

Unfold the art of kimono dressing
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The Source

forum of diversity

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Photo courtesy of YWCA Metro Vancouver



Verbatim

Be you, here

by KIRA MATTHES

I come from a very settled place. It's a city, but it feels like a town. I know families who have lived in the same neighbourhoods for generations and grandparents who attended the same high schools as their grandkids. Even my dad has lived in the same neighbourhood ever since he was a kid. When this is how you grow up, people get to know your family and your history, and they get to know you. Or at least they think they know you. It's not always a bad thing, but it made me feel like I didn't have full control over my story.

So I packed up and moved to Vancouver six months ago in search of a clean slate. For me, this city represents the space I'm holding for myself, allowing me to learn and change however I want to and to explore what's out there. It represents less ties to what has always been and more opportunities for what could be. I feel supported and encouraged by this city, like I'm being gently nudged and told to grow. And in the best way possible, I feel a little more anonymous here – a little smaller even. It allows me to sit back and quietly learn. In many ways, I feel like I'm gaining perspective.

Sometimes when I'm on the sky train or in a coffee shop, I look around and realize that I am a minority in the room. To be honest, as a white girl, this is pretty new to me. It makes me realize that for most of my life, I've been surrounded by people who look like me and talk like me. I question how that has coloured my own thoughts and opinions. I like to think it hasn't, but maybe just the fact that I have very seldom been aware of my own race means that it has. It makes me realize that I want to be reminded always of how many perspectives exist outside of my own.

See "Verbatim" page 10 >

Towards an inclusive workplace

by COLLEEN ADDISON

Sylvia Fuller and Joann MacKinlay tell a sad story. Women and minorities often struggle in Canadian workplaces, sidelined by a lack of support. But there's hope. Programs like the YWCA's Pathways to Leadership for Immigrants and Refugee Single Mothers, help disadvantaged groups get the resources they need to succeed.

"When you have a workplace that [is] dominated by a particular group, people come to norm-

alize the relationship between that group and the characteristics needed to succeed in the job," says Fuller, a sociology professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who looks at labour markets. "Their successes are more likely to be noticed; their failures are written off. The converse happens for groups that are seen as not fitting or different."

The YWCA's Pathways program aims to overcome barriers like the one that Fuller describes, says MacKinlay, an employee in YWCA's Single Mothers Support Services who manages and facilitates the program. Pathways

consists of 17-weekly classroom sessions and optional one-to-one mentor support. The program is free, but registration is required.

A tunnel vision

"Single mothers are the poorest family group in BC," says MacKinlay. "There's already barriers for immigrants. But if you're a single mom and there's already a gap in your employment history because you've been raising children, how do you find yourself a way out of that situation?"

"Barriers for these women are real," Fuller notes. "Poor English

skills and little to no Canadian experience can significantly hamper both job searching and the ability to succeed within a job," she says.

"Employers have historically been uncertain about experience in other countries, particularly the global south," explains Fuller. "They're less likely to worry about someone coming from the United States or Australia. But when it comes to the Philippines or India, there [is] hesitation."

Childcare is another problem. "[The women] may not have [the] extensive family support

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Cultural Spotlight



Reclaiming history and imagery

by MATTHEW FRASER

In the ever-changing modern world, the importance of media and its portrayal of the history and narratives of marginalized groups has increased dramatically. As more people turn to social media and online sources for information about the world and the people around them, the need to address misconceptions has become more apparent.

Aisha Amijee, executive director of *Voices of Muslim Women (VMW)*, and Professor George Elliot Clarke of the University of Toronto outline some of the challenges and opportunities facing those confronting this new need.

Spreading awareness

Amijee is well aware of the ways online media can negatively impact the representation of groups that may not make a common appearance in some people's lives. With that knowledge in hand the objective could be simple and direct.

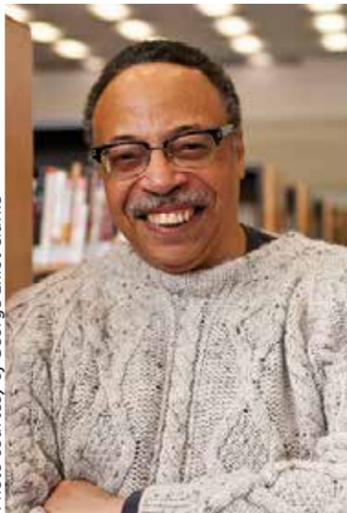
"*Voices of Muslim Women* is a nonprofit platform that actively looks to disrupt media misrepresentations of Muslim women. We do this by making Muslim women who lead and live big in Vancouver more visible. We host a range of events including an annual awards gala for the professional accomplishments of Muslim women in Vancouver as well as a professional development conference called the Ringleaders Conference," she says.

Amijee understands the importance of showcasing the diverse and dynamic realities of Muslim women in a way that is both truthful and eye-opening.

"VMW is interested in creating bridges by working together with non-Muslim and Muslim community stakeholders. We host a space for Muslim women to tell their stories in a digital form and in their own words to become visible mentors for other women," explains Amijee. "These programs are also open and inclusive to non-Muslim women. This is probably our leading strategy to overcome old media stereotypes of Muslim women. Also, getting to know Muslims in your neighbourhood is often a better source than reading online media content."

History is the people's own story

Clarke, who spoke last year at Kwantlen Polytechnic University's *Anti-Racism Day*, is a full and vocal supporter for communities to self-determine who its own historic role models should be.



▲ George Elliot Clarke, professor at the University of Toronto.

"We need to know for ourselves who should be upheld and venerated as a great writer, leader or role model. Radical and revolutionary figures in black and African diasporic history have never been favoured by the empowered," says Clarke. "[The empowered] have shown, over centuries, little interest in extolling the virtues of those who have challenged the system and challenged their rule."

Without shying away from the thornier edges of its use, Clarke makes both sides clear in his analyses of African cultural heritage.

"On the positive side yes, Black History Month has helped us all to focus on the contributions and challenges people of African heritage and descent have experienced during our 500 year odyssey on Turtle Island, the so called 'New World.' On the negative side, as opposed to extolling the virtues of those who have been less famous, less wealthy or less lionized, what tends to happen is that an emphasis is placed on the notable greats and the one in a million who have become president of the US or have won a Nobel prize as opposed examples for everyone else to aspire to be," he says.

Watching what we teach and what we know

Amijee delivers a clear path for addressing the way ideas have been used to obfuscate Muslim women.

"Understanding that language constructs realities, allies of Muslim women can make a conscious effort to unlearn the general media biases in order to better understand media misrepresentation and combat it," she says.

Meanwhile, Clarke is clear when delivering his assessment of how we can protect and enshrine the legacies of those who fought to free themselves and their descendants.

"It's incumbent upon us to not just accept the totems and figures of achievement that capitalist society is comfortable with because they will always parade those folks out," he says. "Unless we deliberately seek to resuscitate and preserve the memories of the people we consider to be the real champions of progress and opposition to white supremacy, it's easier for those figures to be erased, obscured or forgotten. This is our responsibility." ✍

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All my non-relations explores kinship and reconciliation

by PAUL LEE

The indigenous term “all my relations” refers to the notion of interconnectedness in all aspects of life. Clint Burnham, professor and chair of the English graduate program at Simon Fraser University (SFU), will discuss this concept in a lecture at the Coach House, Green College, University of British Columbia (UBC) on March 28.

“All my non-relations” will explore indigenous ideas about kin-



Photo by Lincoln Clarkes

▲ Clint Burnham, professor and graduate program chair, Department of English, SFU.

ship and family, how both indigenous and non-indigenous writers and academics approach these topics, and the role of literature in achieving reconciliation.

Burnham is the founding member of the Vancouver Lacan Salon, a psychoanalytic study group based in Vancouver. The purpose of the Salon is to share, discuss, and promote psychoanalytic discourse by creatively reading and engaging with the works of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. By combining an exploration of indigenous literature with Lacanian psychology, Burnham hopes to create awareness of a plurality of textual meanings and the idea of Lacan’s “non-relation.”

Influence of other writers

Burnham uses the work of various writers to show how marginalized people in indigenous culture is explored by others. Quoting Daniel Heath Justice, “sometimes Indigenous people, queer, trans or other marginalized people relations aren’t readily available,” says Burnham. “There’s this desire for Indigenous people to act with responsibility to their community, their family or all my relations in a broader sense, but then what about those who feel like they don’t have any relations,

who have been thrown out by their family because of their sexuality or other reasons?”

Another writer Burnham cites is Wendy Rose, author of the essay *Neon Scars*. Rose writes “I’ve heard Indians joke about

many playwrights such as Kamau Brathwaite, Félix Morisseau-Leroy, and Femi Osofisan have explored the colonial challenge to authority through the play, since *Antigone* experiences unresolved conflict between her

nationalities have immigrated, but feels that some immigrants may not be able to fully grasp the issues of colonialism in a Canadian setting. “Maybe they themselves were in a country that was colonized. Maybe people think rec-

“ Maybe people think reconciliation has to do with the past, but the last residential schools closed in 1996. That’s not that long ago.

Clint Burnham, professor and chair of the English graduate program at SFU

those who have acted as if they don’t have relations i.e. no relations. I have no relatives they live but they threw me away so I do not have them I am without relations.”

Burnham stresses that he is not saying that relations don’t matter, but that they are very difficult, even if we do not have any of our own. “Settlers are still living with indigenous people on indigenous land so we have to figure how to work that out,” he says.

Connection with *Antigone*

Burnham’s talk will also link post colonialism and Sophocles’ play *Antigone*. He points out that

state and her family responsibilities. Burnham also mentions versions of *Antigone* that appear in a Canadian context – for example, Deanne Kasokeo has written an *Antigone* play set on a Cree reserve in Saskatchewan. “What’s interesting me is that there’s all these de-colonial attempts to take the same story to find a way to think about its relevance to the present day.”

Possibility of reconciliation

Burnham believes that his talk ultimately aims to achieve reconciliation between settlers and indigenous people. He understands that Canada is multicultural society where many na-

conciliation has to do with the past, but the last residential schools closed in 1996. That’s not that long ago,” he explains. “This is why we need a historical consciousness.”

Burnham believes that while reconciliation is possible, it takes time for healing to happen. He also thinks that social awareness, along with exposure to indigenous writers, will eventually pave the way. He hopes that his talk will help “colonized people, indigenous or not, to see there’s value in thinking about the non-relation.”

For more information on the talk, check out www.greencollege.ubc.ca.

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An evening of kimono dressing

by NAILA TOPAN

Fumiko Horan, a kimono-dressing specialist will be demonstrating traditional kimono dressing at the O Hanami Festival Apr. 5–Apr. 6 at the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.

Horan, raised in Nakano, a municipality of Tokyo, introduces the culture of *oiran* kimono dressing and processions and the festivities in Japan associated with the oncoming of cherry blossoms—known as *Sakura*.

“*O hanami*’ means ‘I’m going to see the flowers,’” says Horan.

Kimono schooling

At 22, Horan began her career by modelling kimonos and wondered why there were so many schools for kimono dressing in Tokyo when kimonos seemed so simple.

“But it’s very difficult [to tie a kimono]. They have four layers and no buttons, just rope,” she says.

Horan goes on to explain that there are different sleeves, lengths and colours to consider with kimono dressing, as well as the *obi*, a 12-foot long piece of fabric used as a sash. To learn the art, she studied for two years at Hakubi, a prestigious kimono school in Tokyo where she went on to receive her kimono dressing license.

Horan describes how her mother assembled traditional flower arrangements, referred to as *ikebana*, and they would prepare *sado*, a ceremonial tea for special events in Japan. She was able to contribute with her

specialization in kimono dressing. She says that kimonos are a focal point for many events in Japan, including weddings, coming of age ceremonies and festivals.

As a former dancer, Horan joined a traditional Japanese dancing group at the Nikkei Centre in Vancouver where she then accepted a role as a professional kimono dresser.

their customers; they have the power. She describes *oiran* as being educated in speaking, writing, calligraphy, art and music.

“They walk the street slowly and all the women come to see the *oiran* fashion. If they would wear a red kimono, after that, every woman would wear a red kimono,” she says.

“When I came to Canada, I never thought I was going to dress in kimonos again. I gave them away.

Fumiko Horan, kimono-dressing specialist

“In Japan, [kimono dressing] was not my job. [My family] owned a restaurant. My friend had a hair salon, and I worked there sometimes to help people wear kimonos. When I came to Canada, I never thought I was going to dress in kimonos again. I gave them away,” she says.

Since becoming a professional kimono dresser, she has collected a large array of kimonos, including cotton kimonos, called *yukata*, and hair accessories she has made.

Oiran kimono procession

Horan explains that *oiran* in Japan are courtesans, similar to geishas except that the customers choose Geishas, but *oiran* choose

She likens the parades to fashion shows and enjoys *oiran* kimonos for their beauty and influence.

Horan progressed from traditional kimono dressing shows to *oiran* processions at the North Vancouver Cultural Centre after a request for even more than the dressing demonstrations she had previously hosted.

“I thought that if they want something different and interesting, I can give them an *oiran* parade,” she says.

The Nikkei Centre then requested for the *oiran* kimono dressing and parade to be demonstrated at the O Hanami Festival to complement the celebration of Japanese rituals and traditions during *Sakura*.

O Hanami Festival

“In Japan, the news tells us exactly what dates the *Sakura* will be opening in each city,” Horan says.

In Nakano, Horan’s family and many others celebrate by preparing food, drinks and rice bowls. They place *tatamis*, traditional mats, under the *sakura* trees where they eat, dance, sing and drink.

“*Sakura* time in Japan is very traditional. It shows how life is very short, and it’s a time of re-birth,” she says.

She says that during *Sakura* festivals, women wear kimonos with *obis* featuring cherry blossoms to celebrate the opening.

At the O Hanami Festival, Horan will demonstrate kimono dressing first, showing how to tie both hair and kimonos before beginning the *oiran* procession, which will circle the hall. The procession will include traditional lanterns and parasols, two ‘*oiran*,’ two ‘*geishas*’ and two ‘*maikos*’ – geishas in training. She describes the walking style as slow and mesmerizing.

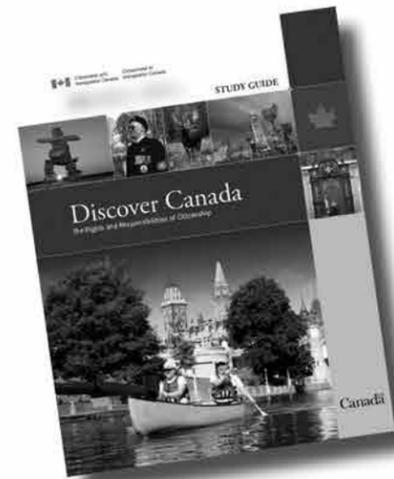
Horan emphasizes that her focus is on showcasing the intricacy of *oiran* kimono dressing and the elegance of *oiran* processions in alignment with the culture in Japan. ☞

For more information, please visit www.centre.nikkeiplace.org.

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Catharsis and reconciliation in memoir form

by CHRIS HO

Vancouver-based Lindsay Wong's debut memoir explores her childhood as a Chinese Canadian, as well as her family's history of mental illness and intergenerational trauma. In the process of the book, Wong discovers catharsis, personal growth, and a heightened understanding of her family, and the nature of mental illness as a whole.

"[Writing the book] helped me understand my mother and my grandmother and all the things that had faced them in the past," says Wong. "They would talk about their childhood and that made me sympathize with them. They have suffered so much but didn't have the tools necessarily to talk to a therapist, so that's how intergenerational trauma is passed on."

Wong will be discussing the darkly comedic memoir *The Woo-Woo: How I Survived Ice Hockey, Drug Raids, Demons, and My Crazy Chinese Family* with fellow memoirist JJ Lee at the 2019 North Shore Writers Festival, held at The North Vancouver District Public Library, on Apr. 6.

The necessity of storytelling

Wong reveals a complex relationship with writing. Just as her family and other Chinese Canadians struggled to find a home within the mainstream cultural narrative of Canadian society, it also took her many years to get her story published. Publishers has told her it was too niche, not universal enough. In spite of this Wong persevered, and, before she knew it, her memoir was nominated for the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction before its release in October 2018.

"I always tell people, writing for me is not [about having] fun. I have a cavity and have to get rid of it, especially as a memoir," Wong explains. "When I set my sight on something, I have to have that. I will do whatever it takes. That's just my personality, but also writing, it's an obsession. I was telling someone the other day, 'I have to write,' it's just not an option. I'm miserable when I'm writing, and I'm really miserable when I'm not writing."

Acceptance and perseverance

As with many stories and experiences there are silver linings to be found. Since Wong grew up in a tumultuous home environment where the prevalence of paranoia and rage would escalate to the point of becoming the norm, the criticism that she experienced as a writer was significantly less daunting. Having to take piano and join the hockey team also instilled in her a sense of discipline and commitment.

"I think hockey [especially] teaches a person discipline," she says. "You have to wake up early, there's a target and you know the only way it counts is if you actually hit the puck in the net, and that's what life is in some ways for me, so that has really

taught me determination. But in terms of family, I developed a really thick skin. So whatever someone said to me, it just bounced off. Sure, sometimes it hurt, but it just taught me you have to keep going. And I think in writing that's really important. I've always felt that if I want something I can [either] get better at it, or not listen [to criticism]."

In spite of an illness, vertigo, Wong was able to not only complete her memoir during her stay in New York City, but also her MFA in Literary Nonfiction at Columbia University as well.

Understanding Family and Mental Illness

Aware of the unavoidable "narcissism" that often comes with writing a memoir, Wong dedicates her memoir to herself in jest, but also wishes to make clear that she has also dedicated it to "anyone who's ever felt like an outsider."

"I think that's a larger part of being a part of two cultures," reflects Wong. "You're not quite Canadian; you're not quite Chinese, right. This was my first time back in Hong Kong. I look like everyone there; I'm the same height and can fit all the same clothes. But at the same time my thinking and the way I talk is so different. I can understand a little bit of Cantonese, but I can't fully articulate myself either. So it was like [I was] a foreigner but [I didn't] belong there."



▲ Lindsay Wong.

While Wong's ultimate goal was to simply finish the memoir, she admits she had no expectations about whether or not it would be well received. The most valuable outcome of the process was not so much its literary success, but the way it has both helped her better understand her family's history of mental illness and the lives it has touched along the way.

"It helped me understand my mother and grandmother and all the things that had faced them in the past," she says.

Wong has already begun her first fictional young adult novel, *The Summer I Learned Chinese*, which is set to debut in 2020 through Simon Pulse publishing.

For more information on her appearance at the 2019 North Shore Writers Festival, please visit www.northshorewritersfestival.com.

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Siyabonga (We are Thankful): a film with the determination to inspire others

by JESS CAUSBY

Vancouver will be presenting the 9th Annual South African film festival that showcases features and documentaries exploring the culture, history and politics of South Africa Mar. 29–31.

The festival shows films aimed to inspire, to inform and to entertain. The proceeds from the festival will be supporting the educational development work which *Education without Borders* has been doing in South Africa since 2002.



Photo courtesy of Other People

▲ Still from *Siyabonga*.

“People should go and see these kinds of films because it is good to see different visions from different parts of the world. Film is a wonderful tool; it offers people a unique perspective,” says Joshua Magor, director of *Siyabonga (We are Thankful)*.

Real life inspiration

Siyabonga (We are Thankful) is a film named after its main character Siyabonga Majola, who hears a movie is being made in a nearby town. The audience is taken through his real life adventures as he attempts to become part of the film.

From stealing wi-fi from the *umlungus* (white people), in order to write an email to the film producers, to refusing his friend’s request to get help through witchcraft, Majola’s journey is full of surprises which eventually leads him to meet the film’s director. The conversation that followed led to this film coming into existence.

“After sending out a newspaper article looking for people to participate in a film I was planning to make, I was contacted by a young man, Siyabonga Majola, who was very keen to help and so we agreed to meet. A few days later we sat down to talk and I was so moved by this man that I threw away all my previous plans and decided right there to make a film about him,” explains Magor.

This film is about a man’s attempts to improve his life and take control of his fate, Magor says.

“From the way he carried and addressed himself, to the way he spoke about his life, I was struck by his sense of determination. He possessed a real dignity,” says Magor describing Majola.

Of country and context

Magor, originally from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, de-

veloped an interest in filmmaking while making video art in high school.

Magor earned a scholarship to study English Literature and Economics at the University of Edinburgh. He then proceeded to do his Master’s degree in Filmmaking at the London Film School and during this time, he worked consistently on honing his craft making short films, documentaries, video art and installations.

Siyabonga’s past echoes in his present in a similar way that South Africa’s own his-

tory seems to be unforgettable to the people and places of the film.

“[With this film] I wanted to make something that presented the truth of a person’s spirit in the context of a country dealing with many obstacles and historical trauma,” explains Magor. “It’s hard to express in words how I felt when I met Siyabonga, which is probably why I made a movie.”

Magor, based in London, is passionate about cinema’s ability to capture the ferocious intensities of life, as well as the camera’s potential to confront realities that may otherwise remain hidden. This is the first time his work has been involved with the VSAFF; however, his previous films have won awards and have been screened at other festivals around the world.

All proceeds from this year’s South African film festival go to Education Without Borders, a Canadian non-profit organization. Their mission is to provide education opportunities for disadvantaged and at-risk children in South Africa and Canada. They run after-school support programmes in Math, English, Science, school leadership and youth mentorship.

The organization focused its first efforts in South African township schools because of problems such as overcrowded classes, high drop-out rates between Grades 11 and 12, a lack of jobs and inadequate resources for teachers. ✉

The Simon Fraser University (SFU) Goldcorp Centre for the Arts will be showing *Siyabonga (We are Thankful)* Saturday, March 30. For more information, please visit www.vsaff.org.

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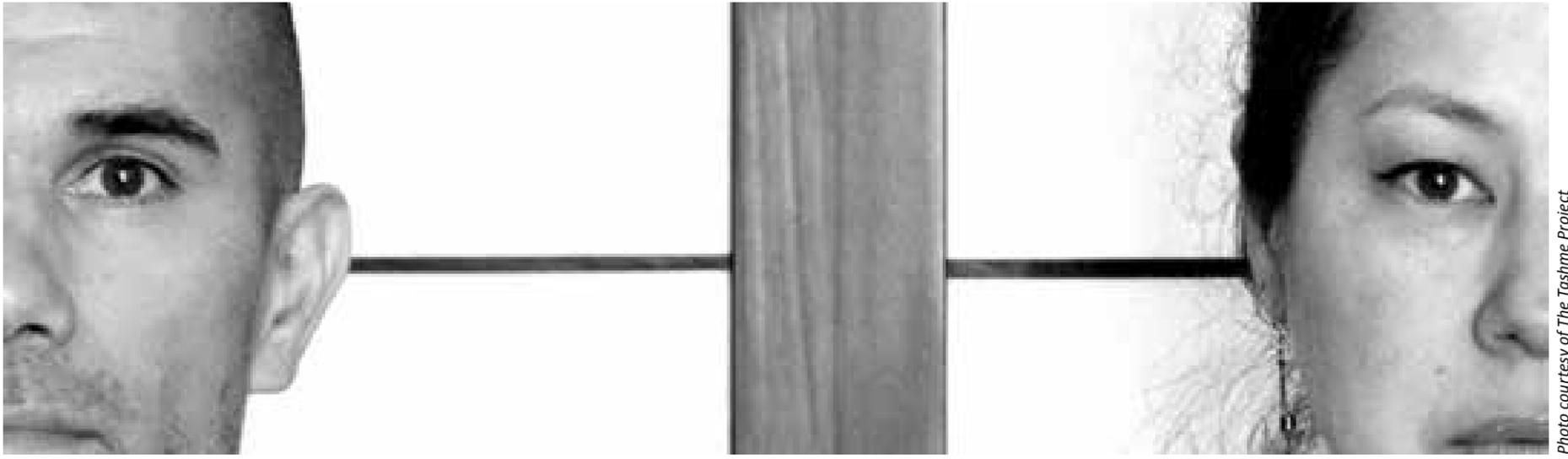


Photo courtesy of The Tashme Project

The Tashme Project

A living archive connecting a community

by THERESA K HOWELL

A couple of lifetimes ago and another world away, the lives of many Japanese Canadian families changed forever in 1942.

Trying to understand what these times were like, from a Nisei's perspective, is what initiated *The Tashme Project: The Living Archives*. The Firehall Arts Centre will present the docudrama play Apr. 2–13.

"We shift from character to character, tracing the oral history of their experiences from childhood to present day in the play. It's quite a challenge as an actor," says Matt Miwa, actor and creator of *The Tashme Project*.

Historical backdrop

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, Canada's government reacted. On December 8, under the War Measures Act, Canada required all Japanese nationals and those naturalized after 1922 to register with the Registrar of Enemy Aliens. Soon afterwards, Japanese Canadians were stripped of their freedom, property and other assets. In the meantime, they were housed in the horse stables and grounds at Hastings Park, some up to 6 months, while camps were constructed. Following this, men between the ages of 18–45 were

separated from their families and sent to work camps across BC and Canada.

While in March of 1942, women, children and the elderly were sent to internment camps, many in abandoned mining or logging towns in the BC Interior. One of these camps was Tashme. *The Tashme Project: The Living Archives* traces the history and common experience of the Nisei [second generation Japanese Canadians] through childhood, internment in Canada during the Second World War, and post-war resettlement east of the Rockies.

"I always thought Tashme was a Japanese name like my mom's name, Tamiko. It's actually taken from the names of three of the BC Commissions officers who dealt with the internees and their property: Taylor, Shirras and Mead," explains Julie Tamiko Manning, actor and creator of *The Tashme Project*.

Personal connections

More than a half century went by before Miwa and Manning met. The two were working on two productions together, *The Christmas Carol* and *Mother Courage*. Both being half-Japanese, there was an immediate connection. "When Matt and I met, we found out that each other's families were in the same internment camp together," says Manning.

They also shared a mutual curiosity about their family's past, initiating the inception of

the project in 2009. When they discovered they had a history that was seldom discussed, a spark was ignited. "It was a first time to reminisce [about this timeframe] in an intergenerational way for everyone," says Miwa.

In 2010, the actors decided to orate a scripted version of the interviews and stories during the Powell Street Festival in August. Based on the positive audience response, it became important to them to continue the project. Realizing that they needed to gather other perspectives, they travelled across Canada and interviewed over 60 former Nikkei internees. "The Nisei are of a certain age now. This is the last generation that has this experience. We had to get these

stories from our community before they couldn't talk about it anymore," says Manning.

From there, the original project blossomed into a play developed at the Playwrights' Workshop Montréal. In 2015, the premiere production opened in Montreal at the MAI (Montréal, Arts Interculturels). It was a creation based on 20 interwoven interviews with Nisei from Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, Montreal, and Vancouver. The piece moves from voice to voice and story to story with fluidity and with a purposeful and constructed gracefulness. The actors portray the voices of both men and women interviewees as they seek a deep emotional and spiritual connection with the stories of their elders,

breathing new life into these memories.

Reconnecting community

The biggest motivating factor for Manning and Miwa has been experiencing its effect on the Japanese-Canadian community; their hope is that the project continues to replace shame with pride. "It is our intention to connect younger Japanese Canadians more deeply to their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, as well as ignite a desire to rediscover their Japanese-ness and reinvigorate the dwindling Japanese Canadian community."

It's symbolic that the premiere showing in Vancouver is at the Firehall Arts Theatre, which lies within proximity of the historic pre-internment Japantown. "To perform the show in Firehall Arts Theatre and in Vancouver where the story began is very meaningful," says Manning.

Similarly, the performance dates coincide with the Sakura Festival. While the timing wasn't necessarily planned, it seems to be part of how this project has unfolded.

From curiosity to a thoughtful and subtle political act, *The Tashme Project: The Living Archive* is making a point of rebuilding Japanese Canadian identity and pride and redressing the injustices of a bygone era. ✎



▲ Matt Miwa and Julie Tamiko in *The Tashme Project*.

Photo courtesy of The Tashme Project

For more information, www.thetashmeproject.com and www.firehallartscentre.ca.

► "Workplace diversity" from page 1 they [were] relying on [in] their country of origin. [Outside] childcare is expensive, and it can be difficult to come by, especially if you are working long hours which leadership positions often require," she adds.

These difficulties can result in lowered expectations for women like those in the Pathways program, Fuller and MacKinlay say. Instead of looking for employment that fits their personalities, background and training, women in these situations are, in MacKinlay's words "tunnel-visioned" into a certain type of occupation.

"[Usually] being a cleaner. Some of these women are highly trained in their country. But the displacement causes them to say 'Hey, my education and skills are not transferable here,'" says MacKinlay.

Driving and dreams

"Too many social services concentrate on fixing women in these situations," notes Fuller,

"particularly with regards to confidence."

"Lack of confidence [can be] rooted in a realistic understanding of barriers they fac[e] in services and supports to help them manage the care obligations they have; and also the bias



▲ Sylvia Fuller studies inequalities present in the labour market at UBC.

Photo courtesy of Sylvia Fuller

and discrimination they can face in the workplace," she says.

MacKinlay agrees, commenting that sometimes the women are unaware of better services that might be available.

"One of the first lessons," she says, "is where is the most inexpensive English class. Doing the research – [it's] very practical."

Connections made within the group help the women overcome daily struggles.

"I looked at [two women] and I thought, these women are not going to be friends," she recounts. "They were just too different. One of them couldn't take driving lessons with her son crying in the back seat. They teamed up. One would take the lesson; the other would look after the children."

Program exercises, along with the peer-to-peer communication the program enables, can help women discover what solutions others have found.

"It's a very common experience in these groups to have somebody sit back and say, 'I thought

I was the only one.' They're realizing that they're all facing the same barriers; they all need to research together," says MacKinlay.

Mothers and mentorship

But peer support, while useful, is not enough says Fuller. She points out connections need to be made by minority groups to people in power, something the program achieves by way of mentoring.

"People from disadvantaged groups might not be advantaged by the kinds of informal relationships where someone tends to look at junior people: 'Oh! They remind me of me when I was young,'" explains Fuller. "[But] if you formalize a relationship, people higher up feel responsible for promoting the careers of folks underneath them."

In the Pathways program, the women meet with mentors twice a month for five months, with discussions and duties varying according to the women's needs.

"It might be helping with paperwork," says MacKinlay. "It might be helping by bringing their child along with them to a class. Sometimes it's traditional mentoring, informational interviews."

The mentors come from all walks of Canadian life.

"Professional women, define[d] as someone working, could be a plumber [or] an engineer," says MacKinlay. "[They] want to offer their time for these women in order to help them keep working on their transition and adaptation to Canadian culture."

Only a few weeks into the program, MacKinlay says, some results can be seen.

"We're helping them discover their strengths, who they are, and what they'd like to do," she says. "They start getting stars in their eyes about what they might be able to achieve."

She adds that she would love to help even more women.

"We're always looking for more funding!" she says laughing. ✎

Beatriz Santiago Muñoz – in search of a new visual language

by XI CHEN

That which identifies them, like the eye of the cyclops, a three-channel video installation by Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, will be on display at Western Front gallery from March 22 to May 4.

The Puerto Rican artist's exhibition will have an opening on March 21, followed by a live performance by Muñoz with another Puerto Rican artist, Marién Velez, on March 23.

Experimental filmmaking

Loosely based on Monique Wittig's 1969 novel *Les Guérillères*, where, in an imaginary future after a battle of the sexes, women have toppled the patriarchy. The title of the exhibition is a line of text from the novel.

"The novel is an experimental work in which Wittig creates a new language and a new grammar. Lesbian is gender-free and is neither woman or man. She was promising a provisional use of a shifting identity to imagine another language

or another world. Even though there is a war between women and men, there is no description of battle scenes; there is no protagonist; and there is no linear progression," Muñoz says.

Inspired by the novel, the artist says she wanted to challenge herself and use this project as the beginning of a search for a new visual language.

"There are two different components that are part of the same project. One is the three-channel installation and the other one is the live arrangement, which is called *mouther*," Muñoz explains.

Mouther, a made-up word with multiple layers of meanings and a parallel to the play on words in the novel, will be a collaboration between Muñoz and Velez, a lighting designer.

"The first question we started asking: is a new language about communication or about taking pleasure? Maybe we need to start with just playing with the lights," Muñoz says.

She sees this project as an opportunity of expanding experimental cinema and challenging the idea of what film is.

"I am interested in formal experimentation; I consider it starting at the level of production. For me, filmmaking is a way of [contrasting] language with what we have been trained to see. I have a way of making films and videos that gives a lot of attention to the aesthetics play in that moment when I am filming. It is kind of a vibration that happens between camera and the subject," Muñoz explains, regarding her working methods.

According to Pablo de Ocampo, exhibition curator at Western Front, Muñoz's films



▲ Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, *That which identifies them, like the eye of the cyclops* (production still), 2016

frequently start out through research into specific social structures, individuals or events, which she then transforms into moving image, sometimes supported by objects and texts. He says Muñoz's work resonates with him. "She thinks about the cosmic and the very terrestrial and everyday things," Ocampo says.

A generous Western Front

Western Front, which is financially sponsoring the two artists with this project, is always trying to find ways to help artists, through funding from the

three levels of government as well as through their own fundraising events and donations, Ocampo says.

"[Velez] is based in New York City. One thing that is really important is that Western Front is allowing this to happen, just for us to have a week together to work out some of these ideas," Muñoz says.

The non-profit organization has been a long-standing stature in Vancouver's art community, founded 46 years ago by eight artists from a diverse backgrounds.

"It was founded under the idea of embracing innovation

and experimentation, for artists to try new things and not to operate as a commercial gallery or to sell things," Ocampo says.

Because he has transitioned from a practicing artist to a curator in his own career, Ocampo understands the challenges and needs of artists.

"Western Front has always been a nexus for artists internationally. It is always finding ways to develop dialogues with artists from other parts of the world," he adds.

For more information, please visit www.front.bc.ca.



▲ Beatriz Santiago Muñoz wants to challenge the idea of what film is.

Photo courtesy of Beatriz Santiago Muñoz

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By the Light of the Dark Moon tour: Ayla Nereo

by CURTIS SEUFERT

Musician and performer Ayla Nereo will bring her soulful voice and unique sound to the Fox Cabaret on April 5, 2019. Drawing on themes of compassion, life and our relationship with the earth, Nereo's performance seeks to allow her audience, and herself, to experience life in the present moment, calling to attention our relationship with the world and with one another.

"To really feel connected to all life is both my personal mission and also the mission of this music and why I want to share it," says

is, in a way, a paradox. While she's put in plenty of work and achieved many of her musical ambitions, Nereo says that her goal is not to focus on the next step. Instead, the key is to appreciate the present moment as it is, something that is as crucial to Nereo's artistic process as it is to her own life.

"If I try to create this connection, it can't be forced. Wanting it makes me feel like I don't [actually] have it," says Nereo. "My goal has always been to not think about those goals, but rather to have the goal be as much presence as possible, either on stage or during the recording process, and defi-

“What we do at shows is [create] such a profound feeling of connection among all of us, and by the end of the best shows we're all like one being.

Ayla Nereo, musician

Nereo. "What we do at shows is [create] such a profound feeling of connection among all of us, and by the end of the best shows we're all like one being. It's such a nice way of remembering that that's always true."

Nature and presence

Nereo says her life path has led her to creating passionate, spiritual music focused on nature and being. Raised in the hills of rural Sonoma County, California by her music-loving parents, Nereo's early education was mostly at home with a heavy emphasis on cultivating and understanding one's relationship with nature.

Instilled with an appreciation for the earth and the environment, Nereo and her brothers were also encouraged to become involved in music and the arts.

"I remember composing music at age eleven or twelve, just little chord progressions on the piano. But I never sang, and I never thought about it as something I'd wanna do as a career. It was more just something that just flowed through me," says Nereo. "My [brothers] both did music, and I figured 'Oh I'm a dancer, and I love making videos so I'll stick with that. They're the musicians.'"

It wasn't until college where Nereo worked up the courage to start singing her own songs. She was compelled by the poetry and meaning conveyed by the works of Bob Dylan and others. Beyond being inspired musically, it was at this point Nereo realized the message she wanted to share would have to come through her own voice.

"It was a combination of the meaning, the deep meaning, and really he has a way of speaking to things that is leaving a lot of room for interpretation," says Nereo about Bob Dylan. "It awoke something in me. It literally unlocked something that hadn't been alive before in me, which was my desire to write poetry, words to a song."

Sharing the music

Nereo says that setting out to achieve her musical goals

nitely during the songwriting process, to stay really present and focused on whatever wants to flow through me."

When it comes to her music, Nereo says the themes of being, universality and one's relationship with the world are as present in the songwriting process as they are in the music itself.

"It's very personal, and at the same time it feels like the universe is coming through; it feels like something much bigger," she says.



▲ Ayla Nereo sings the human connection to nature.

For Nereo, bringing people's attention to their connection to the world is important to her, as well as being rewarding and fulfilling.

"I see our potential as humanity, and I'm really going to continue seeing that clearly and speaking it in my songs and other creations that help [bring] that into being," she says.

For more information on the show, visit www.foxcabaret.com.

For more on Nereo, visit www.aylanereo.com.





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Photo courtesy of Ayla Nereo

Cultural Calendar

March 19–April 9, 2019

by SIMON YEE

Welcome to the spring season! I am finally able to recommend some outdoor events to you, such as the high energy Norooz Fire Festival at West Vancouver's Ambleside Park and a spiritual medicine wheel ceremony at VanDusen. And with the cherry blossoms in bloom, why not also celebrate spring with O Hanami at Nikkei? Have a great season everyone!

Norooz Fire Festival

Mar. 19, 5–10:30 p.m.
Ambleside Park, West Vancouver
www.westvancouver.ca/calendar/norooz-fire-festival-0

The 29th annual Persian New Year celebration includes live music, fire jumping, amazing food and dance performances. This event is based on traditions regarding the last Wednesday of the Persian Calendar known as Chaharshanbe Suri. Everyone is invited to come to the celebration! Fire jumping will take place from 6–10:30 p.m. For more information, please check out the West Vancouver website.

Surviving Vancouver: Gathering in our City

Mar. 20, 7 p.m.
Museum of Vancouver
www.museumofvancouver.ca

The philosophy of plants for food, medicine and cultural resources are found in the very cities we live in. Despite popular belief, people need not travel outside of urban centers to discover a robust world of eco-diverse plants and animals that contribute to the health and vitality of our well-being. Traditional technology and knowledge of harvesting belongs to Indigenous peoples' beliefs and ways of knowing, rooted in their relationship to the land. Join panelists Lori Snyder, Woody Morrison and T'uy'T' Tanat-Cease Wyss at the Museum of Vancouver on Mar. 20 as they engage in an exploratory and educational discussion about Indigenous food systems, abilities to subsist, survive and live with traditional food sources and healing properties of the natural world.

Fatoumata Diawara

Mar. 20, 7:30–9:30 p.m.
Kay Meek Arts Centre,
West Vancouver
www.kaymeek.com

Fatoumata Diawara's new album, *Fenfo*, focuses on the challenges of migration and family – challenges she experienced firsthand, fighting for her independence by leaving Mali to pursue a career as an actress and singer/song-



▲ Don't miss the Festival du bois's 30th anniversary festivities.

writer. Now hailed as "one of the most dynamic voices in Afropop" [*PopMatters Magazine*], she uses her voice to tell stories about the challenges facing migrants. In perfect symmetry with her lyrics, her music blends a variety of international styles while staying true to African roots, mixing stinging guitar lines with traditional African strings including the *kora* and *kamale ngon* and traditional percussion.

30th Annual Festival du Bois

Mar. 22–24
Mackin Park, Coquitlam
www.festivaldubois.ca

The 30th annual Festival du Bois runs Mar. 22 to 24 at Mackin Park in the Maillardville area of Coquitlam – the centre of francophone culture in B.C. Come join the party! It's a weekend celebra-



▲ Fatoumata Diawara.

tion of francophone and French-Canadian culture. Enjoy amazing music and dance, great traditional food, shows for kids, fun activities and more. The festival opens on Friday with a free Contra Dance in the Grand Chapiteau (Big Tent) in Mackin Park. On Saturday and Sunday, the festival welcomes outstanding music artists from B.C. and beyond, including Vishtèn, Comté de Clare, Les Tireux d'Roches, Seconde Nation, Shauit, Alpha Yaya Diallo, Jou Tou and more!

Medicine Wheel Ceremony

Mar. 24, 12 noon–3 p.m.
VanDusen Botanical Garden,
Vancouver
www.vandusengarden.org

People from varying backgrounds and spiritual traditions are invited to gather to celebrate the beginning of a new season in a beautiful outdoor setting at VanDusen Garden. The medicine wheel is a symbol of holistic teachings based on the cycles of nature. Drumming, singing and prayers will be shared. The ceremony concludes with a potluck (the sharing of food). Please bring weather-appropriate clothing, a small stone to leave at the wheel and a potluck item to share! Check out the VanDusen website for more information.

Fifth Annual Vancouver Badass Film Festival

Mar. 29–31
Vancity and Rio Theatres,
Vancouver
www.vbaff.com

The Vancity and Rio Theatres will host the Fifth Annual Vancouver Badass Film Festival, which features the best in new extreme-genre film from around

the world. The festival highlights new films from maverick film legends old and new, showcasing a variety of international and Canadian horror, neo noir, wild action and avant-garde films. Festivities include interactive sessions with visionary filmmakers and cast, an awards gala, and unforgettable spectacle and parties. Please visit the website, for tickets and showtimes.

Simon Mayer: Sons of Sissy

Apr. 4–6, 8 p.m.
Scotiabank Dance Centre,
Vancouver
www.thedancecentre.ca

Sons of Sissy delves into the heart of the Upper Austrian countryside, where traditional folk dances and music reign supreme. These traditions are joyously subverted when four versatile performers/musicians reformulate Alpine dances to liberate themselves from convention. Defying categorization and pigeonholing, the *Sons of Sissy* live up to their name as they conduct themselves as part weird folk music quartet, part experimentally playful ritual dance combo, using humour to radically disrupt hackneyed male role models. An accomplished choreographer, dancer and musician, Mayer offers an irreverent and affectionate take on his heritage, while demonstrating impeccable timing, bodily control and musicality.

Cherry Docs

Apr. 5–28
Pacific Theatre, Vancouver
www.pacifictheatre.org

The Pacific Theatre will be presenting a play by Canadian playwright David Gow, *Cherry Docs*, this April. Danny is an ambi-

tious Jewish defense lawyer who believes in the common good. When he is assigned the case of an unrepentant neo-Nazi accused of murder, Danny finds himself defending the life of a man who wishes him dead. The play shows how two antagonists can work through radical differences towards a better understanding of themselves and each other. For tickets and showtimes, please visit the Pacific Theatre website.

Deanna Bowen:

A Harlem Nocturne

Apr. 5–June 16
Contemporary Art Gallery,
Vancouver
www.contemporaryartgallery.ca

Deanna Bowen is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist whose practice examines race, migration, historical writing and authorship, who will be hosting *A Harlem Nocturne*, a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery from Apr. 5 to June 16. The exhibition comprises two separate trajectories of research that follow the artist's maternal lineage in Canada and takes up many of the concerns currently shaping discussions in photography and Black visual studies. Her artistic practice concerns itself with histories of Black experience that remain below the threshold of visibility, not because they are impossible to see but because they are difficult for the majority culture to acknowledge. Mining overlooked archives and forgotten documents, Bowen makes use of a repertoire of artistic gestures to bring traces of a complex, deeply personal and often violent past into public visibility.

Liberation: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Apr. 5, 8 p.m.
Orpheum Theatre, Vancouver
www.vancouver-symphony.ca

The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra will be performing the works of German composers Richard Wagner and Felix Mendelssohn on Apr. 5. Wagner's music was appropriated by Nazi Germany, used for inspiration and a road map to a "vision of the future" of Germany – particularly his extraordinary Ring Cycle. *Götterdämmerung*, recounting the final fate of Earth and the Norse Gods, closely paralleled what the Nazi command envisioned of their Reich. During the time of the Nazi party's ascendancy, the music of Mendelssohn was banned, but in a concert that declared liberation from the Reich, his was the first music performed by the Berlin Philharmonic after the end of the war and the defeat of Nazi ideology.

► "Verbatim" from page 1

Of course, not everyone grew up like I did, speaks the language I speak, or sees things the way I see them, but I like the humility of being reminded of it. I like keeping this closer to the forefront of my mind.

I used to believe that there was a checklist of things to accomplish in life that allowed you to become the person you should be, and I'd feel alone any time I did anything off-list. But in Vancouver, I can't help but feel that no matter your goal,

your passion, your identity, you can be you. You can be different, the same, unique, new – whatever you want. The culture suggests it, and the city encourages it. There are universities, classes, clubs, community centres and co-working spaces bringing people together. You can be anything here, and you won't be alone in it.

People warned me before moving to Vancouver that it would be a tough city to make friends in because, they said, the people aren't all that friendly.

I can't say if this is true about Vancouver natives, because so far everyone I've met here is originally from somewhere else. And in my experience, everyone I've met has been kind, open and friendly. Maybe it's the fact that we share the experience of uprooting ourselves and leaving the familiar, which somehow quickens the bond. Maybe it's that we're happy to indulge each other in stories of what it's like back home, what our families think of us leaving or how excited we are to be away from

the winters we know. Maybe it's that certain humility that comes with being the new kid. Whatever the reason, there seems to be a shared understanding. There is a weight to realizing that the adventure you're on can be as isolating as it is exhilarating, and the people I've met seem to get that.

I hear so many people say that Vancouver feels more like home than home ever did. I'm not sure if I'm there yet, but I'm also not sure if I ever want to feel that "at home" again. This experi-

ence has me more alone than I've ever been and yet more connected to so many who've felt the same things I have. Through the hustle and bustle of the city, I'm finding my centre. Through being on my own, I'm finding connections with others and realizing that none of us are all that different from one another. And as much as I miss home sometimes, I wouldn't leave Vancouver. I love being part of a city that all different people from all different places call home. ✍