown. With bus shelter ads, google ads, youtube ads, and countless full-page newspaper ads, this is one of the most prominent marketing campaigns the city has seen in years. But what is really behind this supposed fight for beauty?

The ubiquitous slogan and ma-genta-coloured ads are a project of Westbank, a giant local and international development company run by Ian Gillespie. As the corporation behind projects like Woodward’s, Vancouver House, and the just-approved 57-storey luxury tower at Burrard and Nelson, Westbank is remaking Vancouver’s skyline.

Given the wall-to-wall publicity, I decided to go check out Westbank’s “Fight for Beauty” myself. I dropped by on a rainy Saturday afternoon, taking my kids along after their swimming lessons. The exhibit is set up in a tent between the Shaw Tower and the opulent Pacific Rim Ho-tel. When we arrived, a valet was parking a Lamborghini.

Rather than something culturally or artistically significant, what I found was a sterile and surprisingly small-scale “exhib-it” that is little more than thinly-veiled PR for the developer. Most of installations are simple photographs or scale models of West Bank’s developments. Each piece is accompanied by rather anodyne audio explanations, many of them narrated by Gillespie himself. Sure, there’s a Shane Koyczan poem mounted high up on the wall, and a few sublime designs by the likes of the late Bing Thom. But the artistry, and the artists, are co-opted in this fight for corporate branding and profits – talent and beauty are subsumed by the banality of late capitalism.

The first piece is neon-lit po-eetry that reads as self-parody: “The Real Fight for Beauty is the Fight for the City, the Fight for Beauty is the Fight for the City, the Fight for Beauty is the Fight for the City.”

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Workplace meditation saves lives
by SUsAN HANCOCK

As a certified organizational change manager and global spañer, Quan proposes workplace mindfulness meditation and change management tools to build employee resiliency to company change.

"Mindfulness meditation is about hitting the pause button on your butt and being present in the moment through meditation," says Quan.

Research data provided by HealthyFamiliesBC suggest that 21 per cent of the working population in Canada experience mental health issues such as fatigue, insomnia and depression, which have the greatest impact on workplace productivity. Approximately 350,000 people in B.C. are affected by mental health issues in the workplace every year. The economic cost of mental health in B.C. is at least $6.65 billion per year.

Quan believes that employees should take ownership of their health, she also thinks that organizations should support employees through health and wellness programs to help reduce stress and mental health issues.

"Companies that are forward thinking realize one thing: they really care about the well-being of their staff - recognize that they can contribute to the well-being of their employees by offering health and wellness programs," says Quan.

Mediation improves employee engagement
In Quan’s workplace paper, Meditation: A powerful change management tool, she shares results from the program she developed for Pacific Blue Cross while working as an organizational change manager. The program began in 2011 with 12 employees interested in meditation practices, but in 2014 when the Pacific Blue Cross transformed their business operations with the adoption of new technology, the numbers of participants jumped to 100.

"It was a Goliath project for Pacific Blue Cross, but throughout the very difficult and bumpy start, everyone was calm and committed to achieving a successful launch," says Quan.

In months later, the Pacific Blue Cross conducted an employee engagement survey. One of the questions asked of employees was if they would go the extra mile for the organization. Quan and her team were surprised, but excited to share that 98 per cent of respondents were still prepared to work hard to meet company goals.

"This statistic sent us through the roof. We’d been through a very difficult time, and in months later employees were still committed to the organization," says Quan.

Progressive organizations like Google, the City of Vancouver and VanCity, to name just a few, have adopted mindfulness meditation practices through Quan’s business, the Calm Monkey.

"Giving employees the space to be in the present and think calmly helps them make better decisions," says Quan. "When people are self-aware, they’re mindful of what they are saying, which reduces conflict and encourages people to work better together."

Kuli Yee is an administrator for retirement registered savings accounts at VanCity. She’s also a workplace mindfulness meditation facilitator for the organization. Yee is one of six employees that have been trained by Quan to create three different lunchtime groups across the organization, in May months prior to the program, Yee only practiced in the privacy of her home. She then integrated her passion with colleagues at work. Yee currently uses a group extending her weekly meditation session, but attendance does fluctuate depending on people's work schedules.

"I never thought this was something that would happen at my workplace," she says. "It’s very empowering. I feel much more engaged with my organization because I feel I’m able to help other people."

Mediation builds diversity and inclusion in workplace
There are still a few misconceptions about meditation. Some people identify it as being religious or spiritual, while others see it as new-age therapy that encourages escapism. Quan explains how these ideas couldn’t be further from the truth. Workplace meditation is actually very grounding in the present and isn’t connected to religion. The amazing part of workplace meditation for Quan is that it creates shared experience, or what she describes as an unexpected sense of community in a diverse group of people.

"Workplace mindfulness meditation welcomes everyone regardless of their ethnicity, religious beliefs, culture or age," says Quan.

Quan is scheduled to speak at the Project World/Business Analysis World Conference in Vancouver on October 31. For more information, please visit www.pmbaconferences.com.

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Tales told through Taiwanese comic books

by VINH NGUYEN

Nick Stember, a translator and historian in the field of Chinese comic books, has been working closely with the Ministry of Culture in Taiwan and the Grayhawk Agency on the Books from Taiwan project. He has been translating excerpts from notable Taiwanese comic books to catch a publisher’s interest.

Stember will be delivering his talk, Telling Tales: Tradition and Historiography in Taiwanese Comics, on Oct. 27 at SFU Harbour Centre.

Chinese comics
The definition of the term “comics” in the context of China is complex and rich in history. It varies from continuous art sequences, to paradigmatic ink paintings or satirical drawings.

"There’s obviously a long history of sequential art in China, with things like the Buddhist cave paintings at Dunhuang, completed during the Tang dynasty, or the many illustrated novels that have survived from the Ming," says Stember. "Even traditional Chinese ink paintings often tell a story, to paraphrase one of my mentors, a fisherman is never just a fisherman. But more narrowly defined, comics as topical (often satirical) drawings arrived in China 150 years ago, with the opium wars," he adds.

According to Stember, the earliest Chinese comic strips date back to the late 1920s, when Hong Kong, or “linked picture books” started to appear. The art styles expressed in those comics changed through time, says Stember. Chinese cartoonists in the 1920s and 30s based their work on the art styles seen in magazines like Vogue and Vanity Fair. During the Mao Zedong years, comic books suffered a reversal, especially on the mainland. "In mainland China, Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Zedong, who ended up double majoring in computer science and Chinese, and eventually just Chinese." says Stember.

Talking about his work in Chinese comics, Stember says that the comics came first, then the Chinese language much later.

"I’ve been a comics fan since I was a kid, mostly for the art," says Stember. "[...] somehow ended up double majoring in computer science and Chinese, and eventually just Chinese." for more information, please visit www.sfu.ca/ davidamont/events and www.booksfromtaiwan.tw.
Artist showcases Latin American women in new exhibition

by NAOMI TSE

In an effort to pay homage to her Latin American heritage, Clarissa Argueta will be showcasing her acrylic paintings titled “Women in Colour” at Place Des Arts in Coquitlam, Oct. 13-Nov. 10.

Argueta has been drawing or painting for as long as she can remember. After completing a MFA in graphic design from the University of Illinois in Chicago, she moved to Vancouver in 2002. Originally from El Salvador, her artwork centres on celebrating her ancestral heritage and the mysticism found in Latin American idiomsyncrasies, popular culture and folklore, by showcasing indigenous women in portrait style paintings.

“My colours are very vibrant, there is a very cheerful feeling to the paintings,” says Argueta.

“It’s very celebratory of my culture and I showcase indigenous women as the axis of this magical universe.”

Not only is Argueta interested in painting Latin American women, she is also fascinated by the ancient textiles woven by indigenous communities and the intriguing symbolism that lie within them.

“To me, painting the women who create them [the textiles] is like a tribute to their craftsmanship and it’s a privilege to be able to participate in this heritage. This is very important to me as a Latin American,” says Argueta.

The exhibition

Argueta describes her paintings as minimalistic, in an effort to focus on the beauty of the women and their garments while illustrating their resilience and efforts in keeping their traditions alive.

“Now that I live abroad, I’m not exposed to this rich and colorful visual stimuli [textiles] anymore. You could say I long for that and these and many other ancient traditions that remain very close to my heart,” says Argueta.

For her upcoming exhibition, Argueta will also be showcasing some artwork with a Day of the Dead theme.

“’It’s a very fascinating concept to me, and all the mysticism and symbolism behind life and death as a transition and not an ending. Therefore, the equal importance of celebrating and paying tribute to both events,’ says Argueta.

Textile symbolism

The textiles that Argueta speaks of include garments such as traditional blouses, skirts, waistbands as well as shrouds or blankets that are usually woven from natural materials such as cotton or wool. The material is also dyed with natural dyes. The craftsmanship of each garment, says Argueta, represents the honour and pride of the people who created them and each design is unique and requires pre-planning before the weaving process can begin. Each garment can take weeks to months to create.

“All symbols chosen are pre-planned and try to communicate an idea,” she says. “A young woman might create a traditional blouse, or huipil, to communicate what village she comes from, her marital status and the rank she holds in her community. The bottom line is to show the pride of the weaver and how good they are.”

For more information, please visit www.placedesarts.ca.

Translation by Louise Dawson
We wanted to bring attention to the critical and creative work by Canadian designers and makers that demonstrated an awareness of the Scandinavian aesthetic culture.

Michael Prokopow, curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Nordic influence through design

By kevin vergel

Curators Rachel Gotlieb and Michael Prokopow look to reveal the connection between Scandinavian and Canadian design in their upcoming exhibit, True Nordic, running Oct. 28, 2017–Jan. 28, 2018 at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

True Nordic considers Scandinavian social and design principles and how the aesthetics of the region influenced the development of industrial design and artisanal craftsmanship in Canada. The exhibit will display a wide range of mediums from multiple designers including Niels Bendtsen, Bocci, Karen Bulow, Kjeld and Erica Deichmann, Thor Hansen, Andrew Jones, Janis Kravis, molo, Carl Poul Petersen, Rudolph Rensius and Marion Smith.

“What is great about the exhibition is that it is interdisciplinary, meaning visitors will get to see work by artisans trained in wood, glass, clay, metal and textiles,” says Gotlieb.

Scandinavian design principles

The vast popularity of Danish Modern and Scandinavian design from the 1950s, ’60s and onward turned on the ideas of simpler and more progressive modes of living. Prokopow says that while in many parts of the world Scandinavian modern design is appreciated for its style, in Canada there is a deeper appreciation for the use of materials that can be found in a similar climate and topography.

“Canadian designers who adopted and adapted Scandinavian and Nordic aesthetic influences did so because the principles inherent in objects from the Nordic – simplicity, integrity, calm and natural palettes, thoughtful use of materials – resonated given the similarities of natural conditions between Canada and the Nordic,” says Prokopow.

Canadian talent, Scandinavian design

Even though the showcase features Scandinavian design principles, True Nordic aims to highlight Canadian artists. The exhibition displays works by Nordic émigrés to Canada or artists who were trained in that part of the world, and also by designers who adopted the principles, stylistic emphasis and material practices of the region.

“We wanted to bring attention to the critical and creative work by Canadian designers and makers that demonstrated an awareness of the Scandinavian aesthetic culture,” says Prokopow.

For more information, please visit www.vanartgallery.bc.ca.
A haunting Japanese story of heartbreak

by MASHA RADEMAKERS

Master practitioners of the Japanese art form Noh combine their strengths with professional opera singers in Komachi Visited, an East meets West performance of a heartrending Japanese story. The Show talked with librettist and director Colleen Lan-ki, scholar of Asian theatre and a Noh practitioner herself, about the challenges of creating a Noh piece for a Canadian audience.

“When I first saw Noh performed in Japan, I was astounded. When a Noh actor is moving three steps, he is doing it a hundred percent. It is so strong, it’s stunning,” says Lan-ki, who decided twenty years ago that she wanted to move to Japan and learn the ancient art.

Becoming a master

Lan-ki trained in Noh dance and chant under Kita Noh School master Onoura Sadamas, whose daughter is the drummer of Komachi Visited. “To be an expert in Noh you have to start as a child, and so I am definitely not an expert. A Noh actor has to memorize more than hundred plays, with different costumes, music, and chants. They mostly reach a highly professional level when they are in their fifties,” Lan-ki says. Despite this, many amateur Noh groups enter their local stages as a hobby. “These people study and perform Noh because they like the history. And a funny fact is that the chanting is a very good breathing practice as well,” she says.

In addition to stylized gestures and exhilarating chants, Noh plots typically hinge on two main characters who perform on a minimalist stage backed by a chorus, a flute player and a drummer. Noh theatre was never done with opera before, until award-winning Iranian-Canadian composer Farshid Samandari was inspired by the talents of the famous Noh player Yamai Tsuano. He asked Lan-ki to create a new libretto in which Tsuano would star next to a soprano, Vancouver’s own Heather Pawsay.

“Just like Noh, chamber opera revolves around a singing chorus, a small musical ensemble, and a few lead characters. Both chamber opera and Noh theatre are performed by very devoted musicians, who train all their lives to become a master in their own traditional disciplines,” says Lan-ki.

“I took pieces of poems and traditional Noh plays about Ono-no-Komachi, who is a really famous poet of 9th century Japan. She wrote passionate poetry, sometimes with herself in the main role. I chose to base the story on the heartbreaking Noh play about her in which she blantly disdains a lover to sleep for hundreds days next to her house before he can be her lover. For Noh, the two lovers could neither live together. And the two could never be together,” says Lan-ki.

Gender roles change

The Noh play starts when the ghost of the lover starts haunting the ghost of the woman. “Both of the lovers make each other miserable, a thing that sometimes also happens in normal life,” says Lan-ki, laughing. “He won’t let her go to heaven. She won’t let him go to heaven. He won’t let her rest, because she hurt him so badly.” In the chamber opera, each of the two lovers are performed by very devoted male singers and a female singer and a drummer, and it is great to see the gender divisions change over the years. All these singers are, however, from the Kompa school, because in other schools female professionals are not that accepted yet,” says Lan-ki.

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The composer did a wonderful job of combining the two sounds. There are times that Noh takes the lead, and times when opera takes the lead,” says Lan-ki.

Although Noh traditionally was a male art form, in the last century women started to work as professional actors as well. “We have two professional female singers and a drummer, and it is great to see the gender divisions change over the years. All these singers are, however, from the Kompa school, because in other schools female professionals are not that accepted yet,” says Lan-ki.

A picture of the performance of Komachi Visited at the Cultch Historic Theatre. The show is available online at www.thecultch.com.

A pull of mother tongues on immigrant families

For Yan, it’s troublesome to think immigrants need to immediately learn French or English. “That’s a really big problem because it breaks away from the fact that our strength is in that diversity,” he says.

For immigrant families like Filsoof’s, to maintain that strength can be painful. Filsoof has tried for decades with little luck to teach Farsi to her children, who are now grown-ups struggling to pass their heritage to the next generation.

“I tried very hard to speak Farsi at home, and I still do. But my children have difficulty expressing themselves in Farsi. They speak something in Farsi but [if] they are stuck on it, they use the English words, says Filsoof.

She hopes there will be a Farsi school to keep the language alive. The same can be said about Mandarin. As Habacon points out, it’s unbelievable that Vancouver only has one public school with a Mandarin immersion program.

“That doesn’t make any sense in a city with so many Manda- rin speakers, so many people of Chinese descent. We have such strong connection to China in so many different ways, and yet there’s only one [Mandarin immersion program],” says Haba- con. “There’s no policy in place that actually encourages more linguistic diversity, to ensure our communities are able to sustain the diversity that we have.”

No one is a bad Canadian

Sherry Yu is a senior research associate for Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Media in B.C. Study. Her approach to increasing immigrant languages depends on ethnic media to facilitate dia-logues between communities.

“It can be a barrier at the begin-ning when newcomers don’t speak English at all. There’s a significant limitation for those people to interact with individuals and the broader society whose official languages are English and French,” says Yu.

“But that doesn’t mean they can’t function as citizens of Canada. If ethnic media provide enough information of what’s going on, this assists their integration and settlement.”

For Yu, social cohesion comes in two ways. “It’s not that immigrants are expected to integrate to the broader society, but there’s also a fair share of responsibility on the broader society to pay attention to these new members of the so-ciety and be able to integrate to their cultures as well,” she says.

Both Yu and Yan see language barriers as a potential opportunity. “You may not be able to speak English, but that doesn’t mean you are going to become a bad Canadian. (B.C. immigrant lan-guage) is something that one can use throughout one’s life, and it ensures they can work in a global economy. Similarly, we have to ensure that we keep those avenues of learning English and French,” says Yan.

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Speaking through calypso music

by CURTIS SEUFERT

Kobo Town, Toronto-based band fronted by founder-songwriter Drew Gonsalves on ukulele and vocals, will perform its own blend of calypso, dancehall and reggae music Nov. 2, 2017 at the Evergreen Cultural Centre in Coquitlam. Originally from Trinidad, Gonsalves writes songs based on places and events specific to the Caribbean and its history, but also incorporates themes and topics he feels are universal.

Born and raised in Port Of Spain, Trinidad, Gonsalves moved to Ottawa as a teenager. His cultural and musical knowledge of calypso—a style native to Trinidad—runs deep, but he says it wasn’t until he came to Canada that he really garnered an interest in this style of music.

“I am influenced a lot by old-time calypso, and I grew up surrounded by it in Trinidad, but I wasn’t really interested in it. I grew up surrounded by it in Trinidad, but I wasn’t really interested in it. I guess, like a lot of middle-class suburban Trinidadians, my taste was for foreign things,” says Gonsalves, laughing.

A bookish, introverted teenager at the time, Gonsalves notes that it was through reading about Trinidad and the rest of the Caribbean that compelled him to discover music originating from the area.

“It was really only in Canada that I discovered old-time calypso, hunting through record stores, amassing a collection of it,” says Gonsalves.

Calypso music

Gonsalves says that while reggae outside of Jamaica hit its height in popularity in the 1970s and early 80s, the dancehall genre is currently influencing chart-toppers from Drake to Ed Sheeran. He notes the calypso genre, unlike a few of its Caribbean contemporaries, has not seen the same kind of rise in popularity outside of Trinidad in quite some time.

“There have been different times that calypso has enjoyed a heyday, when it was popular beyond the Caribbean in the 1920s to 1930s, and in the early 1950s, but calypso has not the reach of the often-dark, colonial history of the Caribbean; it’s one of the major themes of the album, and it’s the deep impact of this history that allows Gonsalves to treat the topic through current events and places.

“It’s a region of the world that has suffered deeply in the past and still bears those wounds and scars today,” says Gonsalves. “A lot of the songs [on the album] take their reference points from different moments in history or places emblematic of the history of the Caribbean.”

Gonsalves says that his own songwriting, and calypso more broadly, is hardly unrelatable, even if the music or the topics that he takes on might seem distant.

“I think a lot of people are maybe unfamiliar with the particular details of the history of the Caribbean, even if it’s an often-visited place, but at the same time I find that in writing about particular places or things, that they’re part of a wider human experience, so they’re not really beyond the reach of communities here to relate to them,” he says. 

For more information on the event & Kobo Town, please visit www.evergreenculturalcentre.ca and www.kobotown.com.
**Cultural Calendar**

**October 24–November 7, 2017**

**by Simon Yee**

"By the pricking of my thumbs," as William Shakespeare once wrote, "Something wicked this way comes!" It is Halloween once again and there are many haunt- ing events to look forward to. The featured events this week focus on music, opera, film festivals, evening concerts, and more. Have a safe and happy Halloween everyone!

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**Potter’s House of Horrors**

Until Oct. 31
25697 72nd Avenue, Surrey
www.pottershouseofhorrors.com

Potter’s Farm & Nursery, a local garden centre in Surrey supplying plants, pottery and garden gifts, converts into the Potter’s House of Horrors every October. Potter, an 85-year-old resident of a local haunted house, is hoping to provide a delightfully frightful Halloween experience. There are a total of 19 haunted houses, one for each family, where the scariness factor is reduced, for children and adults of all ages. For more information, please visit their website.

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**Heart of the City Festival**

Oct. 25–29
North Van, Central Van, Downtown Eastside, Vancouver
www.heartofthecityfestival.com

For the 14th time, the Heart of the City Festival returns to the Downtown Eastside until Nov. 5. The festival is a bridge-building force that gives voice to the Downtown Eastside until Nov. 5. The theme of the 2017 festival is “tribute to women from all walks of life” and its low income residents, communities and neighbourhoods. The theme of the festival, "Honouring Women of the Downtown Eastside," pays tribute to women from all walks of life in the Downtown Eastside past and present. For a complete schedule of events, please check out their website.

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**Halloween at the Cannery**

Oct. 26–29, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Gulf of Georgia Cannery, North Vancouver
www.heartofthecityfestival.com

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery is haunted by strange noises, ghosts and screams. Dare to explore the haunted house, encounter ghouls, and learn the characters along the way and see what tricks you have to play to get some treats at the Cannery. The festival is in conjunction with the Cannery’s spooktacular Halloween weekend, so be sure to visit their website.

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**The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race**

Oct. 29, 4–6 p.m.
SFU Harbour Centre, Vancouver
www.cultural-programme-iccubed.com/public-events

In this talk held at SFU Harbour Centre, University of Toronto sociologist Neda Maghbouleh shares the under-theorized, and sometimes heart-breaking, story of how Iranian-Americans move across a white/not-white colour line. By challenging underlying assumptions in the sociology of race/ethnicity and immigration, The Limits of Whiteness offers new evidence for how and which “white” groups might become “brown,” and what such a transformation says about race in North America today. Check out the SFU website for more details.

***

**Vancouver Jewish Film Festival**

Nov. 2–12
Fifth Avenue Cinemas and
Norman Rothstein Theatre, Vancouver
www.vancouverjff.com

The 29th annual Vancouver Jewish Film Festival will be screening some of the latest cinematic offerings from or about the Jewish world. There will be films showcasing many subjects including an interview with David Horovitz, editor and co-founder of the New York’s first prime minister, stories from a group of young adventurers to the Himalayas and a documentary about renowned Batesian dancer Bobbi Jene Smith. For tickets and showtimes, check out the festival’s website.

***

**Vancouver Tea Festival**

Nov. 4–5, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Garden, Vancouver
www.vancouveraufestival.ca

The fourth annual Vancouver Tea Festival returns to the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden and surrounding area on Nov. 4–5. Come explore the world of tea, interact with like-minded tea lovers and taste dazzling examples of tea from around the world. With a marketplace of tea purveyors, offering a vast variety of teas to suit all tastes and budgets, as well as plenty of tea tastings, presentations, workshops, and tours throughout the festival. Check out the festival’s website for more information.

***

**Cardamom Pastry Cream**

The resulting dessert, while delicious is a bit dense, but that makes it perfect for the coming holiday season, it makes a lot of sense to have it be lighter, yet still incredibly flavourful.

Ingredients for Cardamom Pastry Cream

- ½ cup sugar
- 3 tbsp cornstarch
- ½ tsp ground cardamom
- 1 tbsp water
- ¾ cup milk
- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup unsalted butter, cubed
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 vanilla bean, scraped

Ingredients for Dough

- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup water
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ cup flour
- 1 tsp cardamom
- 4 eggs

Ingredients for Cranapple Topping

- 2 cups cranberries
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1 cup orange juice

Pastry Cream Method

1. Whisk together sugar, cornstarch, cardamom, and salt in a saucepan.
2. Whisk in the cream, milk, scrambled vanilla bean and eggs, then bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat.
3. Cook the cream, whisking continuously until thick.
4. Remove the pot from the heat and whisk the butter into the cream.
5. Transfer the mixture to a bowl (you may optionally pour it through a sieve for a very smooth product) and cover it with plastic wrap, ensuring that the plastic is touching the cream so that a skin does not form. Refrigerate the mixture to cool and thicken.

Puff Method

1. First, the croquenut in a bowl, mix the sugar and butter until combined.
2. Add the flour and knead together to create a dough.
3. On a lightly dusted surface, roll the dough out into a thin sheet, then refrigerate.
4. Meanwhile, make the croquenuts! Whisk the flour and cardamom together.
5. In a saucepan over medium-high heat, combine the milk, water, butter and cardamom, and bring to a boil. Once the butter melts, remove the pan from the heat, add the flour to ensure patrons have the best time.

Recipe by Jen della Luna

**Semla**

(Semla, or silmær, if there are many) is a traditional Swedish dessert common found throughout the Scandinavian region. Historically, it began as a bread baked in a bowl of cool warm milk, which has since evolved into a more refined pastry. The roll is typically a braided-style sweet yeast bread, flavoured with cardamom and filled with a pastry or an almond cream. The resulting dessert, while delicious, is an inescapable holiday tradition. Bring your creation to all the holiday meals you’ll be attending (or making).

With that in mind, I decided to create a semla-profile. The peanuts, ..probably more sense to have it be lighter, yet still incredibly flavourful.

Touching the cream so that a skin does not form. Refrigerate the mixture to cool and thicken.

Hybrid! Using the airiness of a choux pastry but keeping the fluffy profile and shape of typical semla, I’ve chosen to celebrate this tradition with this modern twist! Touching the cream so that a skin does not form. Refrigerate the mixture to cool and thicken.

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