

Play tackles serious
youth issues
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The Source

forum of diversity

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DOXA



Human spirit on screen

by VICTOR VAN DER MERWE

Look for a home? Longing to belong? The South Asian program of films explores the complications of Asian life throughout the world.

The DOXA Film Festival has been bringing some of the best documentaries to town for 18 years now, and the 2019 line up is no exception. The films and programs selected for this year's festival are very much in keeping with the DOXA mission to "support a better understanding

of the complexity of our times through engaging the public in documentary media as an art form." One of the engaging documentaries screening this year is *Midnight Traveler*, and one of the more exciting special programs is *Longing and Belonging*.

DOXA is happening from May 2 to 12 in theatres all over Vancouver.

A family on the move

Midnight Traveler is a film that follows Hassan Fazili, his wife and two young daughters as they travel from Tajikistan to Afghanistan with a Taliban bounty

on his head. The young family goes on a sometimes harrowing journey through countries like Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Fazili and his family used a cell phone to film their journey to safety, putting an intensely personal perspective on the political issue of refugees seeking asylum.

Emelie Mahdavian, who served as co-producer, writer and editor of *Midnight Traveler* talks about how the film came to be and about the unique challenges that came with making this film.

"The story emerged naturally out of the terrible situation that the Fazili family, who are filmmakers, found themselves in. Nonetheless, at the outset, none of us fully understood the duration of the journey the family was embarking upon," says Mahdavian. "Over the course of the two years of shooting the film, his daughters grew up, he and his wife Fatima were both evolving in their hopes and fears, and every member of the Fazili family participated in shooting some element of the film. Much of the insider perspective

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Verbatim

New landscape, new life

by NAILA TOPAN

I was in for a culture shock when I moved to West Vancouver, B.C. Having spent 22 years of my life living in the bustling multicultural metropolis that is London, England, I initially found myself feeling anxious when greeted by the stark shoreline of Vancouver. My instinctive reaction was restless and antsy, dreaming of being back in the thick of the mayhem. As a British woman of Indian descent, I found myself being referred to as "exotic," something unfamiliar to me as this was not how I had ever defined or understood myself.

My cultural identity and sense of home were aspects of my life that left me feeling conflicted for the first two years of my move. This was especially so on the North Shore, where my peers were predominantly white Canadians that found my ethnicity paired with my accent delightfully entertaining. Capitalizing on this at first, I soon found it to be isolating as an outsider. My views and beliefs were very different from those surrounding me, and those who may have shared my perspectives – fellow immigrants and other minorities – lived in further away areas that were not quite figuratively, nor physically, close to me. I found it hard to "fit in" and maintain a favourable view of what I deemed to be a much less cohesive city.

With this in mind, I also learned a lot from the friends I did make – how to enjoy hiking and simple pleasures, and how to appreciate the slower pace of life and the connection with nature that I could easily have overlooked. Witnessing life on Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast offered me insight into another element of myself I had not yet tapped into. Over time I noticed an

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Cultural Spotlight

Reading India in Vancouver

by COLLEEN ADDISON

“Don’t be chicken about butter chicken! It’s important to accept and trust in all parts of yourself, including the culture from which you come,” says Mahtab Narsimhan.

Narsimhan is a Canadian author of young adult novels who originally hails from India. Her newest novel, *Embrace the Chicken*, deals with just such an immigrant experience. She will be reading from this and previous novels at the Vancouver Public Library on May 7 as part of Asian Heritage Month.

“Immigrants are [often] torn between the culture that they left behind and the one they want to embrace. Breaking in is difficult; it’s even more [so] when you come from a completely different background,” says Narsimhan.

Spices and shame

“The story revolves around a teenager, Shivani, who is desperately trying to fit into the Canadian culture,” explains Narsimhan. “She tries to hide her culture, especially her mother who doesn’t speak English very well.”

The turning point of the novel comes when Shivani’s mother decides to help at a school fundraiser by serving traditional Indian food.

“It turns out that the very things [Shivani] was ashamed of are the things that endear her to the community,” she says.

Narsimhan’s novel refers to being embarrassed by your parent, a feeling common to teenagers everywhere. But the novel will also be relevant for those teens who have experience immigrating or with immigrants.

“Teens are in that middle ground where they’re not kids. If you start at kindergarten, it’s a lot easier to integrate into the culture and make your own friends, as opposed to later when friendships have already formed,” says Narsimhan.

Narsimhan believes these teens will be comforted by some truths.

“When it comes out that the reason [Shivani] isn’t bringing her mother to parent-teacher conferences is her mother’s [poor] English language skills, [Shivani’s] friend says ‘how many of us have tried to speak with [your mother] in Hindi?’



Photo courtesy of Mahtab Narsimhan

▲ Mahtab Narsimhan is a Canadian author who writes about the immigration experience.

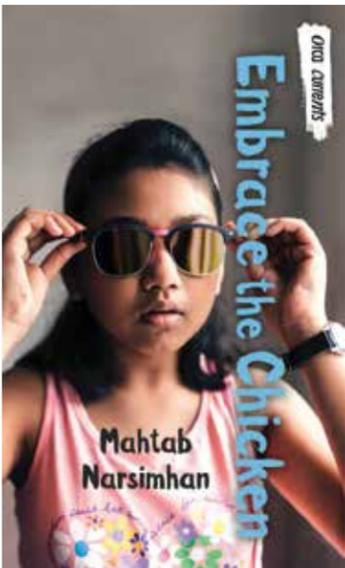


Photo courtesy of Mahtab Narsimhan

▲ *Embrace the Chicken* is a novel about an immigrant teenager, Shivani, who is trying to fit into Canadian culture.

And if any of us attempted [it], we’d be bad as well,” she says.

Stolen toilets

Narsimhan emphasizes that *Embrace the Chicken* and her other novels are a lot of fun too. In a previous novel, *Mission Mumbai*, from which she will also read, Narsimhan tells the story of a North American boy’s trip to India, a mirror image of her current novel.

“The funniest part [is] the Indian toilet,” Narsimhan laughs. “In many Asian countries, it’s just a hole in the ground. [The protagonist] Dylan has been waiting to go, and he comes running out saying ‘someone’s stolen the toilet!’”

Narsimhan feels she can relate both to the experience of

immigration and that of visiting India as an (almost) foreigner.

“I came to Canada 21 years ago, to Toronto,” she says. “I was on shaky ground when I came here, wondering ‘am I going to fit in?’ ‘Am I going to have to go back home?’ [And] I used to wonder how I was going to survive the cold because I’d never seen ice and snow except in my freezer!”

Narsimhan has returned to her home country on visits with her young son, and it’s one of these voyages that inspired the story about the toilet.

“He was seven,” she recalls. “I remember him saying, ‘Mom, I think there’s a bit missing here!’”

Narsimhan will share this and other stories at the reading, which will also include tips for budding writers.

“Kids always ask, ‘Where do you get your ideas?’” says Narsimhan. “I love showing my drafts because most people seem to think that a story comes fully formed in your head!”

Though her novels focus on young adults, they aren’t the sole intended audience.

“It’s not just for kids. It’s also for adults. It’s for the rest of us to be more tolerant and accepting of those of us who are [different],” she says. ✍

For more information, please visit www.mahtabnarsimhan.com, www.vpl.bibliocommons.com/ events, or the Twitter handle @MahtabNarsimhan.

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Vancouver en français?

A picture of the French in Vancouver

by SIDDHARTH BALA

Maurice Guibord will address the francophone community's impact on the historical and economical landscape of Vancouver in a lecture titled *The Francophone Pioneers of Vancouver: A Little-known History and Legacy*.

Guibord is the president of the *Société historique francophone de la Colombie-Britannique*, a not-for-profit organization that aims to highlight the history and culture of the francophones in British Columbia. He will summarize how the francophone cultural and economic impact in Vancouver's early history, and how the colonization days has left remnants and permeated into today's socio-cultural and economic life.

The lecture will take place at the Vancouver Lawn and Tennis Club on Apr. 30.

Francophones' impact on the early economy

"Francophones in greater Vancouver were present in high numbers, [they were] originally [engaged] in the fur trade linked to every post of the Hudson's Bay Co., and the North West Company, including Fort Langley," he says, giving an insight into the participation of the francophone community,



▲ Maurice Guibord, president of the *Société historique francophone de la Colombie-Britannique*.

throughout history, in the diverse aspects of Vancouver's economy.

Guibord highlights the diversity within the francophone community by adding that the community did not solely comprise the French, but also some indigenous communities.

"Not only was this fort built mostly by Francophones, but over 60% of the fur trading work force across the province was composed of Francophones, mostly French-Canadians, but also Francophone Métis and First Nations men," he says.

He adds that the French and First Nations languages were

important as well. "The language of the trade within the [colonial] forts was French, no matter what your origins, he explains. "The trade jargon used when trading with First Nations was mostly Chinook, but that jargon also included numerous terms taken directly from the French language."

The community, says Guibord, apart from trade and business, also participated and dominated in other domains, such as religious institutions and the financial sectors.

"Many of the male and female [members of religious orders] that came into both the province and the Vancouver region were Francophones, from Quebec, France and Belgium. Several became the first clergy of the main Catholic churches," he says.

He gives the example of the *Crédit Foncier Franco-Canadien* building, which he explains was built in 1912 in Vancouver's financial district to aid in providing loans to the francophone community, members of which were otherwise rejected by other banks for cultural and linguistic reasons.

The francophone community today

In the talk, Guibord intends to address the ways in which the

early French-speaking Vancouverites shaped the city's history. He says that in the 1940s, after the Second World War, the francophone population, settled around the area's only French language church at the time, the Blessed Sacrament Parish. He adds that the area was named as the 'French Quarter' despite the population being French-Canadian and not French.

"When the new *Maison de la Francophonie* was built on west 7th Ave. in the 1970s, all the organizations relocated there, and most of the Francophone residents melded into the fabric of Vancouver's population within a few years," Guibord explains.

He adds to the contributions of the community to the city by listing some French-speaking Vancouverite influential leaders and pioneers, that excelled in various domains.

"Over the decades, there were many business and community leaders, [such as] Dr. Henri Evariste Levraux Langis; hoteliers, Joseph Guichon, R.G. Desautels, Thomas Cyrs and George Fortin, [and] architect Paul Marmette," says Guibord.

He hopes to address how the Francophone community's contribution, throughout history, has left remnants in Vancouver's socio-economical life today.

He explains how the French-speaking Vancouverite cultural impact has penetrated into cultural institutions, media outlets and the educational system.

"Vancouver is home to the *Maison de la Francophonie*, the hub of societal and cultural Francophone activity in the province. Radio-Canada and CFUM-FM provide us with coverage in French. *La Source* is our paper, so we're well informed, if we so desire. The Conseil Scolaire Francophone and the immersion schools of every school board provide education in French and cannot keep up with demand," says Guibord.

The future of the francophone community

Guibord hopes that this talk would increase the amalgamation and interaction between the Francophone community and the other communities in Vancouver.

"I would hope that they would learn something new and that they would be moved to become engaged, from searching out our festivals to becoming sufficiently interested into joining our various boards," says Guibord. ✍

For more information, please visit www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org

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► "Verbatim" from page 1

overlap of cultures and started to observe friendships that represented multiculturalism a little more closely to how I had experienced it in London, especially the closer I drew to downtown. Cultural integration didn't feel so far removed anymore.

My journey of self-discovery led me to reading a lot about consciousness and the power of presence, meditation, and checking-in with myself on a deeper level. By branching out, meeting new people and breaking out of my comfort zone a little more in a bid to find like-minded people, I discovered

ing in East and North Vancouver; people looking for spiritual connections living in small collectives and building communities with those in other collectives.

These friends love music, art, self-exploration, community and expression. They are a host of people of mixed creeds, heritages, abilities and orientations who welcome anybody with a desire to learn more about themselves and humanity at large. The similarities that draw these people together simultaneously break down boundaries. They continue to show me their curiosity of different cultures and strive to



▲ Finding the spiritual side of Vancouver.

a spiritual underbelly in Vancouver. From bookstores focused on esoteric philosophies, through to further engagement within my expanded peer network, there was another world that had previously been separated from my awareness. Within these circles, I learned further about communal hous-

understand each other on a deeply personal level. It has been humbling to be able to both observe and partake in such relationships. I have found new depths to Vancouver that I hope to continue fostering, and in turn, share with others to move towards an ever inclusive and progressive community. ✍

Global peace, local information

by MATTHEW FRASER

Crises and movement are changing the lives of people, both locally and internationally. There is now a need for simple and easy access to pertinent information, and a Vancouver-based, non-profit organization seeks to answer this need.

Founded in 2011, PeaceGeeks has sought to connect and inform diverse people globally over the years and will now bring their expertise home with their new app *Arrival Advisor*.

Access and information in hand

The inspiration for the *Arrival Advisor* app came in part from a 2017 Vancouver Immigration Partnership survey that revealed 1/3 of BC's newcomers didn't access important settlement services, simply out of a lack of awareness. Most people now carry an information powerhouse with them at all times, in the form of cellphones. PeaceGeeks set about leveraging that portal into a simple and effective platform, connecting it with services like BC211 and the BC newcomers guide.

Because they understand that an app aimed at helping immigrants needs to be as diverse as its intended audience, the *Arrival Advisor* design team has succeeded in making the app available in English, French and Arabic – with goals to expand to

both simplified and traditional Chinese, Tagalog, Punjabi and Korean in the near future.

"If newcomers are able to access information that is relevant and critical to their settlement success, they will ease into their new lives and communities in British Columbia more readily, which benefits existing communities by increasing diversity and inclusion," says Lauren Hyde, PeaceGeeks research and communications lead.

From disembarkment to settling in, *Arrival Advisor* aims to supply new immigrants with timely, relevant, and location-specific information about settlement services. The app thus helps the journey to a new life in Canada, making immigrants feel comfortable and at home.

The active Geek

PeaceGeeks has pushed forward using the digital realm and various technological avenues to further peace and understanding globally from its inception. From "Service Advisors" in Jordan and Turkey to Hackathons in the Lower Mainland, PeaceGeeks has continued to blaze a trail both online and in the physical world.

In 2017, they were recognized by the Google Impact Challenge for an app they had created to assist refugees. This boost helped propel them forwards and towards even loftier heights.

"We were extremely fortunate to finish Top 5 in the Google.org Impact Challenge Canada in 2017.



▲ Renee Black (left) of PeaceGeek, one of five winners of the Google Impact Challenge Canada 2017, says their new app, *Arrival Advisor* conveys necessary information to refugees and immigrants.

The recognition and the generous funding we received as a result of that competition allowed us to pour our hearts, souls, and technical minds into creating an app that will serve newcomers to British Columbia in the best possible way. With that as a springboard, we are pursuing partnerships now that will facilitate scaling *Arrival Advisor* across Canada with the same level of thoughtfulness and attention to detail as we have achieved with the app in British Columbia," says Hyde.

The *Arrival Advisor* team has made it an internal goal to constantly work hard to ensure the

data available on their app is up to date and accurate across the province. They also remain keen to hear feedback from users and service providers in order to adapt and improve their platform as it continues to grow.

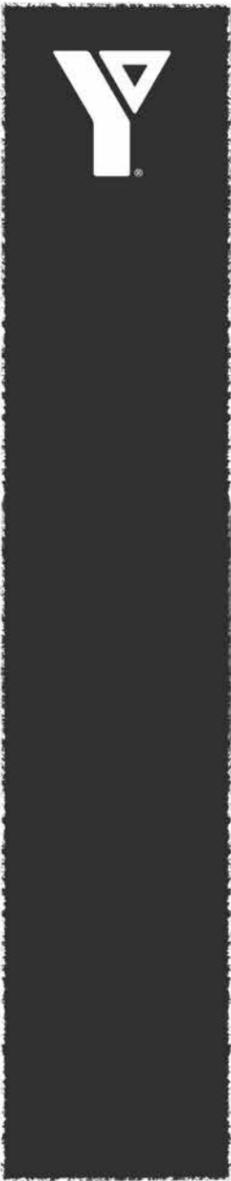
The new path home

Conflicts differ across regions and the people in those conflicts may not feel the struggles equally. It is imperative that genuine aid be offered to people as they move around the globe and into a new life. PeaceGeeks – by way of their newest app – aims to set forth a road to a welcoming and fulfilling new life for all new-

comers to B.C., and aims, too, to later expand that helping hand to encompass all of Canada.

Immigrants and refugees can use the *Arrival Advisor* app to learn about enrolling their children in school, locating family support, and engaging in community-based activities that will introduce them to existing community members. In this way, the app will bridge divides between new and existing community members and facilitate more cohesive communities across British Columbia. ✉

For more information, please visit www.peacegeeks.org.





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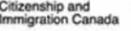
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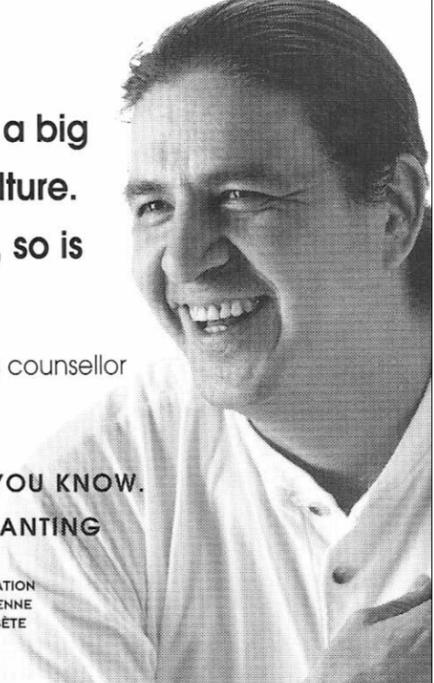


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Photo courtesy of Italian Cultural Centre

Paper flowers

by NAILA TOPAN

Nancy Lui, owner of Citrine Paper Flowers, will host a workshop at the Italian Cultural Centre on Saturday, May 11, to share her craft and teach others the art of making paper flowers.

Vancouver-born Lui's parents emigrated from Hong Kong in the 1970s. She believes creativity runs through her lineage, from her grandmother as a hand embroiderer in Hong Kong and her grandfather as a photographer, to her mother who taught her the art of paper craft.

"When I was a kid, my mom would go to the library and take out craft books on knitting, origami – she loved anything creative," she says. "We tried making flowers out of stretchy crepe paper, and she made a Cosmos flower for me and put it in my desk. In 2004 my mom passed away from breast cancer. When I was studying, I would look at it and it would remind me of her. That memory helped me to get through university," she says.

A creative journey

After university, Lui took many office jobs, but she was continually thinking about what she would want to offer in a new business venture.

"I had a good job and everything was going well," she says, "but for several years I always had this feeling that I wanted to start my own business."

She was also thinking about the flower that her mother had made for her.

"I only started making paper flowers a year ago," says Lui. "That love, that memory, that's what I wanted to share. And that's why I wanted to do the workshop."

Lui joined the Craft Council of BC and responded to the notice requesting vendors for the Christmas Market. Being at the market led to her connection with the Italian Cultural Centre and the start of her new business.

The appreciation and support she has been shown has been encouraging.

"My friends have been very supportive – when I first started out, they bought flowers as birthday gifts," she says.

Lui now makes a wide variety of paper flowers, including peonies and orchids, for weddings and special events. The flowers are made from heavy-weight, Italian crepe paper, which makes them highly durable.

"Making paper flowers is very forgiving," says Lui. "You don't

have to do it perfectly; no two flowers are the same. If the shape is wonky, it's actually a little more natural," she points out.

Crafting responsibly

Lui also believes creating paper flowers is more eco-friendly than fresh flower growing when considering the farmland, water and cost of replacing cut flowers. Like the flower she kept from her mother, she enjoys the long-lasting effects of paper flowers and the sentimentality behind them.

To align with her values, Lui has made efforts to ensure that Citrine Paper Flowers is a carbon-neutral business: for each roll of paper used, a tree is planted. She consulted a carbon-offsetting company to determine the recommended donation amount to fund a tree, and once a year sends the money matching the number of paper rolls she used to plant the corresponding number of trees.

Lui is excited about the event, which will be her first public workshop. It will be held in the museum at the Italian Cultural Centre, so participants will be able to view the museum exhibit simultaneously. There will be room for approximately 20 participants.



Photo courtesy of Nancy Lui

▲ Nancy Lui turned to flower making a year ago.

Lui believes that the workshop will be a good outlet for someone who wants to spend a couple of hours making something creative with their hands. "I hope there will be people with friends or with their moms, because making flowers is a truly bonding activity," she says.

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

Salon du Livre Vancouver hosts its very first French book fair

by JESS CAUSBY

A rich and diverse programme will be seen for the first time in twenty years in Vancouver on Apr. 26. *Salon du Livre* (French book fair) will bring together nearly twenty francophone authors from British Columbia and beyond, signing their books and offering a variety of literary activities.

Author Danielle S. Marcotte will introduce her book for children aged 5–7, *Capri, The Little Prairie Antelope*, at the event.

tion was as established in 1989, bringing together 17 francophone publishers from New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. REFC conducts joint promotion, outreach and market development activities in Quebec and abroad. This association will open its doors for the first time ever in B.C., to captivate everyone with the richness of French literary life outside of Quebec.

“Having 17 French-Canadian authors in one place over two and half days is very unique,” Marcotte explains. “The REFC gives us an opportunity to engage with the French publishers

“ [Children] bring the riches of their imagination to your world and take your book to a place you’ve never even thought about.

Danielle S. Marcotte, author

“For me, meeting new kids is very exciting,” says Marcotte. “They bring the riches of their imagination to your world and take your book to a place you’ve never even thought about.”

What to expect

Starting with a book launch on Friday, accompanied by wine and cheese, there will be a variety of literary activities throughout the weekend; on Saturday, there will be a range of programmes with different authors for ages 1 to 12. There will then be signature sessions and authors presenting excerpts from their work, accompanied by the musician Auto Heart. The weekend will continue with conferences and presentations of new books with the invited writers, and a “speedbooking,” where people can exchange information with authors in four ten-minute flash meetings. The public will also have the opportunity to discover the exhibitions at *Salon du Livre*.

outside of Quebec for the first time.”

In addition, the newest B.C. publishing house, founded by two university professors, is offering specialists outside of Quebec access to more serious publishing through *Les Éditions de l'Épaulard*. Their first book is the work of linguist Annie Bourret, a B.C. author taking part in the “speedbooking” event on Sunday. She, along with three other novelists and playwrights, will be quickly presenting her latest work and answering questions from the public.

Salon du Livre has been organized by a group of hard-working volunteers and lead organizer Lyne Gareau.

“This event is a great example of what change volunteerism can bring about in a community in terms of culture,” Marcotte highlights. “If we want these riches to keep coming back to Vancouver, we need to participate in these events.”

If this year’s *Salon du Livre* is successful, the volunteers and



▲ Volunteer organisers of Salon Du Livre: Lyne Gareau, Léa Tricoire, Jean-François Packwood, Alexandra Bolduc et Louis Anctil.

“This event is great [to learn about] culture and for your mind to expand,” says Marcotte. “We live in an expensive world; this is a free event where you can meet new people and explore new activities – it’s a fun place to be on the weekend!”

A unique event

Salon du Livre will be hosting the Franco-Canadian publishers group REFC. This associa-

local art organizations hope to make this an annual event. ✂

The event will be taking place at the Vancouver French Cultural Centre Apr. 26 to 28, 2019. All activities are free and open to the general public as of 10 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. The soirée launch starts Friday, Apr. 26 at 5 p.m. More information can be found at www.salondulivre.vancouver.com.



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Rewiring the conversation

by RAMAN KANG

“It’s so important that people come to see this play because it doesn’t sit in a negative place. We raise these serious issues to try to process them,” says Valerie Methot, director, playwright and set and sound designer of *REWIRE*.

Created in collaboration between industry professionals and youth, *REWIRE* addresses the causes of negative stress including grief, poverty and sexual assault in youth.



▲ Valerie Methot.

REWIRE premieres May 1–4, 2019 at the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre.

Using theatre as a tool

“The methodology is all about using theatre as a tool to process trauma,” says Methot.

That methodology came to Methot when she was completing her masters of Fine Arts at UBC.

She created a play called *Treated with Tango*, a production

she used to honour her friend who died of AIDS.

After receiving a positive response from the audience, Methot was inspired to take that artistic methodology and tailor it to work with youth.

After taking her proposal to the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre, she created the Roundhouse Youth Theatre Action Group (RHYTAG) and the charitable arts organization, Some Assembly.

Together RHYTAG and Some Assembly raise awareness about the issues youth face by getting youth and industry professionals to work together to promote dialogue.

Working together to tackle issues

“*REWIRE* started with conversations I was having with youth writers about an issue that many people face, which is stress,” says Methot.

“Youth [were] given the chance to bring up their ideas and write in collaboration with profes-



▲ Devana Petrovic.

sionals: we have script consultants, people who help with the acting process, people who go over the script, so it is from both sides,” says Devana Petrovic, an actor and writer, who stars in the play.

“Some people were talking about video games, and how going into that fantasy enables people to just forget about their daily negative stress, and just enjoy that amazing feeling of being in that fantasy world,” says Methot.

As a result, *REWIRE* takes place on the night of a total eclipse where a major video game event is set to happen.

The play features youth, aged from 13-years-old to 22-years-old.

“The range of what’s considered a youth is very broad, so getting the perspective of a 13-year-old compared to a 22-year-old is completely different,” says Petrovic.

She explains that bringing these ages together brings about different perspectives and ways of thinking so there is a diversity of dialogue.

“It makes for a beautiful production,” says Petrovic.

Petrovic, who is in last year of high school, got involved with RHYTAG after watching her sister perform in their plays.

“It’s great to have this platform to bring up stuff that I care about, and bringing awareness to things is very rewarding,” she says.

Taking action

Petrovic plays a character named Hope who was sexually



▲ *Rewire* examines negative stresses and solutions.

assaulted at a party while being intoxicated.

“When creating this character, I wanted to bring up the topic of sexual assault and educate people about consent and boundaries,” she says.

During the making of the play, a clinician from Vancouver Coastal Health came in and facilitated a conversation with the writers about grief and sexual assault.

“*REWIRE* promotes normalizing dialogue about these issues, it also promotes the importance of community support and positive action,” says Methot. “We want to educate people about the importance of these issues so that we can promote prevention.”

When doing research for the topic of sexual assault, Methot and her staff found there weren’t any mandatory classes that educate on the issue.

As a result, after every performance, *REWIRE* will hold talk-back sessions and facilitate post show workshops with audiences, says Methot.

There will also be resource materials, from the WAVAW rape crisis centre, being given out to audience members after each performance.

As a way to incorporate education about sexual violence and prevention into the school curriculum, Methot and her staff will take all the information that comes from these sessions and create a proposal for the BC school system.

“This play is to be the first step to promote dialogue about the importance of normalizing this conversation,” says Methot. ✎

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

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“With wings like clouds hung from the sky”

by KATY SWAINSTON

Chinese Canadian brush painting artist Lee Nam went largely unrecognized when he worked with Emily Carr in Victoria in the 1930s. Five years ago, Montreal-based artist Karen Tam began the difficult task of trying to find out more about him.

Tam will explore his work in an exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery from May 4 to June 30.

The legacy of Lee Nam

“The presence of Lee Nam as a historical or artistic figure exists solely through Carr’s journal entries,” says Tam.

These journal entries tell of a talent who grew and persevered in gaining recognition in the face of significant prejudices with support from Carr. The curator of the exhibition, Shaun Dacey, mentions that Carr exhibited his work in her studio-apartment before he went on to have a show of his paintings around a year later.

Carr did not just advocate for his talent though; she learnt from it too. The influence of his approach is something that Dacey believes shows in Carr’s work.

“Carr’s experimentations in brush paintings in the 1930s, exploring British Columbia’s coastal landscape, led her to develop a technique of using oils thinned with gasoline on brown paper in order to paint quickly. This tech-

nique is similar to watercolours and in some ways, Chinese brush painting,” says Dacey.

With the sparse information on Tam’s life that exists only through Carr, Tam has drawn on a rich range of approaches to explore who he was.

“In some [of Emily Carr’s journal] entries, she describes visiting his studio as well as [observing] his paintings. In an attempt to give presence to Lee Nam, I have re-imagined his studio as an installation based on Carr’s descriptions,” she says.

The re-imagining of his studio promises to be a highlight of the exhibition, as Tam’s self-described recreation of ‘Chinese restaurants, karaoke lounges, opium dens, curio shops and other sites of cultural encounters’ runs through all of her work and is

something she is particularly renowned for.

Tam has also created a series of drawings as portraits of Lee Nam based on head tax records of immigrants coming into Canada with similar names. These artworks will be seen alongside paintings by Carr, a sketch attributed to both Lee and Carr and historical artworks from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV).

Local Chinese brush painting

The inclusion of local artworks is not just restricted to historical pieces from the AGGV. Tam’s work with the Chinese brush painting community in the Lower Mainland has been vital to the development of the exhibition in Richmond. Tam completed a two-week residency earlier in the year during which she met with local ink-

brush artists; some of their work will be included in the exhibition. In curating the exhibition, Dacey feels that the contribution of local artists has added a huge amount.

“I was amazed at the crossover and similarities among works we are presenting by Chinese masters and those producing here,” says Dacey. “The skill level is spectacular.”

This involvement of local Chinese brush painting artists does not stop at their artwork being included in the exhibition. Mirroring Tam’s imagining of Nam’s workshop is a space for visitors to get involved in workshops and demos. Participants will be able to take their first steps in learning how to paint birds and flowers led by members of the Lower Mainland’s Chinese brush painting community.

More than that though, through coming to the exhibition, visitors will be taking part in righting misconceptions about British Columbia’s Chinese Canadian community.

“Much of what I see in mass media regarding Richmond is focused on the ‘new’ Chinese community. Karen’s investment in unearthing the biography of Lee Nam speaks to this erasure of Chinese-Canadians identity from our national and provincial history,” Dacey says. ✎



▲ *With wings like clouds hung from the sky.*

Photo courtesy of Richmond Art Gallery

Find out more about the exhibition here: www.richmondartgallery.org.

K!MMORTAL: “X marks the swirl”

by XI CHEN

Lyrical flow rap, experimental hip hop, electronic soul full, activating queer, and Filipinx shape shifting type movement are all part of the descriptions artist Kim Villagante uses to capture just how multi-dimensional K!MMORTAL is.

Mainly self-taught in music, she just released her second album *X Marks the Swirl*, with the swirl symbolizing her gender fluidity.

A multi-dimensional artist

With an educational background in visual art and art history, and a father who is a painter, Villagante grew up drawing. She also enjoys reading, dancing and singing and initially wanted to be a dance teacher. After performing at Open Mics in the city, she ventured more into music and released her first album *Sincerity* in 2014.

“I really want to branch outside of a specific medium,” Villagante says. “I don’t want to just do music. I want to have art that is gripping, so it incorporates art, dance, acting, spoken words and music. I hope my work is strong in the message but also gripping in the art itself.”

As a second-generation Filipino, she says her music talks a lot about flying and what is home, especially because Canada originally is indigenous.

“I talk about what it means to feel at home,” says Villagante.

“Sometimes I don’t find Vancouver to be home. Vancouver is only 150 year old and there is no treaty between indigenous people and the late-comers. I think there is a story that is hidden why people don’t feel at home. I think the place would benefit if indigenous are more involved in creating this place.”

Empathizing with the indigenous cause, she penned a song *Ice Palaces* in her latest album, which deals with the topic of colonialism.

Selected as one of the artists witness to a citywide strategy on how artistic organizers and entrepreneurs can change the art ecosystem of the city, Villagante believes Vancouver can be more accommodating to artists through more funding and support.

“Art is not integrated in Vancouver,” she says. “The city is so young that it is still trying to find its artistic voice. I really want artists to be more supported financially, emotionally and spiritually. And the big question is always how we can work with indigenous artists.”

Making a gender statement

A big fan of spoken word – where she gets her musical inspiration from – Kim is also an avid reader with a particular interest in queer authors and their biographies. She is discovering her own identity and makes her unique gender statement.

“In my art and poetry, as I become a musician, I became



Photo courtesy of K!MMORTAL

politicized. Love is not based on if the other person is male. Why do I like that person? It had nothing to do with their gender specs but I am drawn to the person in spirit. Queerness is very political to me; it is not what I am sexually interested in. It is a philosophy; it is a way of living. It is about questioning authority – if you question authority, you are questioning heterosexual norms; you are questioning racism; you are questioning transphobia, homophobia,” she says passionately.

The decision to come out wasn’t well received by her more traditional family. Villagante says her mom still tries to ignore her when this comes up.

“In my own community, you are either a boy or a girl, but really there is a spectrum,” she says. “Swirl means fluid, and I am fluid; I am not either/or. There is no binary; we need to get rid of binary.”

Inspired by many other queer artists before her, Villagante believes that gender activism is their very existence, just by being who they are.

“I am just one of many people, people around me are outspoken,” she says. “If we are surrounded by many voices that challenge the dominant narrative, there will be more creative space, and people will feel more at home.”

For more information, please visit www.kimmortal.bandcamp.com.

▲ Kim Villagante (K!mmortal) is a mainly self-taught musician.

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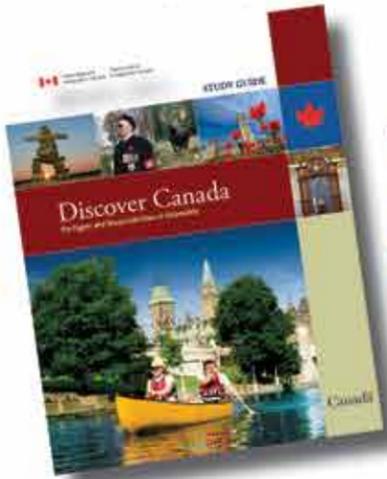
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Photo courtesy of The Cultch

“NASSIM”: theatre unscripted

by THERESA K. HOWELL

What would it be like to walk into a performance without knowing the script? That is what NASSIM, the international award-winning play, asks of its performers. There are no rehearsals; there is a different guest actor at each performance; and the actors never see the script until they step on stage to perform it.

“This [type of experimental theatre] allows the actor an opportunity to go back to who they are,” says Nassim Soleimanpour, multi-disciplinary theatre maker from Tehran, Iran.

NASSIM will be showing at The Cultch’s Historic Theatre from May 7–19.

Rewriting the standards

The self-titled play has already toured extensively from its origin in the U.K. Like Soleimanpour’s *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit*, this play is described as having no borders. The playwright’s approach to these scripts is based on his desire to create more than a play; it is a way to look at the world.

“There was a point in my life that the concept of borders should change. NASSIM is a result of this contemporary world,” says Soleimanpour.

The play talks of the ideas of home and language, while underlining the idea that any place can be home. The name *Nassim* means breeze in Farsi, Soleimanpour’s first language. His father, a famous novelist in Iran, referred to the Soleiman-

pour as a hurricane during the playwright’s youth.

“Whether a hurricane or a breeze, I love to travel; going from country to country carrying these ideas hopefully finding places where they can blossom,” says Soleimanpour. During his young adulthood, Soleimanpour took 7 years to write his internationally acclaimed *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit*. It was his sole intention to write a play that would travel beyond Iran. He imagined an endless play that had no boundaries, no limits. To this date, *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* has been translated into 25 different languages and performed over 1000 times across the globe and has toured for over a

decade. Soleimanpour says the play was designed to survive.

his schedule but he was determined to make it happen. “I’m 100 per cent confident that it will be a learning, educative experience for me. It will lead me into a place where I’ll learn a little bit more about myself,” says Warren.

Pippa Mackie, voted ‘Artist to Watch’ by the Vancouver Sun and the Georgia Straight, will be performing on May 15. Her film and television credits include *Supernatural* (CW) and *Van Helsing* (Sci-Fi). Mackie says she was born with a love for acting and

“ Theatre needs to start another dialogue.

Nassim Soleimanpour, theatre maker

decade. Soleimanpour says the play was designed to survive.

The play has landed

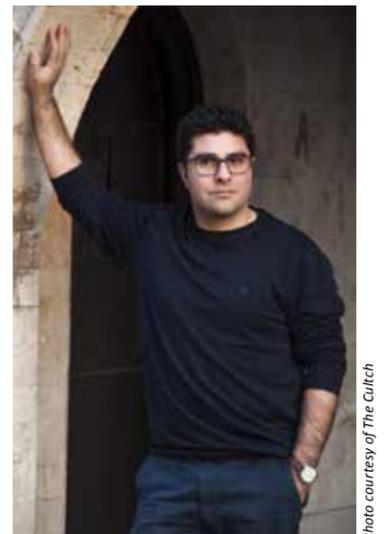
The gueststars in NASSIM’s Vancouver performances are Carmen Aguirre (May 7), Adam Grant Warren (May 8), Maiko Yamamoto (May 9), Marcus Youssef (May 10), Craig Erickson (May 11), Christine Quintana (May 12), Dawn Petten (May 14), Pippa Mackie (May 15), Quelema Sparrow (May 16), Tetsuro Shigematsu (May 17), Conor Wylie (May 18) and Donna Soares (May 19).

Writer, performer and director Adam Grant Warren says that ever since he was asked to perform the show he has been looking at his own work from different angles. Busy with his production *Lights*, showing at the upcoming rEvolver Theatre Festival, it was a scramble to find a night that accommodated

theatre. So, when asked to do NASSIM, she felt truly honoured.

“You must trust your instincts as a performer and let the show reveal itself while you’re on stage. This is so interesting to me and I can’t wait to see what it is like,” says Mackie.

Preempting NASSIM, Soleimanpour’s *BLANK* will also open at The Rumble Theatre from April 30–May 4. Soleimanpour says that engaging the audience has been of certain inter-



▲ Nassim Soleimanpour.

est to him. So *BLANK* reverses the typical theatre experience: it’s a script riddled with blanks, leaving the audience in charge of how the story will unfold.

“Theatre needs to start another dialogue,” says Soleimanpour.

For more information, please visit the following sites:
www.auroranova.org
www.rumble.org
www.thecultch.com



▲ Adam Grant Warren.

pour as a hurricane during the playwright’s youth.

“Whether a hurricane or a breeze, I love to travel; going from country to country carrying these ideas hopefully finding



▲ Pippa Mackie.

Photo courtesy of The Cultch

Photo courtesy of The Cultch

Cultural Calendar

April 23–May 7, 2019

by SIMON YEE

I hope everyone enjoyed their long Easter weekend! As April showers give way to May flowers, there are plenty of events and festivals to check out around the city. Wax philosophical in front of international art at Canada Place, watch a man sell his soul to a demon at the Vancouver Opera, learn how to prepare a micro-green meal at Simon Fraser and more!

Art Vancouver

April 25–28
Vancouver Convention Centre
at Canada Place
www.artvancouver.net

Since the first edition of Art Vancouver was launched in 2015, the fair has played host to over 500 artists and galleries that show their work at the Vancouver Convention Centre each spring. The show strives to bring together the global arts community in a city with young and rapidly growing creative talent. Featuring an array of reputable galleries and artists from Canada and around the world, exhibitors can showcase their art work on a thriving and prestigious platform to a global audience. For a complete list of artists and exhibitors at this fifth annual art fair, please check out their website.

IELE

April 26–27, 8 p.m.
BlueShore Financial Centre
for the Performing Arts,
North Vancouver
www.lamondance.com

IELE invites the audience into a dance story of a group of boys that mischievously decide to go into the forest in the hopes of seeing and taunting the IELE – the forest nymphs. Inspired by Romanian folklore, and with original music and story by the Emmy-nominated Hal Beckett, IELE is a timeless journey into the heart of a story full of duels, enchantment, vengeance and passion. The show will be playing at the BlueShore, April 26 and 27. For tickets and more information, check out the Lamondance website.



▲ From reggae to afropop to soul, Mokoomba brings an international perspective to music.

IGNITE! Youth-Driven Arts Festival 2019

April 26–May 4
Various venues around Vancouver
www.thecultch.com

Every year The Cultch is taken over and transformed by young people. Hundreds of youth are involved in what has grown to be one of Vancouver's largest youth-driven arts festival. The festival includes showcases in music, dance and spoken word, the world premiere of three one-act plays, a visual arts exhibit, variety shows featuring improv, drag, circus arts and much more. All of this is created by local artists between the ages of 13–26. Check out The Cultch's website for more information.

Pantayo

April 27, 8 p.m.
The Annex, Vancouver
www.newmusic.org

Pantayo is an all-women lo-fi R&B gong punk collective based in Toronto. The group combines percussive metallophones and drums from kulintang traditions of the Southern Philippines and synth-based electro grooves, to create a sound shaped by their experiences as diasporic Filipin-

nas. They will be performing at The Annex on April 27 at 8 p.m. and there will be a free pre-show chat at 7:15 p.m. For tickets and more information, please visit the New Music website.

Mokoomba

April 27, 8 p.m.
The Imperial, Vancouver
www.imperialvancouver.com

The Zimbabwean musical group Mokoomba will be performing at The Imperial on April 27. Living in a border city that attracts tourists from all over the world gave Mokoomba's music an international perspective from the beginning, incorporating everything from reggae to afropop to soul, alongside their own local musical traditions. Mokoomba's knockout live shows and potent blend of traditional Tonga, Luvale and Nyanja sounds are laced with international styles from Congolese soukous to soul. Mokoomba have become one of Zimbabwe's most popular bands, playing with such icons as Hugh Masekela, Baba Maal and the Talking Head's Tina Weymouth and Chris Franz.

Vancouver Opera Festival: Fairytales & Fables

April 27–May 5
Various locations
around Vancouver
www.vancouveropera.ca

The third annual Vancouver Opera Festival aims to engage, inspire and entertain the community over nine days through voice, music, theatre and the visual arts. This year's theme explores fairytales and fables from around the world. Some of the shows include *The Troubadour and the Tallow Candle*, a musical re-telling of a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale; a French adaptation of the German legend *Faust*; *The River of Light*, an original Canadian musical ensemble. Please check out the festival's website for tickets and showtimes.

Journeying through Chinatowns

April 30–Sept. 1
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical
Chinese Garden, Vancouver
www.vancouverchinesegarden.com

Shaped by commerce, poverty, and community ties, British Columbia's Chinatowns housed the majority of the ethnic Chinese immigrants who settled in early, segregated Vancouver. These spaces, although transformed, remain today. Journeying through Chinatowns, a photography exhibit which will be hosted by the Vancouver Classical Chinese Garden from April 30 until Sept. 1, includes work by three Vancouver-based photographers who strive to capture the present-day conditions of historical Chinatowns in Vancouver, Richmond and New Westminster. Through their photographs, they seek to share these evolving spaces and their significance to the people who inhabit them. There will be an opening reception from 4 - 6 p.m. on May 4.

Place des Arts May/June Exhibitions

May 3–June 1
Place des Arts, Coquitlam
www.placedesarts.ca

Visit the Place des Arts Gallery as they unveil three new exhibits for the month of May. Check out photographers Rita Hernandez and Jennifer Sarkar's *My Mother's*

Home, capturing the power and resilience of immigrant and refugee mothers, grandmothers and their children. Next, watercolour artist Mary Kate Woodward's Connections contain drawings depicting different races, religions, species, ages and genders, celebrating similarities and interdependence rather than focusing on differences. Finally, the Fraser Valley Chapter of the Federation of Canadian Artists share their best paintings, which they've collectively titled *Blending Tradition and Innovation*. There will be an opening reception at 7 - 9 p.m. on May 3.

Burnaby Blooms

May 4–5, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Shadbolt Centre for the Arts,
Burnaby
www.burnaby.ca/rhodofest

The City of Burnaby will be hosting Burnaby Blooms on May 4–5 at Shadbolt Centre, a festival promoting the long-term sustainable, ecological health of communities and providing a venue for art and horticultural groups. View figures dressed in flowers, plants and foliage by floral designers as they create unique floral ladies. Also on site will be the popular Burnaby Eco-Sculptures, floral installations, workshops, market vendors, entertainment and more! Admission is free.

Burnaby Festival of Learning

May 4–11
Various sites around Burnaby
www.festivaloflearning.ca

The Burnaby Festival of Learning celebrates unconventional, lifelong learning. A week-long series of free events, the festival features performances, lectures, discussions, tours and more, all designed to inform, engage and spark creative conversations among Burnaby's vibrant and diverse audiences. Check out Star Wars Day (May the fourth) at Cameron Complex, listen to the history of B.C. African migration and Black Strathcona at the Burnaby Neighbourhood House and join a garden workshop to learn how to prepare a meal of microgreens at the Embark Learning Garden. For these and other events, check out their website.

► "DOXA" from page 1

and humanity of the film emerges as a consequence of this multi-perspective approach."

Mahdavian got involved with the project since she knew the Fazili family from previous work. She programmed a short film called *Mr. Fazili's Wife* in the Davis Feminist Film Festival. Originally, she and others started a letter writing campaign on behalf of the Fazili family, trying to avoid the journey that became *Midnight Traveler* altogether, but it was not meant to be. After this difficulty, Mahdavian was determined to help out Hassan and his family in any way she could.

"When their situation deteriorated, I agreed to help the Fazili family in documenting their journey," she says. "We did not know what the end product would be at that stage, but we felt it was worth capturing and preserving. So, from day one of the filmmaking journey, I was

there to provide support and collaborate with Hassan to tell his family's story."

The process of getting the footage and then getting it to the United States for processing and editing is in itself a tale of human determination. Mahdavian explains how the footage was made into *Midnight Traveler*.

Hassan was unable to travel with his laptop, so he captured the footage on SD cards that he guarded until Mahdavian was able to arrange local contacts in each country to copy and ship the original footage to the US. Once she had the footage, Hassan wiped his SD cards and shot new material. But it was only the first challenge to get the footage safely to the post-production facilities. Other challenges lay ahead in making the footage into a movie.

"Fortunately, we had an incredible team in sound and color that took the footage from raw mobile phone material to some-

thing that felt cinematic and professional," says Mahdavian.

Belongings

Along with *Midnight Traveler*, visitors to the DOXA Film Festival can also enjoy some amazing South Asian film and videos from the 1990s that have been selected to play in the *Longing and Belonging* Program. The curator of this program, Zool Suleman, who is also co-founder and editor of South Asian art and literature magazine *Rungh*, approached DOXA and got the program and its films and videos to be part of this year's festival.

"The program at DOXA is part of *Rungh's* ongoing project to make visible the invisible cultural histories of racialized groups in Canada," says Suleman.

When asked about the program's name, Suleman talks about the "racialized migrants, and those born of such communities in Canada, that often struggle with understanding "there" (longing), while "living here" (belonging).



▲ Still from *Surviving Sabu*, 1998.

"Multiculturalism does not "fix" these issues, but often exacerbates them," says Suleman.

The program focuses on the 1990s because it was a time of significant cultural production in the South Asian community in Canada. When asked what he hopes the audiences of the *Longing and Belonging* program takes from the

films and videos they watch, Suleman says: "I hope that they leave wanting to know more about what they see. The *Longing and Belonging* program is just a small piece of what was taking place in the 1990s. Many of the topics from that time, continue to influence films which are made today."

Similarly, Mahdavian hopes that the audience of *Midnight Traveler* feels they have had a chance to see the journey of a refugee through new eyes.

"The topic is often in the news, but I don't think we often get beyond the common black-and-white depictions of the situation. With this family, we get a chance to see the whole experience through insider eyes," says Mahdavian.

The human spirit is on display in these films and programs and available to the public, thanks to the DOXA Film Festival. ✉

For more information:
www.doxafestival.ca