An ever shrinking margin

by MATTHEW FRASER

Brian Lam (Arsenal Pulp), Rolf Maurer (New Star Books) and Allan Cho (Rice Paper magazine) are three of the Lower Mainland’s leading publishers in Asian Canadian, POC and LGBTQ literature and arts. All three have seen the changes in both the market and challenges of previously marginalized communities feeling in a way that they now have permission to tell their stories. That has been very positive for the movement," says Lam. “Historically, there have been communities such as the Indigenous community and also trans writers who felt ostracized, but I think both of those communities have found their voice over the years and writers from those communities have found a place on our platform in particular, so I think things are looking up.”

All three publishers have seen an internal evolution within the publishing and arts world where artists have begun to boldly step forward and consume previously marginalized communities feeling in a way that they now have permission to tell their stories. That has been very positive for the movement," says Lam. “Historically, there have been communities such as the Indigenous community and also trans writers who felt ostracized, but I think both of those communities have found their voice over the years and writers from those communities have found a place on our platform in particular, so I think things are looking up.”

As these communities continue to push forward with their stories, the wider consumer public has made it clear that they wish to experience

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A century and a half of photography in India
Page 7

Calypso rhythm to tell stories
Page 9

There is a lot of receptivity towards difference.

Rolf Maurer, New Star Books

As an explorer, I want to learn about you, explore you, discover you – my new home whose vastness fascinates me. So, I moved to meet you, and like the pioneers, my ancestors, I settled down my bags here to build a new future and create a new life. I am well aware that you are different, and this is one of the million reasons that drew me to establish myself in British Columbia. I was curious about this city that offers simultaneously a cosmopolitan life and a wild setting. Indeed, by learning to know you, by searching, I found that you are rich and alive. Culture access (musical, theatrical, gastronomic, etc.) is easy and affordable. The "icing on the cake" is an environment where nature is ubiquitous.

Thanks to you I’m growing up. Change. Resilience. These words have never made more sense in my life.
**Cultural Spotlight**

*by Colleen Addison*

It’s the order of the day! Seders, meaning order, is a Jewish festival at which Jews (and privileged guests) eat ritual food and have conversation. One such upcoming dinner will give Jews and community members the chance to experience key elements of Jewish heritage, says Jennie Johnston and Sandra Hochstein.

The dinner is part of Feasts of Coquitlam, events put on by the Coquitlam Heritage Society (CHS) in connection with their year-long exhibit Heritrooms and Treasure currently taking place at Mackin house. This particular “feast” will be held Apr. 11 and will include a cooking lesson.

**Herbs and heritage**

[Heritrooms exhibit aims to show] the things we hand down through the generations,” says Johnston, CHS program manager. “These things are sometimes physical objects and sometimes cultural aspects, Johnston explains.

“People don’t realize how multifacultural Coquitlam is,” she says. “We have a meat grinder salvaged out of a [European] home destroyed during World War II and brought to Canada. And we show different ways of plate, which rests in the middle at Mackin house. This particular her Jewish cooking skills and knowledge as host of the dinner.

There is a tangible object, a Seder plate, which rests in the middle of the table during the dinner. By a roasted beet, [which] has that red blood look.”

**Passover participation**

A key part of Seder dinner in particular and the Feasts of Coquitlam in general is audience participation, says Johnston and Hochstein.

“What is lovely about the Feasts is that people come in and ask a lot of questions; it’s very interactive,” says Johnston. “It’s a sharing of the culture.”

Hochstein clarifies that questions and responses are an established ritual at a Seder dinner.

“There’s a tradition,” she says, that the youngest person has to ask four questions, [beginning with] ‘why is this night different than all other nights?’ [Seder] hinges on retelling the story.”

Hochstein notes the dinner lends itself very well to friends who wish to learn, as this theme of strengthening communities is important in Jewish culture.

**The Heirlooms exhibit aims to “feast”** will be held Apr. 11 and Treasure of the table during the dinner.

“Every aspect of the Seder plate, which rests in the middle of the table during the dinner, is symbolic. Each item on the plate represents something that is important to the story of the holiday,” says Hochstein.

“Tell me the story; we eat the ritual food, and we celebrate.”

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Women newcomers get job-ready skills to enter B.C.’s high-tech industry

by SUSAN HANCOCK

A partnership between Immigrant Services Society of B.C. (ISSofBC) and Emily Carr University of Art and Design invites women, immigrants and refugees to develop job-ready skills to support B.C.’s high tech sector.

“This program opened my eyes to the Canadian job market and workplace expectations,” says Saba Farheen, a student currently enrolled in courses through TechWomen. “It’s not only technical — it’s English, it’s what to say, what to expect from others, what to expect on the job. You learn so many things that can’t be put into words.”

A pre-employment program

Last fall, in women enrolled in Emily Carr’s continuing education studies to complete web design courses such as Adobe suite, industrial design, architectural design and more. Access to these free courses were made possible through a tech training program called TechWomen, offered by ISSofBC.

TechWomen, a pre-employment program, encourages newcomers to upgrade their basic computer skills with Adobe suite and industrial design so re-entering the Canadian workforce or building a career in the Canadian tech sector.

“The success of Asian-Canadians with industry stakeholders, TechWomen is formed.

Skilled workers in tech industry in demand

Armstrong explains tech jobs are in high demand around the world, so filling these types of roles are competitive for B.C.-based companies. A framework would benefit both businesses and immigrants entering the technology sector in B.C.

“Programs like TechWomen help facilitate and close gaps in recruiting skilled people for the B.C. tech industry,” says Armstrong. “It gives people a chance to do what they want to do professionally, which is especially true for newcomers to Canada who have a background in technology, design, or as teachers. It’s important for them to be able to flow into the sector in a way that makes sense, not do some other job.”

Anitha Amarnath left India in 2017, immigrating to Canada with her husband and three-year-old son. She enrolled in TechWomen and gives credit to the program for helping her identify specific career goals to work towards. Amarnath took web design and development introductory courses and has now developed a professional website to support her resume and job search.

“All of the components of this program have helped me carve a path toward reaching my professional goals,” says Amarnath.

The practical, activities-based learning has not only provided me with critical technical skills, but helped lay the foundation of understanding and engaging in Canadian culture and ways of interacting. [Learn more at www.issofbc.org]

Asian journalists in Canada are limited in their roles and are often reporting or writing about ‘ethnic issues.’ “This is a complex issue, of course, and part of that could simply be the reason that Asian-Canadian writers are sometimes interested in narrowly writing and telling their stories about issues that deal with diversity within the mainstream,” says Cho.

Asian journalists in Canada are limited in their roles and are often reporting or writing about ‘ethnic issues.’ “This is a complex issue, of course, and part of that could simply be the reason that Asian-Canadian writers are sometimes interested in narrowly writing and telling their stories about issues that deal with diversity within the mainstream,” says Cho.

Shared experience and a well-kept path

When posed with the question of how an evolving industry will shape and groom new artists, Mauer looks to the past.

“I think that is part of the ongoing built-in tension that the arts have to resolve, that writers have to resolve,” he says. “I think it’s just a case of looking at someone with an experience parallel to yours and you learn from those people. Writers like James Baldwin and Franz Fanon have a lot to say to people of all backgrounds and descriptions but particularly to people whose lived experiences reflect the impact of colonialism.”

The path is not easy and success is never guaranteed especially when up and coming artists clash against the big names of the genre.

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“Kazuko Ishiguro and Haruki Murakami are now well-known Asian writers in the English-speaking world, but it’s an uphill climb for Asian-Canadian writers despite being constantly told that they live in a land of opportunities and pluralistic values,” Cho says. “The Canadian literary and publishing industry still has a long way to go, and this is indicative of many marginalized writers in the mainstream and lost in the wilderness of the Canadian literary world. There is a collective lack of understanding of diverse cultures by literary critics. The power of these few critics can arbitrarily decide which works will remain invisible.”

New homes and new roles

According to Lam, many smaller publishing houses have made themselves the best routes for local artists and storytellers.

“Everywhere we [Arsenal Pulp] are concerned, I think there is ample room for Asian and other voices to be heard, especially with indie presses, though I can’t sing for large multinational companies. As far as our indie publishing world is concerned those voices are more than welcome,” he says.

Cho also points to the history of various independent organizations furthering the cause of writers.

“The path is not easy and success is never guaranteed especially when up and coming artists clash against the big names of the genre.”

“I see concerted efforts such as the Asian-American Writers Workshop, Asian-Canadian Writers Workshop and the Vancouver Film Festival as attempts to give journalists/writers/cultural producers of Asian ancestry a spotlight to experiment and hone their crafts through a supportive network. They are still relatively recent organizations and are a temporary solution to a much larger issue at stake.”

Still, he continues, new challenges emerge when these artists enter the wider industry.

“The success of Asian-Canadian writers has also produced a strange and unintended consequence of identity crisis among Asian-Canadian writers,” he says. “Once an Asian-Canadian author has achieved status, they need to carefully choose the path that they take on the course of being a ‘serious’ writer in the Canadian literary mainstream without being held back by specific labels.”

Cho believes some writers carefully shed their ‘Asian-tag’ in order to suit the marketability of their brand. In a way, it reflects what some have called the ‘bamboo-ceiling’ (term first coined by Jane Hyn). He also sees a troubling trend that
Philosophy of Fake News and the diffusion of disinformation

By Siddharth Bala

A trio of philosophers will be discussing The Philosophy of Fake News, at the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Public Square as part of the 2019 Community Summit.

Endre Begby, Ph.D., associate professor of philosophy at SFU, will hold a discourse with Regina Rini, Ph.D., Canada Research Chair in Moral and Social Cognition, Department of Philosophy at York University and Jennifer Nagel, Ph.D., professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto. Together, they invite the public to join in the conversation on April 17.

Begby intends to address the dichotomy behind the phenomenon termed as ‘fake news’ and the underlying mechanisms that make it so easily permeable in today’s news stream. In doing so, he intends to help the audience re-evaluate attitudes that sustain those who fall prey to such phenomena.

“Some thing, to which philosophers can contribute, is to probe beyond or behind those initial appearances [of fake news] or look at those underlying mechanisms that information gets disseminated in [such as] peer networks, social media and so forth and see how it works,” says Begby.

Defining ‘fake news’

According to Begby, the overarching concept of ‘fake news’ can be split into two distinct phenomena.

“The first are the fabricated click-bait stories. You have people who are sort of specializing in creating false stories that involve real people, and they involve settings that have a feeling of familiarity and so on,” he says.

The second phenomenon that comes under the banner of ‘fake news’ is when entire news organizations are deemed to be peddlers of fake news.

“From Donald Trump saying, ‘Oh, the New York Times is fake news etc.,’ Begby says, “you are trying to cast, not individual stories, but whole news organizations as peddlers of fake news.”

People could be led to believe that the organization itself is dubious and, in the process, could also suspect that all the stories that are published are fake and are agenda driven. In such cases, Begby states that they might not judge each individual story based on its actual merits.

How fake news permeates society

The talk will focus on how (dis)information gets diffused in society and the underlying mechanisms as to how fake news is at times positively received by people.

“These phenomena [the two kinds of fake news] that we see these days work as well as they do because they are tailored to piggy-back on otherwise rational belief-forming processes, says Begby.

Begby further explains that it is not the individual’s belief that is manipulated but the context in which the individual has to apply these processes. He adds that when people believe fake news, they use otherwise rational belief-formation processes but in a different context or information environment.

“We manipulate the information environment in which people operate. In a carefully manipulated information environment, even the most rational belief-forming process may not put clearly false beliefs,” he adds. Begby also notes that social media platforms act as catalysts for the accelerated in-flow of such stories as it is now easier to share information in abundance through these environments.

Sharing of information through known contacts also lends some authority to the (dis)information being transmitted.

“You know maybe there is something to this because my friend retweeted or shared it – so let’s just go with the stamp of approval,” he says.

Understanding victims of fake news

“I do worry that people who are going to attend fake news aren’t the people who necessarily will be highly susceptible to this kind of, say, click-bait stories or something like that,” says Begby. “They are hostage to that kind of information. It is not the information itself that is the fault that they grow up in this kind of context.”

“The information environment itself is often manipulated and the belief-forming processes that are normally exercised wouldn’t yield the same results in a doctored environment or context.

“In that sense, I don’t think it will do them any disservice to people who believe in such things as just being plain old dumb,” says Begby.

For more information, please visit www.natalielim.ca

Portrait of a poet: Natalie Lim

By Prachi Diwan

Natalie Lim, a Vancouver-born, Chinese-Canadian poet, won the 2018 CBC poetry prize with her first public poem submission: ‘Arrhythmic.’ This surprise success has encouraged her to continue to explore her heritage and share her work.

Lim explains that writing has always been part of her life, but that it was the discovery of spoken word YouTube videos that really persuaded her to finally put pen to paper in poetic form.

“When the performances made me realize that poetry doesn’t necessarily have to rhyme, and that the topics these artists covered were contemporary issues that I was able to connect to,” says Lim. “For me, this opened the door to poetry, and I have been writing ever since.”

Inspiration from disconnection

Until ‘Arrhythmic’ Lim kept most of her work private, using poetry during high school as a platform for self-expression. With her award-winning poem, she began to dissect her feelings of disconnection to her Chinese culture.

“The feelings of not being able to connect to my culture through language or being able to communicate with my grandparents has been something I had been wrestling with for a while,” she says. “I also had some thoughts and images related to the subject that I really wanted to talk about and the poem came out of that.”

Stephen Collis, English professor and poet at SFU, encouraged her to add Chinese words to her poem.

“This helped me unlock the connection to my language, says Lim. ‘Arrhythmic’ is also a touching eulogy for Lim’s family.

“My mom was the first person to read it in my family. She said this is really good but I didn’t know that this could be poetry. It doesn’t rhyme!’”

My grandparents understand that I won a prize and are super proud of me. I am close to getting a full Chinese translation done of the poem for them to read,” says Lim.

Future forward

As Lim enters her last semester as an English major at SFU, her long term focus is on a market/communications career in technology, but she says that poetry will always be a part of her life.

“I am always going to be writing,” she says. “I will keep sharing my work as long as people want to read it!” she says joyfully.

Two of Lim’s new poems are soon to be published in literary magazine Honey & Lime.

“I am very excited about these two poems,” she says. “One was inspired by Isabella Wang who is a local 18 year old poet, while the other was inspired by a visit to a class of grade 9 students. I did a Q & A about writing poetry.

As for her advice for budding poets, Lim suggests they “read a lot of poetry, and listen to a lot of poetry – it is really amazing what you can learn from others. Then just keep writing and sharing your work!”

For more information, please visit www.natalielim.ca

PICS Vancouver also offers one-on-one employment assistance, paid on-the-job work experience through our Wage Subsidy program, and a one-stop Career Centre with a broad range of job hunting resources. Funding for all programs is provided by the Ministry of Social Development, Employment, and Labour Market Services Division.

Please call 604-324-7733, go to www.pics.bc.ca, or visit us at 200-8161 Main St., Vancouver, to find out how we can best help you.
One Girl, a film about beauty and diversity

by Jess Causby

The 21st annual Reel to Real Film Festival for Youth presents culturally diverse films and documentaries, aiming to expose youth to new ideas and cultural perspectives. One Girl, a documentary offering a glimpse into the life of five girls from five different countries, fits exactly this aim.

“I wanted to show how diverse and beautiful the world is,” explains Rosa Russo, director of One Girl.

One Girl will be showing at Vancity Theatre on Apr. 9 and 13.

A day in the life

Through her documentary, Russo shows an ordinary day in the lives of five girls, all living in different countries but along the same geographical meridian. Their lives vastly differ, from their education and lifestyle, to the challenges they face and dreams they have. It explores their schools, daily chores and how they play and interact with the world. Through their lives, One Girl aims to inspire viewers to have a better understanding of their own world.

Russo describes how “a friend showed me a video of a small boy who had to walk two hours to school every day, and when he got there he couldn’t concentrate because he was starving.”

“We always complain. When the bus is late, or the internet is slow, we complain,” she explains.

Russo was inspired to create something which showed people how lucky they are and illustrate that what may seem like an ordinary life to some people, appears extraordinary to others. Through One Girl, she wanted to show the reality of the girls’ lives, while also showing a contrast.

“Everything in film now is so huge with superheroes and things. I’m afraid that children won’t know what is normal. I’m not against this kind of film, but we now rarely have films of normal people,” she says.

Casting contrasts

The five girls, from Finland, Jordan, South Sudan, Romania and Turkey, each tell their own unique story. When trying to find girls to be in the documentary, Russo struggled to connect with anyone at the school in South Sudan. After attending a mass a few days later, she was approached by a girl named Sunday.

“[Sunday] was very smart and saw me as an opportunity. I like that, I feel like she chose me,” explains Russo.

In Romania, Russo was instantly drawn to a girl named Mariana. “She wanted to pose and show how cool she was,” she says.

In Finland, Russo conducted a casting, so lots of girls were given a potential opportunity to be part of the documentary. Contrastingly, in Jordan, a girl was selected to be in the documentary rather than Russo being able to choose. Even in the search for girls, the contrast in opportunities between the different countries was evident.

Russo and the Reel to Real

Originally from Italy, Russo started as an assistant director and went on to set up her own company with the help of friends. Due to difficulties in Italy with the film industry, Russo moved to London. There, she worked with independent producers doing films and documentaries alongside working on her own company. Russo is now an award-winning producer and director and her productions have been selected and awarded in the main film festivals around the world.

“I want people to be able to see themselves as well as how diverse the world is, and look into the beauty of little things,” says Russo.

For more information, please visit: www.r2rfestival.org
When magic comes to town

by RAMAN KANG

When magic comes to town
Jack and the Magic Bean
Jacks father needs to sell the land to make money for the family.
A twist on a classic

The story starts because the land that Jackie and her father live on is dead, so nothing grows, says Leyva. “Kids are growing up with the idea that money is very easy to get and spend, so for me, when I knew the treasure for Jackie was knowledge, that was big.”

The play emphasizes the value of actions, rather than material goods, Leyva notes. When Jackie’s father needs to sell their land in order to make money for the family, Jackie decides to sell her toys to help.

“This was a very important moment for Leyva when presenting the play in Mexico. “The moment of being poor is who are the children are moving because in Mexico we have many communities that are very poor,” she says.

What Jackie soon learns is that money doesn’t last and what she really needs is the knowledge to make her land grow again.

“In this world and in this moment where everything goes to material things, to make the treasure in this story be knowledge; that is very important,” says Leyva.

As Jackie, I need to be there in the moment and be present. “I try to get the kids to believe in magic. They have to believe that Jackie needs [and can use] their help,” says Leyva.

Points for participation

In Jack and the Magic Bean, because the audience is encouraged to participate, that connection becomes even more important.

“I was so scared, I didn’t want to act in the beginning, the interaction with kids is more direct if you do it by acting than with puppets,” she explains.

By acting Leyva realized she was making a different connection to the audience and couldn’t treat the audience as a whole, rather than as individuals.

The play is a result of the close working partnership between Leyva and Selody. After meeting at a festival where they presented their own plays, the two theatre professionals liked each other’s work so much that they decided to collaborate on some projects.

Leyva travelled with her team from Mexico to Canada to train a local cast in Vancouver to perform her play, Sleeping Beauty Dreams, in English and Selody went to Mexico to put Jack and the Magic Bean together which is now coming to Vancouver.

Usually Leyva remains hidden from audiences during her plays as she is a puppeteer, but for this role she is putting her puppets away and facing audiences head on.

“Because Jackie’s life hasn’t been easy, it’s important we get the kids to believe in magic. Moments[el][ha][ve] to be very sincere because kids need to believe in magic. They have to believe that Jackie needs [and can use] their help,” says Leyva.

For more information, visit www.mpmgart.com
Performance photography from India

By Katy Swainson

A major exhibition of Indian photography exploring gender, religion, and sexual identity will open at the Vancouver Art Gallery on Apr. 19. And will run till Sept. 2.

Moving Still: Performance Photography in India has been three years in the making, with Diana Freundl, associate curator of Asian Art at Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) meeting Critical Collective’s Gayatri Sinha while in Delhi, India. Sinha’s renowned group does work to build knowledge of the arts in India. Both curators share an interest in photographic art, which led to them talking about co-curating an exhibition together. “...photography can explore dimensions that other media cannot because it allows the artist to appear as author, narrator, and actor, who can subvert the image or the icon, and render it in an entirely different context and time frame,” says Sinha.

One hundred and fifty years of photography

Both curators also share the view that photography has an important place in Indian art and its history. “A lot of self-taught photographers embraced the camera from very early on in India,” says Freundl. “These artists were reading, studying, and establishing photographic societies soon after the invention of the camera and their work took on a very local vernacular.” The art they have included in the exhibition is self-consciously performative. The images are staged and the people featured know they are being photographed. How they choose to present themselves and their surroundings says a lot about how they see themselves in the world around them.

“Very early in its history, the photograph demonstrated the ability to ‘perform’ and create contexts of wish fulfillment,” says Sinha. “People turned to the photograph in popular studios to create identities of who they aspired to be, rendering the photograph as a document removed from the quotidian.”

The exhibition shows the different forms this performance has taken during the last 150 years of photography in India. Some of the earliest works include never before displayed pieces from the Photographer Prince, Sawai Ram Singh II, the Maharaja of Jaipur from 1835 to 1880, who photographed his staff and visitors against elaborate surroundings says a lot about how they see themselves in the world around them.

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The Swedish acoustic trio Väsen, celebrating their 30th anniversary this year, has developed their own spin on traditional Swedish Folk music over the last three decades, lending what they feel is a virtuosic level of rhythmic and melodic complexity to their both their studio albums and live performances. The Rogue Folk Club, will present the trio at St. James Hall on Apr. 13.

"I’d say that we want to bring the audience into our world of music and give them a bit of the experience we have when we play this music," says Olov Johansson, nyckelharpist and cofounder of Väsen. "In the [better] moments, someone in the band does something that surprises others in a good way, like a pleasant surprise. And in the absolute best moments, you manage to surprise even yourself."

An interest in tradition

Johansson co-founded Väsen nearly 30 years ago in Sweden with his friends and fellow performers Roger Tallroth (12-string guitar) and Mikael Marin (5-string viola). The trio has been composing and performing their own complex brand of folk music – informed heavily by Swedish tradition – for the last three decades, performing around the world and recording more than a dozen albums.

For Johansson, an interest for the folk music of his home country was piqued early on. While no one in his family played music professionally, Johansson would always look forward to family gatherings as a child where one could always expect an exciting jam session.

"I really enjoyed that. I looked forward to those occasions, I remember, when I was small. And I joined early too with whatever kind of music I could make at the time," says Johansson. "And then one of my maternal uncles, he played the fiddle and the nyckelharpa, so through him I met this instrument."

His mother was equally enamoured with the Swedish fiddle variant so she ended up buying one for herself, which Johansson ended up taking to. He says that’s how it all started for him, though he’s always questioned whether it was a simple case of happenstance.

"I’ve asked [my mother] several times if she planned this – to have me play the nyckelharpa, – by buying one by herself, and she refused to answer that. She’s clever," says Johansson.

Inspired composition

Johansson would have nearly a decade to practice with the nyckelharpa on his own before forming Väsen with Tallroth and Marin. Nowadays, however, the trio couldn’t be more in tune with one another. Johansson says that with each member contributing to the writing and composing process, the trio has learned over time how to inspire each other to create fun yet complex and multi-layered music.

"We kind of discovered more and more what music we should compose for this band to make it interesting, to kind of challenge each other," says Johansson. "I remember, in the beginning when I started to compose, especially for Väsen, I was trying to compose the music in such a way that others would get ideas from the tunes."

For Väsen, the inspiration regularly comes from playing off of tradition. One of the members will often start the songwriting process by riffing off of or using a traditional Swedish melody or rhythm as a basis for the song. From there, the structure of the tune becomes more dense, as layers and sections are continually added, and the various sonic ranges are carved out for each performer and their instrument.

But as much as the trio puts time and diligence into their craft, in the end he says it’s about creating music that’s both enjoyable to perform and to listen to.

"We have always composed and developed the music we enjoy to play, [that] we think is fun to play. We’ve never had to thought, ‘what should we compose to get a lot of airplay, or to get a lot of people to buy our records?’," says Johansson. "We’ve always managed to play the music we think is fun to play. And enough people enjoy that too, so we’ve been able to keep on doing this for 30 years."

For more information on the event and Väsen, visit the following sites:

www.roguefolk.bc.ca/concerts/ev19041320
www.vasen.se

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Väsen: a new take on Swedish folk music

by CURTIS SEUFERT

The Swedish acoustic trio Väsen, celebrating their 30th anniversary this year, has developed their own spin on traditional Swedish Folk music over the last three decades, lending what they feel is a virtuosic level of rhythmic and melodic complexity to their both their studio albums and live performances. The Rogue Folk Club, will present the trio at St. James Hall on Apr. 13.

"I’d say that we want to bring the audience into our world of music and give them a bit of the experience we have when we play this music," says Olov Johansson, nyckelharpist and cofounder of Väsen. "In the [better] moments, someone in the band does something that surprises others in a good way, like a pleasant surprise. And in the absolute best moments, you manage to surprise even yourself."

An interest in tradition

Johansson co-founded Väsen nearly 30 years ago in Sweden with his friends and fellow performers Roger Tallroth (12-string guitar) and Mikael Marin (5-string viola). The trio has been composing and performing their own complex brand of folk music – informed heavily by Swedish tradition – for the last three decades, performing around the world and recording more than a dozen albums.

For Johansson, an interest for the folk music of his home country was piqued early on. While no one in his family played music professionally, Johansson would always look forward to family gatherings as a child where one could always expect an exciting jam session.

"I really enjoyed that. I looked forward to those occasions, I remember, when I was small. And I joined early too with whatever kind of music I could make at the time," says Johansson. "And then one of my maternal uncles, he played the fiddle and the nyckelharpa, so through him I met this instrument."

His mother was equally enamoured with the Swedish fiddle variant so she ended up buying one for herself, which Johansson ended up taking to. He says that’s how it all started for him, though he’s always questioned whether it was a simple case of happenstance.

"I’ve asked [my mother] several times if she planned this – to have me play the nyckelharpa, – by buying one by herself, and she refused to answer that. She’s clever," says Johansson.

Inspired composition

Johansson would have nearly a decade to practice with the nyckelharpa on his own before forming Väsen with Tallroth and Marin. Nowadays, however, the trio couldn’t be more in tune with one another. Johansson says that with each member contributing to the writing and composing process, the trio has learned over time how to inspire each other to create fun yet complex and multi-layered music.

"We kind of discovered more and more what music we should compose for this band to make it interesting, to kind of challenge each other," says Johansson. "I remember, in the beginning when I started to compose, especially for Väsen, I was trying to compose the music in such a way that others would get ideas from the tunes."

For Väsen, the inspiration regularly comes from playing off of tradition. One of the members will often start the songwriting process by riffing off of or using a traditional Swedish melody or rhythm as a basis for the song. From there, the structure of the tune becomes more dense, as layers and sections are continually added, and the various sonic ranges are carved out for each performer and their instrument.

But as much as the trio puts time and diligence into their craft, in the end he says it’s about creating music that’s both enjoyable to perform and to listen to.

"We have always composed and developed the music we enjoy to play, [that] we think is fun to play. We’ve never had to thought, ‘what should we compose to get a lot of airplay, or to get a lot of people to buy our records?’," says Johansson. "We’ve always managed to play the music we think is fun to play. And enough people enjoy that too, so we’ve been able to keep on doing this for 30 years."

For more information on the event and Väsen, visit the following sites:

www.roguefolk.bc.ca/concerts/ev19041320
www.vasen.se
Kobo Town, winner of multiple music awards including the prestigious Juno award, will be performing at the Wise Hall on Apr. 16. The event is organized by Caravan World Rhythms, a non-profit organization that promotes music from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Founded and fronted by Toronto-based Trinidad singer Drew Gonsalves, Kobo Town is named after the historical neighbourhood in Port of Spain, Trinidad where calypso music was born.

Storytelling with calypso

The root of this music genre is traced far back to the arrival of African slaves who, not being allowed to speak with each other, communicated through song. Other music authorities also cited the genre's European influence, particularly from medieval French troubadours. In recent history, the music further evolved as a way of spreading news around in Trinidad.

According to Gonsalves, modern calypso is the folk music of urban Trinidad, but it has always drawn on outside influences, from big band and jazz in the 1930s and 40s to funk and disco in the 1970s and 80s. "For me, the calypsonian is a singing newspaperman commenting on the events of the day, with an attitude halfway between a court jester and grit," he says.

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With a music tradition that is rich in storytelling, Kobo Town's songs are often a perfect mix of danceable rhythms and poetic, witty lyrics. "The songs are either stories or paintings in words. Some of my songs are just telling the stories of Caribbean histories, some others try to evoke sights, smells, sounds and places that have some sort of importance to me," says Gonsalves.

Guyaguare, a song in Kobo Town's award-winning album Where the Galleon Sank, was inspired by a remote desolate beach in southeastern coast of Trinidad where Christopher Columbus was said to have made the first contact with the country on his third voyage. "Like the lifting of a sunken ship from the ocean bed, many of these songs aim to raise to the surface some of our hidden past: exploring, lamenting and celebrating our history and the uncertain legacy it has bestowed on our islands and their people," Gonsalves writes in a note that explains the inspiration behind the album.

He says his own creative process is also similar to ocean waves: "It is rather random - I know others are more disciplined. I need to wait for the waves in order to do anything; sometimes it comes and sometimes it takes a while," he says.

Citing diverse musical influences from reggae and ska, all the way to British rock bands such as the Beatles, Gonsalves says he tries to include many new elements to interpret and reinvent calypso music. Trinidad itself is also very interesting culturally with people from all over the world, says the musician, he himself being of Portuguese descent.

Music with international recognition

Gonsalves has been a musician since his teenager years, picking up a guitar at age 11. He moved to Canada at the age of 13 after a bitter family breakup and sought comfort in music during the initial difficult adjustment to a new life. Prior to fully embarking on a music career, he was a school teacher for two years after studying history in university.

Gonsalves put Kobo Town together in 2004 with some of the band members he met way back in high school; he says the band of six has a great repertoire of skills including guitar, drums, flute, saxophone and bass.

="We all met from different circumstances. I feel blessed to be surrounded by these great musicians and, more so, they are amazing people," he says.

The band debuted in 2006 with the album Independence and quickly became a crowd favourite on the festival circuit. They released their second album Jumbie in the Jukebox in 2013 and with it achieved international fame as the album reached number one on the European world music charts. Their third release Where the Galleon Sank, 2017, won a Canadian Folk Music Award that year and the Juno World Music Album of the Year the following year. The band is currently recording their fourth album.

To learn more about Kobo Town, visit www.rootsrockcalypso.com
I hope everyone is enjoying their April so far. With the flowers and trees in bloom, the weather getting warmer and the long Easter weekend, there is much to see and do outside in Vancouver. But of course, there are plenty of indoor events to keep you busy: theatre plays, musicals and orchestras, art exhibitions and more! Also, Earth Day is on April 22 - be sure to celebrate by conserving energy or planting a flower or two!

Elements Film Festival
Apr. 8–14
Telus World of Science, Vancouver
www.telusworldofscience.ca/elements-film-festival
The Elements Film Festival is a showcase of the best environmental films from British Columbian, Canadian and international filmmakers. There is something for all ages, featuring wildlife, conservation and political action films, special events, guest speakers and expert discussion panels. In the daytime program there will be Science Theatre Shorts, Omnimax Theatre Features and special guest panels. In the evening program there will be a series of beautiful feature films that showcase incredible places on our planet and the people working hard to save them; there will also be special guests and keynote speakers who shine a spotlight on the wonders of nature and humanity as part of nature.

Chilliwack Tulip Festival
Apr. 10–May 5
4300 Tulip Rd, Chilliwack
www.chilliwacktulipfest.com
The cherry blossom isn’t the only flower around! Why not visit the Chilliwack Tulip Festival this year? Chilliwack is Canada’s largest and most recognized tulip festival for the 13th year in a row. Roam through 20 acres of tulip fields set against a Dutch-themed countryside. Check out handmade floral mosaics, a traditional windmill, tractor rides, kids’ crafts and more. There will also be food trucks onsite, serving traditional Dutch foods including stroop waffles. For more information, please check out the festival’s website.

Social Media - Destroying Democracy?
Apr. 17, 7–9 p.m.
Vancouver Public Library, Central Branch
www.sfu.ca/sfu/community/events/b2017/170412b

Social Media - Destroying Democracy? is a timely investigation amid ongoing debates about pipelines and Indigenous rights. qa: xw is a hoping expression that means “water honours us.” For more information, please check out the library’s website.

Saltara Days Japanese Fair
Apr. 19–21, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
VancityVancouver Botanical Garden, Vancouver
www.vcbf.ca
As part of the annual Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival (VCBF), there will be a number of ancillary events around town related to Pato, including a film screening and pre-show talk. Check out the Chan Centre’s website for more information.

Mariza
Apr. 21, 8 p.m.
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC, University Endowment Lands
www.chancentre.com
The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts will present Portugal’s brightest star Mariza at 8 p.m. on April 21. The internationally lauded fadista – a performer of Portuguese traditional soul music, fado – will showcase brand new material from her recently released eponymous album, her seventh studio recording, produced by Spain’s Javier Limon, the singer’s.

Surrey Vaisakhi Parade
Apr. 21, 9:30 a.m.–4 p.m.
Gurdwara Sahib Dasmesh Darbar Temple, Surrey
www.surreyvaisakhi parade.com
The annual Vaisakhi Parade, taking place on Apr. 20, will once again host a lively and celebratory event to mark the birth of the Sikh faith. The parade is expected to draw in excess of 30,000 people to the community to celebrate and enjoy one of the most important elements of the annual event: the amazing foods of India. Each year hundreds of local businesses and individual families present free food offerings to the crowd in celebration of the Parade. For more information about the event including the parade route, check out the parade’s website.