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## Helping hands ease integration

by RAMAN KANG

**"We're here for support and to make a difference," says Muna Amir, one of the members of the Surrey Immigrant Advisory Roundtable (IAR).**

The IAR was formed by the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Committee in 2014 so

cent that it would definitely add value for newcomers who aren't aware about the government and non-government agencies who can help them in settling here," he says.

Durrani came to Canada from Pakistan in 2008. He feels giving feedback to the city will create more immigrant-friendly policies, which will help their settlement

**“I know what it's like to struggle, not knowing the language, not knowing the city, not knowing anybody...”**

*Muna Amir, member of the Surrey Immigrant Advisory Roundtable*

the voices of immigrants would be heard by the City of Surrey. It is made up of members who know what it's like to leave home and have to adjust to a new way of life in a different country.

"The LIP works with stakeholders in the region to determine what the community needs to be welcoming and inclusive," says Faisal Durrani, who joined the Immigrant Advisory Roundtable because he wanted to be a positive part of the newcomer experience.

Durrani says the members of the IAR review research and community consultation findings and provide their feedback to shape the city's future plans. He became interested in the IAR because he likes talking to newcomers.

"I believe my diverse background and experience is so re-

phase become better and more effective, all while helping new immigrants feel welcome.

"My vision of Surrey is to make this place welcoming and inclusive by constantly reaching out to the community by way of doing surveys given to us by a research firm hired by the City of Surrey," he says.

### A guide

Amir believes helping newcomers adjust to Canadian life is her calling. She arrived in Ottawa as a refugee when she was 15-years-old, fleeing the war in Somalia with her grandmother.

"For me, I was just a kid, I was the safest here, but sometimes I felt alone. Once I started going to school, I made friends – for me I felt safe," she says.

See "Integration" page 3 ➤



*Photo courtesy of Faisal Durrani*

▲ *Faisal Durrani, member of the Immigrant Advisory Roundtable, wants to be a positive part of the newcomer experience.*

### Also in this issue



The power of storytelling  
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of colour  
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**Verbatim**  
The Canadian paradox

by EMMANUEL MOUCHET

I landed in Vancouver a little over a year ago. Coming to Canada is not an obstacle course for a Frenchman. If you are under 35, you can apply for a Working Holiday Permit, which allows you to stay and work on Canadian soil for up to two years, although you do still have to win a lottery. I tried my luck and, surprisingly, a few weeks later, I had the precious ticket in hand. At that point nothing could stop me. I wasn't going to have second thoughts.

What first struck me when I arrived was the ease of setting up shop. It's possible to open a bank account in minutes, to get a phone plan in even less time, to exchange your French driver's licence for a Canadian one and even to sign a lease without having any income.

The next logical step was looking for a job. It is difficult to find a job directly from abroad without references, knowledge of the city and without a local telephone number. Once here, finding an equivalent job in Canada, with similar responsibilities and salary, was tricky for several reasons – even while working in IT! First, a diploma and foreign experience do not carry the same weight in Canada. Second, while networking counts for a lot, it requires years to build up and maintain.

I finally secured the holy grail of a job offer by lowering my expectations and starting at a more junior level. Patience, being productive and the pressure of a tight job market will often do the rest for you. On the other hand, what is great here is the ease with which it is possible to reinvent yourself professionally. There

See "Verbatim" page 8 ➤

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# Cultural Spotlight

## Speaking Russian in Vancouver

by COLLEEN ADDISON

**With its Cyrillic alphabet, the Russian language is one of the most complicated to learn. But, as Inna Mikailov and Stan Kriventsov explain, many Vancouverites speak Russian – and they're not all from Russia. June 6th, Russian Language Day, marks the beginning of a summer of events designed to unite Russian language speakers in Vancouver.**

Russian Language Day is a holiday that honours Russian cultural diversity, an aim that echoes through the Russian language community of Vancouver.

"All of us speak and like the Russian language," says Mikailov, who sits on the board of directors of the Multicultural Russian Speaking Association of British Columbia.

But, she clarifies, there are representatives from multiple nations.

"We are all different," she says. "Most are from the Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. The Baltic countries, too. The language that helps us connect is the Russian language."

Kriventsov, a Russian who left in 1997, is an organizer of two meetups, the Russian Speaking Conversation & Adventure and the Russian Language meetup. According to him, Russian Language Day itself is not much known in Vancouver, as many Russian speakers emigrated before UNESCO established this day in 2010.

"During communism, there were some communist holidays," he comments. "The current policy is to make Russians more patriotic. Because they like to support patriotism in Russia, they celebrate all these Russian holidays."

But, he says, the aim of Russian Language Day, to connect people together with language, is alive and well in Vancouver.

"In Russia," he explains, "there are Russians and there are Ukrainians. But here, we all speak Russian."

### Chess and children

The Russian language community is an active one, according to Mikailov and Kriventsov. Mikailov's organization will host its annual festival in late summer, featuring traditional food



Photo by Colleen Addison



Photo by courtesy of Stan Kriventsov

▲ Stan Kriventsov runs two meetups for Russian language speakers.

including perogies and borscht, and entertainment such as Russian songs and folk dances.

"We want to have all the festivals. But we can afford only one," laughs Mikailov.

Mikailov is the owner of Russian World, a store selling Russian souvenirs, food, and books; and she is also a member of the Russian Community Centre in Kitsilano.

"There is a Balalaika orchestra, and music and dancing. A very nice dance, called Yabolo. This means 'apple' in Russian. And there are classes for the children on Saturdays, in the Russian language. The children also write essays on [Alexander] Pushkin," she adds, speaking of the famous Russian poet, whose birthday, June 6th, is also commemorated by Russian Language Day.

Chess is also popular in the Russian language community, which holds chess lessons and competitions.

"The chess community in Vancouver is largely Russian," says

Kriventsov. "Chess was really popularized in communist times because the communists felt that it showed the intellectual superiority of Russia and communism. Chess was government-supported. If you were a chess player, you didn't have to work."

Kriventsov's meetups have other activities for Russian speakers.

"We have hikes and camping trips, for people who speak Russian," says Kriventsov. "There are conversational circles for learners, [and] cultural events, too, theatre, and Russian movies. There are also dancing parties, play[ing] modern music, but in Russian."

### A childhood in another country

Both Kriventsov and Mikailov grew up in Russia, and their stories epitomize the changing history of that country. Mikailov grew up under communism, in a time when Russia and associated countries were one.

"I come from the Soviet Union," she says. "Right now, [where I lived] is Ukraine. I was born in Siberia and also lived in Ukraine. In my childhood, it was all one country."

Kriventsov left Russia after the fall of communism.

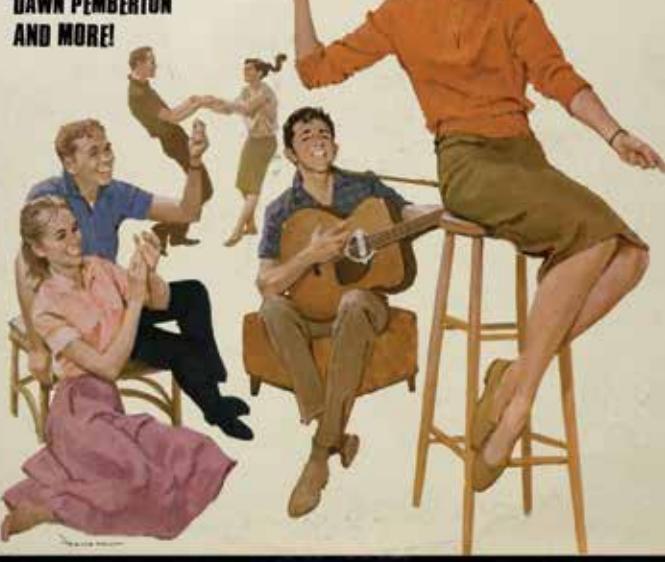
"After the collapse of the Soviet Union," he explains, "there was a lot of money, a lot of people starting their own businesses, but there wasn't a strong enough government system to protect them. There was crime. I was happy to come to Vancouver."

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Photo by Jeff Vinnick, courtesy of Vancouver Public Library

# An Indigenous storyteller finds a new home

by BRITTANY THOMSON

**After competing with her fellow storytellers, T'uy'tanat-Cease Wyss had more than her fingers crossed when applying for the Vancouver Public Library's Indigenous Storyteller in Residence Program.**

Having survived the interview and panel process, she was honoured to be chosen and couldn't wait to start sharing stories and redefining what people thought of storytelling. According to Wyss, there is no "average day" at the VPL. She spends her days working on stories, and trying to make storytelling more interactive.

She is constantly fluctuating between different projects. An accomplished ethnobotanist, Wyss excels in the knowledge of Indigenous plants and the ability to maintain health. She hopes that her time at the VPL will help promote a return to nature; just like her ancestors.

## A journey home

Wyss' – whose diverse heritage includes Skwxwu7mesh, Sto:lo, Irish-Métis, Hawaiian and Swiss – most recent project brought her closer to her ancestors. Journey to Kaho'olawe, is an art publica-

tion about the Hawaiian Island of Kaho'olawe brought to life with artist Hans Winkler.

According to the grunt gallery website, the island is a sacred site to the Hawaiians in recovery after being occupied as a practice range by the American military. Returned to the Hawaiians in the 1990s, the island is being remediated and returned to its natural state. The book also follows Kanaka Hawaiians as they traveled from Hawaii to British Columbia.

"Storytelling is this incredible medium that brings us to different levels and we can go anywhere we want with it, and do what we want," says Wyss.

Another project near and dear to Wyss is her public-art project titled Constellation of Remediation. While working with artist Anne Riley, she is in the final stages of the long, bureaucratic prep process to return Vancouver's abandoned gas stations to their former beauty.

The program, which starts in June and will run for a year and a half, will work towards bringing the community together while remediating the land. Though the project is semi-permanent, Wyss hopes that it will have a lasting effect – evoking change,

and eventually turning some of those spaces into housing for Indigenous youth.

Wyss often partners with schools in the hope of working with children and youth. She

et, and humans are the youngest and that should be a wake-up call.

She believes we have to have a better regard for the natural world and that if we can take care

knowledge and empower urban Indigenous youth.

She found it hard to connect with the earth as a young adult and hopes that by working on her own connection now and

**“Our goal is to engage the community of mostly Indigenous youth, but also Indigenous families and teach them how we can all work on remediation for the land, wherever we are.**

*T'uy'tanat-Cease Wyss, Vancouver Public Library's Indigenous Storyteller in Residence.*

believes that we can engage the future by being present in their young lives.

"Our goal is to engage the community of mostly Indigenous youth, but also Indigenous families and teach them how we can all work on remediation for the land, wherever we are," says Wyss.

Wyss also runs a blog named, Indigenous Plant Diva. Each post focuses on a different Indigenous plant, and all the benefits and uses of the plant.

Wyss says that plants are the second oldest thing on the plan-

of our own communities, pick up garbage we see on our hikes, etc., we can help the natural world.

Her storytelling and plant walks give people a sense of pride in their communities. As a storyteller, Wyss finds this connection with the community empowering and is eager to continue her success.

"By sharing our stories, we're sharing our love of our people," says Wyss.

## Transfer of knowledge

Wyss's most important goal is to help facilitate a transfer of

educating others, she will help inspire the next generation.

Wyss says she's extremely proud of Vancouver for offering such a program as the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence. She hopes more cities will offer similar programs in the future. Join Wyss at the VPL's Collingwood Branch next month on June 9. She'll be sharing stories about the mink, an Indigenous trickster.

For more information, visit [www.vpl.bibliocommons.com/events](http://www.vpl.bibliocommons.com/events)

## ► "Integration" from page 1

One of the biggest challenges Amir faced was learning a new language.

"I would use the dictionary. I would have to stay after school or during lunch-time to know what the homework was because I couldn't understand it. High school was hard for me," says Amir.

Eventually, Amir got married, had kids and moved to B.C. After she and her husband separated, she became a single mother, raising their four kids on her own.

"One day I decided to volunteer with immigrants. I know what it's like to struggle, not knowing the language, not knowing the city, not knowing anybody, especially for women. For me, I know it's not easy to be a parent, especially when you're a single mom," she says.

Amir started volunteering to help immigrants and youth because she feels she can truly relate.

"I know what it feels like to feel lost; I can understand what they're going through," she says. "Challenges immigrants face are language, culture and housing. They don't know where to start, who to talk to, where to go.... I just guide them to where they can get help," she says.

Amir joined the IAR in 2016 where she is a resource for immigrants to help them with their language skills, writing resumes and cover letters,

housing and engaging with people about the things they struggle with.

"I have sources now that I can use to help them with school and the language. Together we can make our city different, we can help each other out," says Amir. "Today there are so many opportunities to help immigrants – there are classes for them to take, the community helps out, everybody is here to help. They're not alone."

## Making a connection

Dongmei (Lily) Yang came to Canada from China in 2006.

"It was hard to settle down because it was so different. It was hard to fit in and I felt very isolated," says Yang. "I didn't have any friends, but I had some English so communicating wasn't a problem; the problem was, who was I going to talk to?"

Her husband had been raised in Canada since age three so he didn't understand her struggle

to fit in or know of any resources to help her.

"He didn't know because he's not an immigrant, so the services I was looking for, he had no idea.



▲ Dongmei (Lily) Yang, Surrey Library Champion Program volunteer.

He didn't understand or know strategies to help me," says Yang.

After enduring unhappiness for a long time, she decided to volunteer.

"Finally I found a group of people who had a similar experience and we shared this experience," says Yang.

Yang started volunteering with the Surrey Library Champion Program where she found out about the IAR and became a member in 2015.

"We contribute ideas, we have different backgrounds, we discuss what's best for newcomers, organize events," says Yang.

Yang says the diversity of the members allows for more people in the community to be reached out to, especially when English is a challenge. She says that through community events, some of which Yang has led, the IAR brings people together.

"Through events we make differences," she says. "We are able to set up a couple platforms for people to get to know each other and for people to know the Immigrant Advisory so people are aware there are tools for them," says Yang.

For more info, please visit [www.surreylip.ca](http://www.surreylip.ca)



▲ Muna Amir came to Canada as a refugee when she was a teenager.

Photo courtesy of Muna Amir



## Left Bank ↪

# B.C. Liberals look to make comeback by fanning flames of property tax revolt

**W**hat a year it's been in B.C. politics. This month marked one year since the cliffhanger 2017 election. Following weeks of political uncertainty, Christy Clark and her Liberal Party were ultimately removed from power by the thinness of margins possible. Clark resigned her seat in Kelowna soon thereafter and the party was left to pick up the pieces and relearn the role of Official Opposition after 16 years in power.

After a rather anemic leadership race, MLA Andrew Wilkinson was chosen to lead the Liberals back to power. He doesn't have much to show for his efforts so far. NDP Premier John Horgan's approval rating is strong, despite decisions like the Site C dam approval that alienated significant numbers of his party's base. A poll



▲ Andrew Wilkinson, leader of the B.C. Liberals.

conducted by Angus Reid in early May found Horgan had a 47 per cent approval rating, with Green leader Andrew Weaver trailing at 34 per cent and Wilkinson lagging well behind at 26 per cent.

The minority NDP government, who are only able to hold power due to a "confidence and supply" agreement with the Greens, once looked unlikely to survive more than 18 months in office without an election. Now it looks possible they could govern until Fall 2021, the next fixed election date. Wilkinson and the Liberals – and the vested interests that back the corporate party – need to find a foothold to start their climb back to power.

With the recent controversy over the BC NDP's new "school tax," essentially a modest surtax on homes valued at over \$3 million, Wilkinson thinks he's found his big issue. The Liberal leader recently characterized this new property tax in ominous terms in a letter to homeowners released to the press: "This new tax calls for a dramatic increase to your property taxes, and is on top of the numerous other tax increases by the NDP you are seeing this year. This is a potentially devastating burden for hardworking British Columbians, many of whom have lived in their homes for decades. ... It's really an asset tax, designed to charge you based on the assessed value of your home, regardless of what you originally paid, or your ability to pay it. Not only will this tax allow for annual escalating increases, but it sets a dangerous precedent for the government to tax away your personal property."

Wilkinson's claims are absurd. Here's how the so-called "dramatic" increase will actually play out, once the new tax regime takes effect in 2019. First, it's crucial to understand that the new tax is a marginal tax on the assessed value of homes, empty lots, or strata properties over \$3 million. The marginal rate starts at 0.2 per cent and increases to 0.4 for the value over \$4 million. So a westside Vancouver resident with a home assessed at \$3.2 million would only pay an additional \$400 per year. Taxing away personal property? Nonsense. Even the owner of a \$5 million home will only face an additional tax bill of \$6000/year. And if they're retirees living on a fixed pension they are able to defer their taxes.

Compare this to the legally allowable annual rent hike – set this year at four per cent – paid by tenants in Vancouver. A family renting an average \$2,000/month 2-bedroom apartment or basement suite in Vancouver will pay an additional \$960 per year in rent. That's more than double the new annual expenses of the person in a \$3.2 million house. For renters, many of whom live paycheque to paycheque, an additional \$960 per year could be enough to tank the family budget or even force them out of their home or out of the city.

So Wilkinson's fearmongering about people being driven out of their homes is aimed at the wrong class of residents. It's renters, not homeowners, who are the most precarious in the current crisis. The tax revolt he's looking to promote is a revolt of the elites.

The fact is that given the unprecedented and frankly out of control land value appreciation in Vancouver over the past decade – a housing bubble that the B.C. Liberals allowed to inflate by turning a blind eye to rampant speculation and profiteering – the shift to progressive property taxes is common sense. Properties don't appreciate in value because of the genius or hard work of the owners, so it's perfectly reasonable for part of the wealth generated by appreciation to be captured and used for the society as a whole.

In a world scarred by inequality, economists and policy makers are increasingly advocating for wealth and asset taxes including progressive property taxes. One weakness of the NDP's new tax is that the revenue is not targeted to the building of social and affordable housing for those who need it most.

One reason Wilkinson is seizing on the property tax issue is that so many of the impacted properties are in the riding of Attorney General David Eby, who was the Liberals' biggest critic on the housing file and now an effective and powerful player in government.

Wilkinson's hyperbole, however, points to another danger for the Liberals. Their elite revolt has grabbed some headlines for now, but there are dangers to the strategy. In the long run they may fail to unseat Eby, only to succeed in reinforcing the view that their party only really cares about the wealthy and the well off. ↩



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Activities at Brentwood Community Resource Centre, 2055 Rosser Avenue, Burnaby

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#### Wai Dan Gong

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Contact: Eliza 604 292 3907 or echan@mosaicbc.org

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\*\*Daisy 604 254 9626 ext 1005 or daisya@mosaicbc.org

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*MOSAIC is a multilingual non-profit organization dedicated to addressing issues that affect immigrants and refugees in the course of their settlement and integration into Canadian society.*



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Photo courtesy of Daiya Bhandall

## Chemically transformed through Soap for Hope

by XI CHEN

**What is the fate of leftover hotel bar soaps? How could it possibly be linked to battling drug and alcohol addiction?**

Soap for Hope, a student-run non-profit project out of SFU has made the creative and bold attempt to bridge the two and has successfully helped both the environment and the marginalised people of society at the same time.

**Soap gets lab treatment**

Seeing the need to upcycle an excess of used hotel bar soaps to save the environment and a need to create more transitional work opportunities for individuals overcoming drug and alcohol addictions, Soap for Hope was born in September 2014 under Enactus SFU, a global organization with a focus on social entrepreneurship. After two years of extensive research and development at the university's advanced materials science research centre, the 4D labs, the project materialised in late 2016.

Daiya Bhandall, project manager of Soap for Hope, explains that there are several steps in the process of how the bar soaps get transformed into usable liquid forms.

"First we have to sanitize the bar soaps by soaking them in a solution of distilled water and chlorine and shave off the external layer of debris. We let the bar soaps dry completely and use a special UVC light to kill bacteria. After, we grate the soaps into small flakes and dissolve them into a mixture of water, coconut oil and glycerin. We then heat this mixture and let it cool down before we bottle it," says Bhandall.

Partnering with Hope for Freedom Society, a drug addiction treatment centre in British Columbia, the project was able to provide wages for 16 individuals and upcycled nearly 50 pounds of hotel bar soaps in the last year alone.

"We are on track in defeating the stigma around reusing bar soaps, and we have created partnerships with local businesses in our community. The students running this project have gained a new perspective on individuals overcoming addictions, and we have created bonds with workshop participants. With that, we are also overcoming the negative stigma surrounding individuals with drug and alcohol addictions," says Bhandall.

**Reciprocal benefits**

Dennis Fagan, administrator of Hope for Freedom Society, praised the professionalism and outstanding work of the students and said that the project's social impact outweigh its

monetary benefits by bringing the two distinctively different social groups together.

"This project allows the ostracised and the marginalised guys to get out of their daily grinds to do something they normally wouldn't do through interaction with young people. It also helps university students to understand the other side of society and how easy it is to go down the wrong path," he says, adding that patients at the centre came from all different kinds of social, cultural and economic backgrounds and most suffered some degrees of trauma before they turned to drugs.

Bhandall agrees. She also believes that the project can help to overcome the negative stigma surrounding individuals with drug and alcohol addictions.

"Before, I was under the impression that drug addictions only happened to people who went down the wrong path, but after getting to know everyone involved with Hope for Freedom, my perspective shifted. They told me about their lives, about their children, about their family and about their struggles. It was an incredible experience, and I wanted to continue my passion for Soap for Hope," says Bhandall.

With a 15-strong team and members with a passion to create a sustainable environment while helping people, Soap for Hope has bolder plans for the future. It wants to replicate the project across different Canadian



Photo courtesy of Daiya Bhandall

cities and is also currently exploring the consumer market for potential commercial products.

Globally, similar initiatives are quickly spreading, particularly to help developing countries with their access to hygiene products as well as creating new employment opportunities.

For more information, please visit [www.enactussfu.com/soap-for-hope](http://www.enactussfu.com/soap-for-hope)

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Presented by Main St. Village Vancouver ([www.villagevancouver.ca](http://www.villagevancouver.ca)) and Little Mountain Neighborhood House ([www.lmnhs.bc.ca](http://www.lmnhs.bc.ca))



▲ *Daiya Bhandall, project manager of Soap for Hope.*

# A lesson in cedar weaving

by VINH NGUYEN

**The cedar tree has been a familiar figure for First Nations communities for a long time. The tree, believed to be a gift from Mother Nature, provides people with tools for their survival.**

On June 3, Port Moody ecological society will hold a cedar weaving workshop with Tsawwassen Alice Guss at Port Moody Centre. Participants in the workshop will have a chance to learn the lessons of the cedar tree. Alice Guss, who has spent 20 years as a director of education in various First Nations communities, will hold the workshop to spread the heritage of First Nations communities.

## Weaving cedar bark

The workshop will focus mainly on the art of cedar weaving. The first step in this process is to harvest the tree. The process starts with stripping the bark from the tree and then curing it. Guss says that this step can take almost a year to complete.

"... Once it is, we are allowed to work with it," says Guss. "Back from the day, our ancestors worked with cedar when it was wet or when it was dry."

Activities like cedar weaving, which involves harvesting natural wood, are an integral part

of the lives of Guss's community and many other First Nations communities.

"We had no Walmart, we had to make everything with local resources and those were the fir trees, the maples. All of those trees were [like] our Home Depot," says Guss. "That was our necessity that we utilized the natural resources. But the cultural significance is teaching us

the slab of the cedar tree from the older tree. We would make wedges from the older tree," adds Guss.

## A way of life

The tradition of cedar harvesting contains meaningful life lessons that are taught within communities.

"... when we work with the cedar, we want to thank the water

**“ I [spend] two hours of class to teach about the cedar because the cedar is the tree of life.**

*Alice Guss, cedar weaver*

respect. Because without [the resources], we wouldn't be able to make anything."

Guss places important values and lessons in her teaching of cedar weaving.

"I [spend] two hours of class to teach about the cedar because the cedar is the tree of life. We utilise the cedar from the day we were born to the day that we die. Things like everyday uses. We made our tools, our canoes. We made our longhouses," she says.

Since the hard work is built from previous ways, it is a good practice to thank the ancestors.

"We wouldn't be able to get

because without the water, we wouldn't be able to make anything," said Guss. "The medium [in] making things teaches us respect, teaches us to share and to care. And most of all, the best teaching is transformation because we transform mother nature's gift into another gift."



▲ Stripping cedar bark.

The First Nations educator reflects back on her past workshops.

"I think [it is] the gratification knowing that when they absorb the teaching and they reflect. And [at] the end, I just love [hearing the participants'] heart-warming stories," she says.

Guss also feels proud that the tradition of cedar weaving is making a comeback in various communities, despite having been repressed in the past. She says that even her 88-year-old aunt is learning to weave again.

"[The older generation] didn't have those when they were younger because they were forced to go to residential schools," says Guss. "Just yesterday I saw the Facebook posts of elders harvesting cedar for the first time. So a lot of teachings are coming back, which is awesome."

For more details, visit [www.portmoody.ca](http://www.portmoody.ca)



▲ Harvesting cedar bark.



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# The Artist's Garden: A connection to Frida Kahlo

by GÜLCE IPCI

**Artist Diana Zoe Coop will be exhibiting her latest works, *The Artist's Garden*, at Sidney and Gertrude Zack Gallery. Her newest botanical paintings tell about her creative process and inspirations from her journey to Mexico.**

The gallery, which is in the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver (JCCGV), will host several exhibitions and events May 15–July 5 with *The Artist's Garden* June 7–29.

The director at Sidney and Gertrude Zack Gallery, Linda Lando, is enthusiastic about Coop's new exhibition because she held an exhibition a very long time ago in her own gallery.

Lando first saw Coop's work while preparing for that exhibition.

"I had a show of her work in my own private commercial gallery many years ago – her gymnastic costumes, which were extremely beautiful. They were just stunning. She is known internationally in this field. So beautiful," says Lando.

#### A new exhibition: A travel to forest garden

Coop's paintings are based on the elements of Japanese gardens, such as water features, seasons and flowers. While she



▲ Diana Zoe Coop in her workshop.

is always creating new works, she also gives workshops in her private studio at Granville Island.

In *The Artist's Garden*, Coop focuses on her creative process with the relationship between nature and art. Living in Vancouver, she gets especially inspired by the North Shore mountains. Her botanical paintings are expressionistic, and they come to canvas from her own garden.

Lando eagerly describes what makes Coop's work interesting for this new exhibit.

"I think the enthusiasm of colour. Her works [grab the] attention with bright, bold colour, movement and light, flowers and forest."

#### A first-hand look at Frida

Lando says that Coop going to Mexico City as a Canadian artist and experiencing the city of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo's work, creates an emotional and artistic connection between her and Kahlo.

"Frida Kahlo uses the same words – bright and bold. Very

same kind of things Coop is working on. It's thrilling and creates a large amount of curiosity," says Lando.

The exhibition of *The Artist's Garden* will be on display at Sidney and Gertrude Zack Gallery starting June 7, 2018.

"We have an opening evening with the attend of Coop on June 7, Thursday. And then the gallery continues to be open the same as Jewish Community Centre hours. The entrance is free and there is no obligation to purchase," says Lando.

To see where the inspiration of Coop's work comes from and to listen to the story of the exhibition from Coop's voice, Lando is inviting all art-lovers to the opening evening and also to the rest of the exhibition days.

"[The] whole gallery will be filled by her works. She has 25 pieces and they probably start with eight-inch by ten-inch pieces. I think the biggest one might be thirty by a forty-inch or something. So, just a huge variety of her work with the theme being the Frida Kahlo idea," Lando says. "I hope people will come, see and enjoy the work. It's an open gallery. It's free for all."

For more information about the exhibition and the artist please visit: [www.jccgv.com](http://www.jccgv.com) [www.dianazoecoopartist.com](http://www.dianazoecoopartist.com)

#### Diana Zoe Coop

Diana Zoe Coop, who is Vancouver-based, is also an international costume designer for dance, gymnastics, synchro and skating. Her costumes have been worn by Canadian athletes at World Championships, World Cups, the Grand Prix and the Olympic Games.



▲ Gymnastics costume by Diana Zoe Coop.

She obtained her post-graduate degrees from Syracuse University in New York and Saint Martin's School of Art in London, England. Early on in her career, she started to take part in exhibitions with her paintings, drawings and three-dimensional works across both Canada and the United States. Her works hang in private and corporate collections in Canada, USA, U.K., Holland, Italy, Australia, Bulgaria and many other European Countries.

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## Asian Canadian theatre: a study long overdue

by VICTOR VAN DER MERWE

**Eury Colin Chang, a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia (UBC), is writing his dissertation on the impact that Canadians of Asian descent have made on professional theatre in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto.**

The performing arts have played a significant role in one form or another for most of Chang's life. Now, his fascination with theatre culminates in his research, which will take him across Canada.

#### Asian Canadian influence on theatre

After earning a Masters degree in Theatre Studies at UBC, Chang began his PhD in Theatre Studies in 2013 and is currently in his final year of study at UBC.

Chang, who wrote for the Capilano Courier in the 1990s while studying theatre at Capilano University, says that the experience has helped him prepare his 300-page dissertation paper on the 30 year history of Asian Canadian influence on theatre in Toronto and Vancouver.

When he began his doctorate, he explored Western theatre studies ranging from Shakespeare to the Jewish German intellectuals but found little information on Asian contribution.

"There is this new branch of Canadian Theatre called Asian



▲ Eury Colin Chang sorts through similarities and differences between Asian Canadian theatre and Anglo Canadian theatre.

Canadian Theatre. Essentially it is an English language theatre, and it is like any other theatre we would see, but it is coming out of the multicultural community, and it is usually created by Canadians of third or fourth generations that happen to be of Asian descent. So there is a particular perspective to that," says Chang.

#### We are all Canadian

In his research, Chang found similarities and differences between Asian Canadian theatre and Anglo Canadian theatre. One such difference is that Anglo Canadian theatre companies can draw from material such as Shakespeare, whereas Asian Canadian theatre cannot. Yet both styles of theatre are

expressions of a similar experience.

"Whether it is from a Euro Canadian perspective or an Asian Canadian perspective, it is really about the Canadian experience. Asian Canadian theatre just has a slightly different take on it," Chang explains.

While the stories Asian Canadians draw from might be different from the ones that inspire Euro Canadians, the theatre is still – at its core – Canadian.

#### The French connections

This does not mean that there is no difference between Anglo theatre and Asian Canadian Theatre. With the Anglo Canadian Theatre being able to draw from English and American plays and musicals (think the Stratford Festival or Bard on the Beach), Asian Canadian Theatre is more prone to telling their own stories, not unlike the French Theatre communities in Canada. Chang talks about the French Canadian dramatist Robert LePage and his play 887 that was produced in Vancouver in 2016.

"More than any other play it just shows how Francophone Culture is quite distinct from Anglo Canadian culture and in that regard there are quite a few parallels between French Canadian Theatre and Asian Canadian Theatre," says Chang.

He goes on to say that the Vancouver theatre community is very innovative, but there does not seem to be as big a need to

reclaim heritage as there is with minority theatre communities or Quebec.

#### The future

The biggest surprise that Chang came across during his research was that no one else had thought to document the history of Asian Canadian contributions to the theatre community of Canada.

"The Chinese had come to British Columbia at the same time as the English. Obviously there was a power differential at the time but we are in our 3rd and 4th generations now. Yet, one of the first professional Asian Canadian plays, *Yellow Fever*, written by Rick Shiomi was only produced in Toronto in 1983," says Chang.

Chang is off to Toronto soon to delve into documents about *Yellow Fever* to see if it truly was one of the first Asian Canadian Theatre productions.

After the research is done and his dissertation is completed, Chang will be teaching what he has learned to third year Theatre students at UBC.

"I will be teaching the first Asian Canadian Theatre course at UBC in the Fall. It will be offered under Theatre Studies as a Special Topics, and I think this will be the first time we introduce 3rd year students to this kind of work," Chang says.

He hopes his next research will take him to Quebec as he would like to research multicultural theatre and intercultural theatre in Montreal.

Photo courtesy of Diana Zoe Coop

# Victim Impact unveils real-life B.C. Ponzi scheme stories

by JAKE MCGRAIL

**What would you do if a trusted neighbour, friend or even family member convinced you to invest your life savings into what turned out to be a complete scam?**

Theatre Conspiracy's newest show, *Victim Impact*, relays the story of Rashida Samji's \$110-million Ponzi scheme that defrauded hundreds of people in B.C. and focuses on the impact it had on the victims and their community.

## True to life

Former notary Rashida Samji ripped off over two hundred people over the course of nearly a decade before her Ponzi scheme was finally broken open in 2012. A large number of the victims were members of Surrey's South Asian community, and many of them were family and friends of Samji. Samji pleaded guilty to fraud but the case has still dragged on

through to the present day. *Victim Impact*, which runs at The Cultch from June 8-17, is a documentary show, taking much of its content directly from the real-life case.

"The writer of the show [Tim Carlson] had a real interest in the story," says Jiv Parasram, the director of *Victim Impact*. "This was a case where there was a fair amount of documentation, so he was able to conduct interviews with people who were affected by it."

Much of the text of the show comes from interviews with various victims, while some of it also comes directly from court documents. For Parasram, what drew him to this production was the scope of the case.

"I got drawn in by the sheer impact it's had on people," he says. "It wouldn't seem to be on the surface as thrilling as a bank heist, but there's something about being able to take the time to sort through and see the absurdity of the system and rationalize why people made these

decisions that led to them being ripped off."

While Samji might seem like she's the main character in this story, *Victim Impact* looks to focus instead more on those affected by this scam and relay their story in a way that properly conveys the weight of the betrayal they suffered.

"Part of what we're trying to work with is the storytelling aspect of it all," says Parasram. "When you look at the court documentation it's fairly emotionless. We're trying to see how we can tell the story with the sheer effect it's had on people and the community."

## The impact of theatre

Theatre Conspiracy's work with the Samji case has not been limited to just the stage. They have also produced *Victim Impact*: The Fraudcast, a podcast that gives detailed context of the scheme and includes some longer interviews.

"There's a lot of shared content between the show and the pod-

cast," says Parasram. "The podcast is more thorough: it follows a more traditional documentary form and goes into great detail. The play is more of the emotional end."

Parasram believes the emotional end is the key to the show. While a story can be consumed in many different formats, he

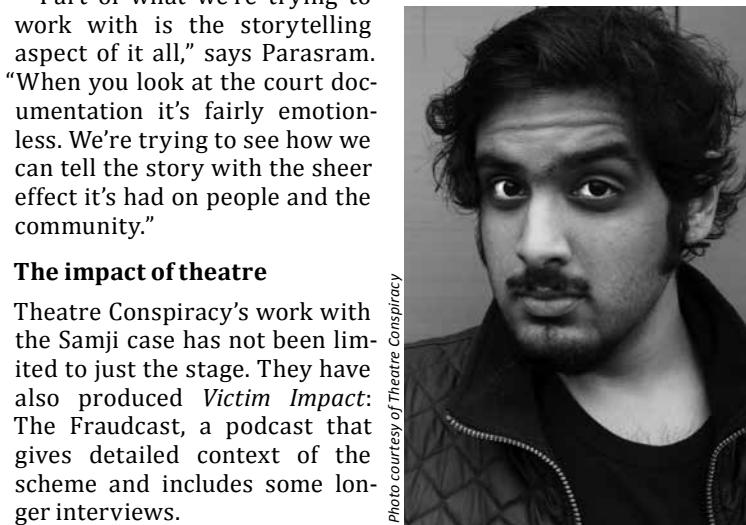
sees theatre as a way to engage with this material in a unique way.

"I think what is unique about theatre is that it's not isolated: we have a group of people who have agreed to be in a room together and take in information together. Considering that [this scam] is something that had a huge impact on a community, watching in this way seems almost essential."

And while watching the show, Parasram hopes that the audience will not see it as a simple, cut-and-dried case.

"I want them to waver back and forth," he says. "I want them to have moments where they can really empathize with what happens and can see that there's a gray area in terms of the motivations behind someone. I also hope people will have a bit more of an understanding of how not to be ripped off." 

For more information on the show and the related podcast, visit [www.conspiracy.ca](http://www.conspiracy.ca)



▲ Jiv Parasram, director of *Victim Impact*

► "Verbatim" from page 1  
will always be an employer to give you a chance, even without a degree or experience. Then it's up to you!

I was really counting on the professional side of things to integrate myself socially in Vancouver. In Europe, work is often the key to meeting locals and forming friendly relationships. Even though the corporate culture in Canada emphasizes team spirit and convivial moments, socializing beyond the office setting is difficult. Many "we should" moments, but few results.

Fortunately, there are other ways, such as joining associations or registering for a sporting activity. There we make acquaintances and create relationships, but these are often limited to what brought us together. Sports

here for 20 years and most of my friends are French."

Finding connection is certainly the most complicated aspect of integration. Here in Vancouver this is unfortunately the case for many newcomers. Too many separate communities exist, though they ought to join together. It is easy to succumb and to stick to one's community. Yet I don't despair. After all, we have the same culture, the same habits, the same tastes and sometimes even a similar past.

I am now thinking of staying in Canada. After a year of working here and with French being my native language, permanent residence reaches out to me.

That is the paradox here: a streamlined immigration, but an integration process that



▲ Creating connection amongst communities.

teammates only see each other during the activity and members of an association interact through telephone meetings. It's hard to make a breakthrough there too. All of this was corroborated during a visit to a professional francophone organization in Vancouver, where a counselor told me, "You know, I've lived

could be improved. Canada is a country that opens its doors to you. Vancouver aims to be an international and multicultural city, but in the end the city is mostly cosmopolitan, where intersecting communities live in each neighbourhood yet seldom mix. 

Translation by Barry Brisebois

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# Justice and equality: sound and song

by CURTIS SEUFERT

The Good Noise Vancouver Gospel Choir will be performing Jazz Meets Gospel on June 2 at the Christ Church Cathedral. The choir will explore connections between the two inextricably linked genres in their many forms, with songs made popular by Nina Simone, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong.

For former lawyer, social justice advocate, active community member, and Good Noise Gospel Choir singer Cleta Brown, music and justice have always been central and intertwined aspects of life.

**“**Gospel music, in particular, speaks to me of hope, service, sacrifice, a better future, and the love that is going to get us through.

*Cleta Brown, Good Noise Gospel Choir singer*

Amidst her family's appreciation for music, including her parents' extensive record collection, and regular family outings to concerts in a variety of styles and genres, Brown remembers her parents' insistence on an active and engaged musical childhood.

"All the children in my family had to play a musical instrument until high school graduation. Nonetheless, I never seriously considered a career in a musical field," she says.

It was justice, rather than piano, that Brown would pursue.

"I was born into a family that pushed and valued community involvement in any way that helped provide progress and betterment for the oppressed, the marginalized," says Brown. "[Just] as important to us [as music] was service in the community, and so I became a volunteer from age thirteen and have never stopped. Law seemed a natural place to use meaningful, impactful skills towards contributing to my community and to the struggle for justice and equality."

From private practice to Crown Prosecutor, Brown's legal career has and continues to span a breadth of positions and affiliations, most often centred around equality and justice. As well as being involved with the Canadian Women's Foundation, the YWCA (Metro Vancouver), and West Coast LEAF and LEAF National (legal organizations centred around women's equality through law), Brown is currently working towards becoming a qualified legal mediator and arbitrator.

## Hope and harmony

Now that she's retired as a lawyer, Brown has been able to pursue her original musical dream: to become a singer in a gospel choir – something which she's achieved with her first year in the Good Noise Choir.

"I have grown up listening to gospel music and had a dream of one day being able to sing in a gospel choir. As with many dreams, I never seriously expected it to come true, especially as I was discouraged in elementary school from singing out loud. But,

with advancing age, I decided, 'What the heck, I'm going to take a singing lesson,'" says Brown.

From the positive experience that followed, she learned of the Good Vancouver Gospel Noise Choir through a choral workshop, and successfully auditioned with the Good Noise Choir soon after. For Brown, it was nothing short of a dream come true.

"There are very few other ways to feel such purity of happiness and of being exactly where one is meant to be and with a congregation of others similarly moved," says Brown. "I'm sure there are scientific and evolutionary explanations for this powerful feeling, but I just know it as moments of human perfection. What we

are capable of when we try hard and let go at the same time."

The sensational experience of singing with a congregation comes not just with appreciation and joy for these songs in and of themselves, it is also underlined by music's connection with its spirituality, history, and justice.

Brown herself is a first generation Canadian born to Caribbean/African American parents, both of whom were raised in devout Christian households, and as such, Brown's parents' relationship and her own relationship to music, especially gospel music, goes deeper than the melody.

"Coming from oppressed, and discriminated against communities (segregation and colonialism) [and the civil rights movement] shaped their values and priorities," says Brown. "Gospel music, in particular, speaks to me of hope, service, sacrifice, a better future, and the love that is going to get us through. It offers heart-swelling beauty in sound



**▲ For Good Noise Gospel Choir singer Cleta Brown, music and justice have always been intertwined aspects of life.**

and gravitas and hopefulness in lyric. A uniquely awesome and compelling combination."

For Brown, it may be the most passionate manifestation of her continued commitment to justice and equality, embodied through sound and song: harmony and hope, together as one.

For more information about the concert and Good Noise Vancouver Gospel Choir, visit [www.goodnoisenvgc.com](http://www.goodnoisenvgc.com)

May 29-June 12, 2018

by SIMON YEE

It's June! The long sunny days are here, and summer is right around the corner. Enjoy a plethora of both indoor and outdoor events happening around the city, from community days and food festivals to artistic and musical performances. Why not check out some of the events below happening around town?

\* \* \*

**Sara Shneiderman:**  
Nepal's post-earthquake  
reconstruction  
May 31, 7:30 p.m.  
Tsengdok Monastery, Vancouver  
[www.tras.ca](http://www.tras.ca)

Sara Shneiderman, a cultural anthropologist at UBC, has worked in Nepal for 20 years. In the wake of Nepal's April and May 2015 earthquakes, she was engaged in relief efforts focused on rural areas. Her current research projects include a multi-disciplinary research partnership on Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction. She will be giving a talk about this topic at the Tsengdok Monastery on May 31, discussing the challenges facing Nepal – political as well as physical – and what we can do to help. For more information, visit the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society's website.

\* \* \*

**Feminist Land Art Retreat:**  
Free Rein  
May 31-August 4  
Audain Gallery at SFU, Burnaby  
[www.sfu.ca/galleries/audain-gallery/FLAR-Free-Rein.html](http://www.sfu.ca/galleries/audain-gallery/FLAR-Free-Rein.html)

The Audain Gallery will be hosting the *Feminist Land Art Retreat* conceptual project from May 31 to August 4. The project provokes reflection on relief, escape and wildness within contemporary life. By proposing a feminist land art retreat, yet perpetually suspending its manifestation, this artistic piece opens a space to consider the social and cultural

Photo courtesy of Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art

paradigms that construct femininity, nature and solitude. There will be an opening reception on May 30 and an exhibition tour on June 23. Check out the gallery's website for more information.

\* \* \*

**West Vancouver  
Community Day**

June 2, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Ambleside Park, West Vancouver  
[www.westvancouver.ca/arts-culture/festivals/community-day](http://www.westvancouver.ca/arts-culture/festivals/community-day)

Come down to Ambleside Park in West Vancouver for the city's Community Day on Saturday, June 2, and enjoy a fun-filled day of festivities for the whole family! This annual event has activities for all ages, including a parade, music, dance stages, food vendors, a kid's zone and a Community Day lounge. This year's theme is superheroes with a parade at 10 a.m. For a complete list of activities and events, please visit the West Vancouver website.

\* \* \*

**Surrey Greek Food Festival**

June 8-17  
Saints Constantine and Helen



Photo courtesy of Greek Food Festival

▲ Folk dancer kicking up his feet for the Surrey Greek Food Festival.



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# Cultural Calendar



▲ Showing off their tattoos for *Body Language: Reawakening Cultural Tattooing of the Northwest*.

**Greek Orthodox Church, Surrey**  
[www.surreygreekfoodfest.com](http://www.surreygreekfoodfest.com)

Come and experience folk dancing representing various regions of Greece and other places from around the world. Hosted by the Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, the Surrey Greek Food Festival invites guests of all ages to celebrate Greek culture and experience Greek food. There will be live entertainment and a Kids Zone booth on Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information, please visit their website.

\* \* \*

**Body Language:  
Reawakening Cultural  
Tattooing of the Northwest**

June 8, 2018-January 13, 2019  
Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, Vancouver  
[www.billreidgallery.ca](http://www.billreidgallery.ca)

Body Language, opening at the Bill Reid Gallery on June 8, is the first exhibition to fully explore the rich history and artistry of Indigenous tattooing, piercing and personal adornment on the Northwest Coast. The contemporary artists included in the exhibition are at the forefront of the revival of Indigenous tattooing in B.C. They are reclaiming traditional techniques and traditional rights to be tattooed and building awareness of the significance and protocols around the tattooing traditions. Today, tattoos tell personal stories, create identity and a feeling of belonging. Each artist will examine the history, symbolism, oral traditions, songs and artistry of indigenous tattooing within their region.

\* \* \*

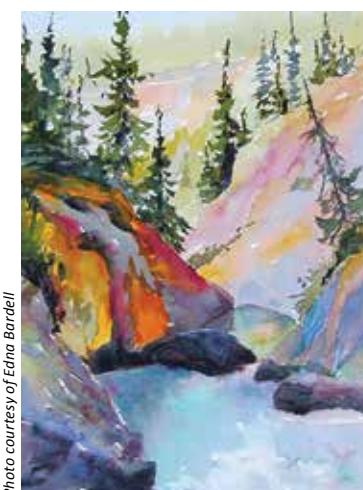
**Breakout Festival**

June 9-10  
Pacific National Exhibition,

**Vancouver**  
[www.breakout-festival.com](http://www.breakout-festival.com)

The first annual Breakout Festival will be held at the Pacific National Exhibition on June 9 - 10. This will be Vancouver's first outdoor music festival featuring some of the biggest names in hip-hop and R&B alongside some of Vancouver's rising hip-hop and R&B talent. For its first year, the festival intends to bring a one-of-a-kind experience to festival goers of all ages. With a food truck area, a VIP section, 19+ bars, alcohol-free zone and more, Breakout aims to lead Vancouver in hip-hop / R&B music festival experiences. Tickets to the festival include Playland admission. For more information, check out their website.

\* \* \*



▲ Exit (Yukon) by Enda Bardell.

**Eighth Annual  
Mid Main Art Fair**

June 10, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Heritage Hall, Vancouver  
[midmainartists.wixsite.com/midmainartfair](http://midmainartists.wixsite.com/midmainartfair)

The Mid Main Art Fair was established in 2010 by artist Enda Bardell to help promote and sell the work of established artists of the greater Vancouver area. Each year, invited artists show works

of art produced in a variety of media and styles during the fair. Abstracts, landscapes, florals, still life and figurative works are rendered in watercolour, oil, acrylic, photography, printmaking and sculpture. Admission is free! For gallery and other information, please visit their website.

\* \* \*

**Italian Day on the Drive**

June 10, 12 p.m.-8 p.m.  
Commercial Drive, Vancouver  
[www.italianday.ca](http://www.italianday.ca)

Italian Day returns to The Drive on June 10. Italian Day is a vibrant cultural street festival celebrating Italian culture, heritage and respective immigrant contributions in Vancouver. This year's festival offers over 120 street participants comprised of: sponsors, merchants, retail booths, food vendors and restaurant patios, as well as stages with live music and theatre, street performers, classic cars, activities and displays, children's amusement zones and more. For highlights and more information, please visit their website.

\* \* \*

**5X Festival**

June 13-17  
Various venues around Vancouver  
[www.vibc.org](http://www.vibc.org)

5X is a festival where global South Asian culture is expressed, showcased and connected and will be held at various venues throughout Vancouver this June. Art nights, workshops, a block party, bhangra battles and artist talks will take place across the city. While the main festival takes place June 13 to 17, on June 1, there will be a pre-party at Celebrities Nightclub featuring Khanvict, Desi Sub Culture and DJ Kid Kang. Please visit the Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration website for more details and artist information.

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