Footnote Number 12: experimental theatre as social discourse

By XI CHEN

Transforming a non-linear written essay into an interesting theatre performance with relevance, humour and meaning may seem like mission impossible, but Footnote Number 12, a recent experimental theatre piece created by Andrea Spreklein in Norway and further co-created with Theatre Replacement in Vancouver, attempted just that, and through it hoped to raise interesting questions on how we understand, use and experience language in different social contexts.

Debuted in Norway last year, the play is currently on tour in Canada, premiering in Vancouver from Feb. 6–8 at Performance Works as part of the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival.

Experiencing an essay in theatre format
The theatre piece is based on a 2006 New York Times sports essay Roger Federer as Religious Experience, written by the late writer David Foster Wallace, who is famous for fusing complex ideas with loose conversational-style prose. He also had a penchant for footnotes, hence the title Footnote Number 12.

"The piece came about when Andrea, the director who is based in Norway, asked the question of how to take an essay and put it on stage in an interesting way," says James Long, main performer and artistic director of Theatre Replacement. "We are interested in exploring the relationship with the reader. Reading is such a solitary experience – it is an experience that allows you to take things in slowly. Performance is the exact opposite of that. Trying to collide these two genres is a real challenge. We tried a lot of experiments till we started to deconstruct the essay and try to find ways to reflect on it and that is when it started becoming really interesting."

According to Long, certain elements of the play, such as performing simple sports and singing, echo the theme of the essay, which praises the beauty and the virtuosity of the human body, as well as pondering the peculiarity and mortality of it.

As a theatre piece that came out of experimental performances, the play was created over a span of three years. It is an essay, which praises the beauty and the virtuosity of the human body, as well as pondering the peculiarity and mortality of it. As a theatre piece that came out of experimental performances, the play was created over a span of three years. It is interesting and relevant, and put it on stage in an interesting way."

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Diversity in Metro Vancouver

By ANINDITA GUPTA

I came to this city as an international student from Kenya. Living on campus and going to a university outside the country I grew up in opened my eyes up to a variety of people from an array of cultures and backgrounds. Through living on campus and just generally going to classes, I met some very interesting people. And, to top that off, they were all from so many different parts of the world; some, from countries that I had never met another person from before.

This is one of the reasons that I was very proud of my closest group of friends that I had made and became very close to over the last few semesters; not only because they are good people, but also because they were from such different parts of the world. Each person is from a different country, speaks a different language and has a very different culture to speak and tell stories about. The City of Vancouver is comprised of many international students and workers, families that have been settled here over many years, and people of many many other origins, liv ing bold and proud in the city, like I have never seen before. For a large part of my life, I thought that diversity was just different cultures. One of the best examples I can think of from the recent past was how I spent my Christmas Eve – it was a true melting pot of people from all over the world. I spent the evening at a Filipino family friend’s house where I met people from Nigeria, India, Mexico, and Japan.

In writing this column and living in Vancouver, I have discovered the true meaning of the word. Diversity is not always about cultural differences, it can also arise from a difference in political opinions, clothing, accents, food...
Cultural Spotlight

Authors in discussion: Omar El Akkad and Esi Edugyan at SFU

by KYLIE LUNG

Simon Fraser University (SFU) is set to host an event to discuss Esi Edugyan’s powerful book Washington Black. Omar El Akkad will participate in a discussion with Edugyan on Jan. 30 to unpack her poignant coming of age story about a young slave named Wash Black and his journey into freedom and adulthood. Washington Black was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won the 2018 Scotiabank Giller Prize.

El Akkad and Edugyan are both renowned authors whose books broach timely topics that encourage the reader to look within themselves as well as examine the society in which they live. Both authors currently reside in Canada but draw on their own lives to tell stories of those whose voices are often silenced. Edugyan is the daughter of Ghana immigrants and grew up in Calgary, Alberta before going to the University of Victoria to study creative writing. She published her first novel, The Second Life of Samuel Tyne, at the age of 24, which was shortlisted for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award.

El Akkad is a successful journalist who has covered some of the most important stories of the last decade, including the military trials of Guantanamo Bay, the Arab Spring, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement in Ferguson, Missouri. After many years of reporting, El Akkad delved into the fiction world and published his first book, American War, in 2017.

The Influence of home

Born in Cairo, Egypt, El Akkad spent a large portion of his childhood in Qatar before moving to Canada at the age of 16. The restrictive governments and societies he experienced as a young person has since influenced his writing and desire to write about those who are making change.

“I’ve long been influenced by the collision of the story and the state, in large part because I grew up in places with very deep and rich storytelling traditions, but are also under the control of governments that have employed all manner of methods to silence storytellers,” says El Akkad.

“That sense of storytelling as an illicit thing, a means of resistance, has heavily influenced my writing.”

American War and the future

That theme of resistance is very prevalent in his work and reflects greatly in his novel American War. The book follows a young woman named Sarat Chesterton in the dystopian landscape of the United States in 2002. Sarat is born shortly before the second American civil war and by the time she is a teenager, she and her family are put in a camp for displaced persons as the country continues to fall apart around her. Both El Akkad and Edugyan’s characters face tremendous adversity in the face of a society that couldn’t care less about their struggles, but that does not mean El Akkad is bereft of all hope for the future.

“My writing doesn’t tend to be hopeful, but I am. And I’m always inclined to believe kindness and fairness will win out. And I think it’s difficult to listen to a writer of her caliber speak and not come away inspired.”

For more information, please visit www.lib.sfu.ca/about/reach-us/news-events/one-book-one-sfu

Esi Edugyan reads from her book Washington Black.
Argotian: learning English in virtual reality

by HARRY JING

A partnership between the English Language and Culture Program at Simon Fraser University and the tech start-up Virtro, results in a pilot program integrating artificial intelligence and virtual reality into a language acquisition classroom.

The department sees hundreds of international students coming to SFU to learn English and continuing on to undergraduate studies.

Virtro is a start-up company working out of SFU VentureLab, a hub where tech companies like Virtro work on high-tech ways of learning. Virtro approached the English Language and Culture Program with a new language learning app called Argotian in order to hold trial runs with students learning English as a second language. Bertrand Lee, 57, director of English Language and Culture at Simon Fraser University and his colleagues accepted, curious to see if their students could benefit from incorporating technology into the classroom.

What is Argotian?

Argotian combines virtual reality and artificial intelligence to create a digital space where students practice their English. Argotian is both entertaining and educational, sending students on a quest to retrieve a stolen painting. Students ask questions, and Argotian is always being improved upon.

Argotian is both entertaining and educational, sending students on a quest to retrieve a stolen painting. Students ask questions, and Argotian is always being improved upon.

The program's intention anyways. Lee explains, "It learns, and I hear that they can input and teach the system to respond to harder question[s]." He notes students were quick in learning how to navigate through the world. Moreover, Lee sees Argotian as an additional tool for classroom discussion but that isn't the program's future, and he hopes that in the future, Argotian could allow students to practice real-life skills, like ordering in a restaurant or opening a bank account. "To be able to go into a virtual world and practice the language can be valuable," says Lee. "I can see the potential of Virtro creating real-life situations for students." For more information, please visit www.virtro.ca and www.sfu.ca/elc.html

A work in progress

"Well one thing we know for sure is that it will never replace a physical classroom with an instructor," says Lee. "What we're hoping is that [Argotian] will give students additional practice on their own, outside of classroom time." According to Bertrand Lee, Argotian is far from being perfect. Lee explains he's never been comfortable with technology. At the beginning of the trial, he had some trouble learning to navigate through the disorientating virtual reality. The program's teaching capabilities require improvements as well. Lee explains the system would misunderstand a question or resort to the default answer that didn't completely answer his question on occasion. However, Virtro's team is always tweaking the app with feedback from students and instructors alike, and Argotian is always being improved upon.

Tech's place in classrooms

"The best way to learn English is to be fully immersed in the language and culture," says Lee. "Even the best games are still artificial in replicating the real experience of using a language." Lee believes Argotian is effective as an educational tool because of its tech-savvy users. He notes students were quick in learning how to navigate through the world. Moreover, Lee sees huge potential in the way Argotian gives less confident students a platform to practice their English. Speaking to characters in virtual reality instead of real, live people allows students to be less self-conscious of their pronunciation. The program also allows confused students to ask a question again without feeling embarrassed.

"Argotian is an additional tool to gain more practice with the added benefit of being able to repeat questions and have the program answer them without being exhausted," explains Lee. "What we're hoping is that [Argotian] will give students additional practice on their own, outside of classroom time."

Although popular with the students, Argotian is far from being perfect. Lee explains he's never been comfortable with technology. At the beginning of the trial, he had some trouble learning to navigate through the disorientating virtual reality. The program's teaching capabilities require improvements as well. Lee explains the system would misunderstand a question or resort to the default answer that didn't completely answer his question on occasion. However, Virtro's team is always tweaking the app with feedback from students and instructors alike, and Argotian is always being improved upon.

"It learns, and I hear that they can input and teach the system to respond to harder question[s]," says Lee. "It's constantly learning and improving itself." The future of Argotian

Argotian has yielded some mixed results. Some students adore the app's entertainment elements and use of cutting-edge technology. Others simply prefer to practice the language in the physical world. For now, the consensus is that Argotian can't replicate classroom discussion, but that isn't the program's intention anyways. Lee views Argotian as an exercise intended to supplement classroom discussion, and in that capacity Argotian works well. Lee is optimistic about the program's future, and he hopes that in the future, Argotian could allow students to practice real-life skills, like ordering in a restaurant or opening a bank account. "To be able to go into a virtual world and practice the language can be valuable," says Lee. "I can see the potential of Virtro creating real-life situations for students."
Unikkaaqtaut

A theatrical sharing of Northern Indigenous stories

by THERESA K. HOWELL

Unikkaaqtaut shows for the first time on the unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ilw̓ətaɁɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations from Jan. 27–29 at the Vancouver Playhouse.

For Vancouver, this has been one of the few productions featuring Inuit theatre and artists, and people are anticipating its arrival.

“From what I've been hearing back from the Indigenous communities who've been contacted, it is that they are really excited about this production coming here,” says Lisa Mennell, Communications Associate at The Cultch.

Stories to share

Unikkaaqtaut means old stories in Inuktitut. In the past number of years, there has been a concerted, collaborative effort to collect and document stories through artistic renderings as well as retell founding stories from Northern communities. This production amalgamates Inuit and non-Indigenous artists highlighting 12 of these myths and stories.

“When founding myths are about to be forgotten that means the culture is in danger,” says Guillaume Itukksarjuak Saladin, co-artisanic director and founder of Artcirq.

Some of the stories recount the origins of night and day, characterized in a dance between a rabbit and raven – the rabbit likes the dark because he can hide, but the raven needs light to find food. Another creation myth presents the origin of death. Mountains, according to lore, were created when giants starved to death. With animated movements and effective costuming, the performers portray the animals, from rabbit and raven to polar bear and huskies. These animal characters figure prominently in the stories.

“In the south, we always try to understand too much,” says Saladin, who is also a Montreal-area circus artist and performer in the show. “Here the audience has a chance to feel the north, to focus on what it is to be there.”

When the performance begins, the audience is immersed in darkness echoing northern life at that time of year. However, before it gets too uncomfortable, the lights come on to an opening scene where a young man lays in a hospital bed. This is where the started adventure begins.

“We are here to share and give everything we have. You will feel the melody of Inuktituk,” says Saladin. 

Behind the scenes

Artcirq, 7 Fingers and TaqputProdictions, in collaboration with Germaine Arnaktauyok’s guidance and her mythical drawings, form the travelling performance, Unikkaaqtaut. Partially funded by the National Arts Center, the production made its debut in Ottawa at the National Theatre and it will tour to Nansen, Vancouver and Yellowknife. Then they are hoping to come back to Toronto and Montreal closer to spring. For the future, it is Saladin’s wish that they bring the theatrical troupe and the stories on a small international tour with a preference for New Zealand, where the Maori people reside.

“It is important to keep the old stories alive,” says Saladin.

Meanwhile, Saladin embraces each post-production opportunity to explore any growth opportunity for the touring company. During the interview, he mentioned Artcirq had arrived in Montreal to be part of CircKazina – National Social Circus Gathering. It is one of the first national gatherings of youth from Nunavut to Vancouver. Artcirq is also concurrent with the company to collaborate with other CircKazina youth for collaborative circus performances in Montreal. One of Artcirq’s guiding principles is to facilitate youth’s access to creative space, performing arts, music and video to further promote cultural wellness. The Inuit performing arts collective has a mission to bridge traditional Inuit culture to its larger global community.

“In the end, Unikkaaqtaut is a sharing of art and its stories. Collaboration is so important because, by ourselves, we cannot survive,” says Saladin. 

For more information: www.thecultch.com

PuSh Festival” from page 1 is still changing and hasn’t reached a final version.

“Gather up your performance is what we would like to call it. It doesn’t have the contemporary theatre: it plays with narratives, it plays with character, it plays with the context of the play,” Long says.

The play as part of the public discourse

In this play, the performers mainly discuss and play around with the language used by David Foster Wallace, such as his choice of words and particularly his footnote number 12, which was ambiguous and somewhat confusing.

“How did it get into the essay? How did it get past the editor? Was it the privilege of David Foster Wallace, or was it a joke by him? Do we take the time any more to consider these fragments of texts that are broken? Is there still value in it apart or should we just experience the writing as a whole – we don’t come up with a clear answer, we just came up with the question,” says Long.

The creation of the play was also concurrent with the Me Too movement.

“How do we represent a white cis male himself, just like David Foster Wallace, Long says he feels the responsibility to explore the space to critique the language in the essay that could be construed as old-fashioned or problematic.

“I didn’t feel that responsibility in 2006 but I certainly feel that responsibility now, and that is absolutely a good thing. This conversation about equity and access had to happen, and it is certainly happening within the theatre community. This piece allowed me to represent my responsibility to participate in this conversation in a comedic way,” he says.

On stage, Long’s voice is clearly manipulated into different voices by sound designer and performer Nancy Tam, which, aside from being more entertaining, adds a deeper layer to the context of the play.

“Contemporary performance is what we would like to call it,” says James Long.

“It allows Nancy to be an equal partner inside of this performance to mediate my voice; she controls how I convey every sound to those speakers. That is important for me just as I represent the white cis male, the everyday average man, she represents a traditionally marginalised individual: young, Chinese, Canadian, queer, etc,” Long says.

“She represents a different generation, a different understanding of the social discourse. It is her opportunity to be present constantly and control how my voice is heard – this implies the power dynamic is shifting.”

Just like the experimental performance itself that is constantly evolving, Long believes there are also no clear answers in our current interesting and complicated time of public discourse.

“We have to stay open to the various viewpoints and that is what this piece is trying to do; it is to sit in this place of curiosity instead of determination, it is constantly asking questions, about every single element of what David Foster Wallace said, of what I am saying on stage and what people are saying in the world,” Long adds.

The co-creator of the play, Theatre Replacement, has produced a number of notable theatre pieces and toured around the world since its inception in 2003. The two artistic directors, Long and Maiko Yamamoto, won the country’s largest theatre prize, the Siminovitch Prize, last year.

For more information, please visit www.pushfestival.ca.
The first wave of New Year in Hanoi

The first of January marks the start of a new year, but for many people it is also a prompt for celebration. For Vietnamese people, New Year’s Eve is a rather new concept from the 2000s decade. Vietnamese people usually start their new year according to the lunar calendar and not the Georgian calendar, so the second wave of new year actually starts in late January or early February, when many fun Vietnamese traditions and celebrations are observed.

The first wave of New Year has been considered a light celebration prior to the tradition ally big celebration of the Lunar New Year. This smaller celebration only consists of sponsored shows and several music shows on TV, which always signals the start of the month-long New Year’s celebration atmosphere to me.

The shows

Big corporate-sponsored shows are a hallmark of this celebration, like the Heineken New Year’s Eve countdown, with spectacular concerts and booming music that makes your heart thump to the beat. And do not forget gifts. It’s hard to go straight through the traffic but it’s still manageable if you can wiggle through the big cars.

You can really feel that Tet, the second wave of New Year’s, is coming as the streets are decorated with vibrant red banners, small New Year decorations that go on your kumquat tree or your Tet flowers like yellow Mai, Ochna, or Dao, peach flower. It really feels like a late Christmas for Vietnamese people in the eyes of a foreigner. Instead of pine trees, we buy kumquat trees and flowers and decorate them with tiny, red and yellow New Year banners. The chúc mừng năm mới, Happy New Year, phrase is seen throughout the streets as they’re filled with Tet decorations.

The treats and to-dos

Aside from the loud music shows, you could consider catching up with friends and distant relatives. It is a good time to catch up as a turbulent year is coming to an end and you have a lot to vent and rant. I suggest you do that with a hot cup of egg coffee under the mid, cool grey sky. My favorite egg coffee shop happens to be near the Old Quarter in Hanoi downtown area; their egg coffee is just sweet and warm enough for a smooth and comforting experience.

The end of the year and the start of a new one opens up so many occasions for conversations and winding down in general for many people in Hanoi. I’m sure that also applies worldwide but you just need a cup of warm egg coffee and walk down the streets of Hanoi at times like this to enjoy a different experience.

VINH NGUYEN

The Source
Legal industry needs to understand truth of Canada’s indigenous history if we truly want to move forward

I graduated from law school in 1979, and I entered a profession that left me little about the history, culture or experiences of Indigenous people in Canada.

I had practised for a very short time when I considered leaving the legal profession. I was disillusioned by how little my colleagues seemed to be aware of Indigenous history, angry that so many of my Indigenous brothers and sisters were denied access to true justice and offended by a legal system that systematically discriminated against my community.

At that time, Section 149 of the Indian Act prevented Indigenous people from hiring lawyers to pursue their land claims, effectively barring us from pursuing our rights. Any lawyer who defied this prohibition by giving legal counsel to an Indigenous person could be disbarred or jailed.

In this way, the rule of law – the very thing that I went to law school to uphold – was used to stack the system against Indigenous people.

Despite my profound reservations, I did not walk away from the law. Instead, I chose to use it to fight itself. I spent my legal career working to create justice for Indigenous people. I practised law in Winnipeg for nine years, went on to serve for 25 years as a judge in Manitoba and was appointed to the Senate in 2016.

The most important work I have done was serving as chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). By forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their parents and communities for the primary purpose of eliminating Aboriginal cultures and racial identity, we concluded that the Canadian government had committed cultural genocide.

And yet, this is just a start. It is these kinds of concrete efforts that will begin the healing process and build the trust we need to move forward together.

When I speak to people about reconciliation, I will often ask members of the audience to pull out their cellphones and find a photo of a child they know and love. I ask them to share the photo with their neighbour, along with a story about this little person.

I then ask the owner of the photo to delete it.

Of course, they cannot do it. Nor do I actually want them to.

And yet, this is the first step towards reconciliation – to appreciate the gravity of what happened to our children. To begin to understand how the law ripped our familial ties and left an entire population, and the generations that followed, traumatized.

I plan to continue to travel the country, sharing this message and inviting this understanding, for as long as I am able.

Senator Murray Sinclair

The Source Vol 21 No 02 | January 21–February 4, 2020
"So I was back here going to the Vancouver Playhouse Feb. 4–8 and 11–15. Raised in exile following her parents’ revolutionary efforts against the 1973 Chilean coup, writer Carmen Aguirre says Anywhere But Here was inspired by a series of dreams she had while attending theatre school in Vancouver. “There’s not many things about this play that are your usual, you know, immigrant story… it’s not about people arriving,” says Aguirre, “it’s about people leaving Canada. We see people refusing, refusing their state of exile.”

Conflicting identities

For Aguirre, reconciling her status as a Vancouver theatre hopeful returning to Canada from her own revolutionary efforts in South America was no easy task. “Within my very early 20s, when I started theatre school right here at Studio 58 in Vancouver, I had just returned from having spent almost all of my youth in Bolivia, Argentina and Chile where I was involved in the underground resistance movement against the Pinochet dictatorship,” explains Aguirre. “So I was back here going to theatre school and my psyche was really confronting this culture clash and my own sense of identity.”

Anywhere But Here is set six years after being exiled from their home country due to revolutionary ties, and a Chilean father and his two daughters look to refute their exiled status. Left behind is their mother, Laura, played by Christine Quintana, who hopes to follow her family to the U.S.-Mexico border, while still grappling with her own past and present self. “She is prepared to take on this tremendous risk to herself, taking up arms on the day of the coup in Chile. But then, in Canada, she’s kind of fallen in with radical feminists, and she’s exploring the role of patriarchy as she sees it in her own life,” says Quintana. “There’s sort of this inherent conflict between those two views, that is the South versus the North, and she’s trying to hold all of that in her, while being a mother, a revolutionary, an academic, a poet, and a wife.”

A diversity of experience

These are the kinds of conflicts with which Aguirre is intimately familiar. While Laura and her family may reach answers of their own, for Aguirre her own character, Laura, her fighting spirit carries her along as she follows her family to the U.S.-Mexico border, while still grappling with her own past and present self. “She form a collage of experiences that are all different versions of the same story. Anywhere But Here takes place in a space that is not limited by time or dimension when you have characters from 200 years away talk to each other about what’s going on right now,” says Quintana. “And then to take all our different experiences and world views in different countries, moving to Canada at different times and having all of those eyes on it makes for a rich collage of work.”

For more information, please visit www.electriccompanytheatre.com.
by LIN WEAVER

The Cultch and Push International Performing Arts Festival present Skyborn: A Land Reclamation Odyssey, a world premiere by Musqueam playwright and performer Quelemia Sparrow. Produced by the Savage Society, performances will be held at the Historic Theatre, Jan. 23–Feb. 1 and at the Gateway Theatre Studio B, in Richmond, March 19–28.

The 90-minute long, no intermission, play is part of the Cultch Fourth Annual Femme Series; a series of shows and events centered on presenting Indigenous women's voices and personal journeys.

"The show is an artistic ceremony that bears witness and connects us to our ancestors who are skyborn," explains Sparrow."It is a process that unites us to our history and our land. It also the connection to my spirituality, it is part of my journey, so in some sense, it is my very personal story.

Land reclamation

Sparrow explains that Skyborn is also the story of land reclamation, a process that strives to return neglected indigenous lands to their ecological beauty and prosperity. In Canada, land reclamation efforts are mostly directed at land disturbed by natural resource development, including mining, oil, and gas operations. "The idea of reclamation is to honor the traditions of the First People of this territory and to learn and respect their lands," adds Kim Senklip Harvey, Fire Creator and director. "So the reclamation idea is for the audience to come and bear witness with respect and humility. It is also the act of refusing colonialism and imperialism. One example being the renaming of the places where our Ancestors have lived thousands of years ago." Sparrow is proud of the experience they have created for the audience. They have invited an honorary witness chosen to represent the spectators and to guide them throughout the process of recalling, retaining and remembering what happened during the artistic ceremony, as Indigenous Peoples rely on their oral history to pass on their stories and personal journey to the next generations. "It is really important to enter Canadian Indigenous Theatre with great humility," continues Harvey. "Skyborn is more than a show and tell. As a proud Syilx Nations woman myself, I am part of this story and invite all to live the Syilx ontology in harmony and balance with the earth." Hy’cyp’ca, Wáy "Hy’cyp’ca, Wáy, an artistic ceremony that honors a Musqueam soul canoe journey. A multifaceted ancestral ritual to retrieve a lost soul when there is a sickness," says Harvey. "There is a sickness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. We need you here in order for us to heal the bond between us, our culture and land. Our Elders teach us that we are the land. So to know us, you must know the stories that flow from these waters, the spirits that grow from the forest floors and the histories that burn from the sky."

This artistic ceremony is an offer for us to be in a knowledge sharing relationship, to share the Ancestral teachings that live with the Musqueam and Sto:lo peoples. This knowledge comes from a time before trees, a time when giant beings roamed the Earth. Quelemia, is a name that pre-dates the human race, it opens up portals into our cosmos and this story indicts us into Salish mysticism." Sparrow explains that the canoe carrying a sick soul is not just a metaphor or a symbolic idea."I actually rode the spirit canoe journey," she says. "It is a ritual held with a medicine healer who assisted me to retrieve my soul and become once again a whole person. It is a full and complete reclamation." Skyborn tells us we are all born from a river of stars. To learn more, go to www.nac-cna.ca or www.pushfestival.ca

The show is an artistic ceremony that bears witness and connects us to our ancestors who are skyborn.

Quelemia Sparrow, playwright and performer

"Verbatim" from page 1

and interests in music and film – anything. Being a part of this city is the simplest of ways to open the gates to diversity. There are events that happen throughout the city that can cater to your interests and tastes. Being a part of the city and using social media can help you uncover numerous food bloggers, skateboarders, photographers, writers – the list is endless.

“Diversity is not always about cultural differences; it can also arise from a difference in political opinions, clothing, accents and even food.”

Just by being somewhat outgoing at university, I was fortunate enough to be a part of various different clubs, each different from the other, be it cultural or intellectual. And even if someone does not have access to university clubs to meet people, there are many other options today, thanks to the media we are surrounded by. I have found various websites and apps that help you meet like-minded or totally different people around you. And the many websites like the former boredinvancouver.com can give you an insight of the kind of activities or events happening in your city.

Vancouver may not be the friendliest of cities and it must be very tough for someone completely new to the country or city to settle in here. I think back to my first semester of university as I type this. It was very difficult to meet and make friends, but knowing that tools like social media, websites and apps exist helps. Mediums such as this can help you find people who have similar or even polar opposite interests as you.

The more I think about it, the more I learned and realized what diversity is really about. Yes, being a diverse society means to have a variety of nationalities and cultures around you. But having many other differences in taste and choice and still coming together as one, sharing them with others and increasing your knowledge and taste, is also diversity.
Chinese New Year sticky cake

This is a fun way to celebrate the new year and share with the neighbours! I like to use a square cake mold if you can find one and once the cake has cooled slightly, cut it into bite size rectangles.

**Ingredients**
- 3 1/4 cups glutinous rice flour
- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- 7 ounces boiling water
- 1/2 cup Chinese dates, softened in water, cut in half, pits removed, or 1/2 cup other dried fruit or 1/4 cup whole almonds
- 1 tbsp milk
- Water, as needed
- 1 tbsp white sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil

**Method**
1. Prepare the wok for steaming by placing a bamboo basket in the wok over hot water. The steam rising will cook the cake.
2. In a bowl, mix the boiling water and the sugar, stirring to dissolve. Soak the Chinese dates in hot water for at least 30 minutes to soften. Cut the dates in half and remove the pits.
3. Place the glutinous rice flour in a large bowl. Make a well in the middle and stir in the sugar and water mixture. Add the milk and begin shaping the dough. Add 1 tbsp of water to the dough at a time, until you have smooth dough. Incorporate 1/2–3/4 of the Chinese dates and almonds.
4. Grease a 6-inch cake pan with the vegetable oil. Place the dough in the cake pan and spread it out to the edges. Decorate with the remaining dates, lightly pushing them into the dough. Sprinkle the sesame seeds on top.
5. Steam the cake over medium-high to high heat for 30 minutes, or until the edges of the cake pull away from the pan. Remove the cake from the heat and cool.

Recipe by Ben Kiely

Photo by Ben Kiely
**Cultural Calendar**

January 21–February 4, 2020

_**By Simon Yee**_ CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Brrr! I hope everyone was warm and safe during the snowfall we had earlier this month. Hopefully, the weather will be warmer as we celebrate the Lunar New Year, happening on Jan. 25. Usher in the Year of the Rat by attending to the many Lunar New Year events happening around Metro Vancouver! Other than the many Lunar New Year events happening around town, there are theatrical performances, roundtable discussions, musical and dance performances and more to check out!

Always a Bridesmaid
Jan. 17–Feb. 1
Metro Theatre Centre, Vancouver
www.metrotheatrecentre.com

Metro Theatre Centre will be presenting a Jones Hope Wootton comedy, Always a Bridesmaid, on their stage from Jan. 17–Feb. 1. Committed to the notion that car- rears, waistslines and even marriages may disappear, but real friendships last a lifetime, our high school girlfriends honour the vow they made to each other at their dateless prom: no mat- ter where, no matter when, they would all show up to stand as bridesmaids when one of them got married. Forsaking all oth- ers, in sickness and in health, they repeatedly struggle to stage the perfect wedding in spite of fistfights at the altar, runaway brides or the mistaken and un- fortunate, release of a flock of white doves. For tickets and showtimes, please visit the the- atre’s website.

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Push Festival
Jan. 21–Feb. 9
Various venues throughout Metro Vancouver
www.pushfestival.ca

The Push Festival returns to Vancouver for the sixteenth time to showcase innovative and transformative art. There will be m performances spread over three weeks, featuring stagger- ing works, immersive en- counters, theatrical adaptations and more. Catch a theatrical dra- ma about Jewish refugees from Romania, a tragicomic cabaret concert, an immersive sound installation about modern day Syria, a confessional narrative about living in the aftermath of economic disaster in South Ko- rea and more at Push. For more shows and event details, please visit their website.

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Islam and with
Psychology Analysis:
AFPRC Encounter
Jan. 22, 7 p.m.
SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver
www.sfu.ca/sfu-community/events.html#view/event/event_id/81989

In recent years the contours of a hitherto unexpected psychological interface has emerged: Islam and with psychoanalysis. Why bring together this odd couple together? What kinds of theo- retical insights could be gained in this crossing of wires? This roundtable panel discussion hopes to stage a provocative yet mutually productive encoun-
ter between facets of Islam and psychoanalytic theory, whereby both can mutually illuminate and enrich each other — in a short-cir- cuiting way. There will be Q&A after the roundtable and re- freshments will be offered. Check out the SFP website for speaker information and more details.

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Investigation of Things
Jan. 22–Mar. 21
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, Vancouver
vancouverchinesegarden.com

The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden will be hosting Investigation of Things, the first edition of the Canada-China Art Exchange for Young Emerging Artists, and second art exhibi- tion by Artist-in-Residence, Lam Wong. This multimedia art ex- hibition will showcase the artwork of ten young, emerging artists from China and Canada. Nomini- ated by an esteemed group of experts in the art industry, the artists’ work explores the way we understand the world around us, and aims to open cultural languages between the East and the West through the evocative language of contemporary visual art. There will be an opening reception from 5-7 p.m. on Jan. 22. Check out the Garden’s website for more information.

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Cosmic Nights: Space Debris
Jan. 23, 8:00–10 p.m.
H. R. MacMillan Space Centre, Vancouver
www.spacecentre.ca/cosmicnights-space-debris

Grab a friend and pay a visit to the H. R. MacMillan Space Centre for Cosmic Nights: Space Debris. There are tens of thousands of pieces of man-made debris, or “space junk,” orbiting Earth that threaten satellites and other spacecraft. With the increase in space exploration and no de- bris removal process in place, the number is sure to increase. Learn more about the impact space debris will have on cur- rent and future missions, space law and the impact human activ- ity, both scientific and commer- cial are having on space. There will be a custom planetarium show, guest lecturers, drinks, science demonstrations and trivia at this 19+ event. Check-in is at 6:30 p.m. For more information, please check out the cen- tre’s website.

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Noises Off
Jan. 23–Feb. 23
Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, Vancouver
www.artsclub.com

Noises Off, hailed as the funniest farce ever written, treats audi- ences to a hilarious peek at a sec-
ond-tier acting troupe perform- ing a show, and will be presented by the Arts Club from Jan. 23 to Feb. 23. With egos, insecurities and tempers flaring backstage — and forgotten lines, missed cues and misplaced sardines onstage — this cast threatens to strike the old adage “the show must go on.” Novelyst and playwright Michael Frayn’s dizzying play-within- a-play classic is sure to leave you doubled over with laughter. Check out the Arts Club’s website for cast information, tickets and more details.

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Cultural Short Film Festival
Jan. 24–26
Vancouver Theatre, Vancouver
www.vsf.com

The Eighth Annual Vancouver Short Film Festival is coming to Vancouver Theatre on Jan. 24–26. Since 2005, the festival has been committed to celebrating the vi- brant community of short film, video and animation artists on the Canadian West Coast, building ties between emerging and established professionals and providing an arena where all short filmmakers, including stu- dents, can screen their films in public and support their fellow colleagues. For a list of films on display, check out the festival’s website.

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The 47th Vancouver Chinatown Spring Festival Parade
Jan. 26, 11 a.m.
Chinatown, Vancouver
www.chinatown.ca

The Chinese New Year Parade will return for the 47th time at 11 a.m. on Jan. 26. This signature event of Vancouver’s Chinatown will feature lion dances, cultural dance troupes, marching bands, martial arts performances and much more. This is an annual cultural extravaganza not to be missed. The Year of the Rat in the Chinese Lunar calendar will be- gin on Saturday, Jan. 25, in 2020. Come see the sights and hear the sounds of the festivities! Check out the Chinese Benevolent Asso- ciation of Vancouver’s website for more information.

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The Believers Are But Brothers
Jan. 29–Feb. 1
Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, Burnaby
www.shadboltcentre.com

The Shadbolt Theatre will be presenting playwright Javada Alipoor’s The Believers Are But Brothers, a Fringe First award winning and Total Theatre Nomini- rated (Experimentation & In- novation) multi-media show from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1. We live in a time where old orders are col- lapsing, from the post colonial nation states of the Middle East, to the EU and the American elec- tion. Amidst this, a generation of young men find themselves burn- ing with resentment; without the money, power and sex they think they deserve. This crisis of mas- culinity leads them on a journey into an online world of fantasy, violence and reality. Check out the Shadbolt’s website for tickets and more information.

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Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (Trocks)
Feb. 1, 8 p.m.
Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver
www.showoneproductions.ca

Show One Productions will pres- ent the anticipated return of the world famous, all-male ballet company Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (Trocks), onstage Feb. 1 at 8 p.m. at the Queen ELiz- abeth Theatre. This sensational performance will showcase the Trocks’ wickedly absurd antics and serious dancing chops – fea- turing sly send-ups of beloved ballet classics and contempo- rary works. Infused with a heavy dose of highbrow hilarity, this anti-laden evening will offer audiences a chance to experi- ence high-powered diva energy as the men strut their stuff in size 11 pointe shoes. Check out the troupe’s website for more information.

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