

My Very Own
Circus: a film about
running away from
a home on wheels
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The Source

forum of diversity

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Verbatim

To rock bottom and up

by ISHA JAIN

Did you ever have an idiosyncrasy as a child? I did this rather ridiculous thing as a child, where I saved the best for the last. It started off by saving the best bite of food for the end. Slowly, that habit bled into other parts of my life. For example, if someone gave me a candy, I wouldn't eat it right away. I'd save it until I really needed it – I would wait for the right moment so that I could maximise value. A pick-me-up, you could say.

Somehow, that habit stuck with me through my childhood and into my adult years, except now I "save" different types of things, I've levelled up. Some of the things that I've "banked up" are: certain feel-good books or TV shows, a vacation, a hair transformation, pottery classes, a visit home, and lazy days (to name a few). I've been saving these items on my list for when I truly needed to redeem them - on really bad days. Naturally, each item on the list had a different emotional value, almost like a coupon. The item I redeemed had to correspond with how much I needed it. For example, when I had my heart broken years ago, and (albeit basic) I redeemed my "hair transformation" coupon, just like every other teenage girl. The books and TV shows were lower value, for hard days, but the vacation, on the other hand, was probably of the highest value and saved for rock bottom.

Anyway, the reason I've yapped on about my little system is because I found myself using up all the coupons I possibly could this past year. When I say it was a hard year, I truly mean it. Hard enough that I can only really describe it in terms of this coupon metric.

I started a shiny new job in January 2020, only to be laid off three months later like millions of people in the world. The lockdown, which started off as

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Linguistic diversity encouraged in the workplace

by CURTIS SEUFERT

According to Statistics Canada, as of 2016 the proportion of workers who use more than one language at work has risen slightly from 2006, hovering at around 15.4%.

However, the use of languages other than English or French accounts for only 5%, with less than 2% of the country using languages other than English or French "predominantly".

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)

will be hosting a webinar on linguistic diversity in Canadian workplaces on Apr. 20. The CCDI is a charity/organization that works with businesses on multiple fronts, through research initiatives, seminars, and more, on how best to promote and encourage diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

For Anne-Marie Pham, executive director of the CCDI, pursuing linguistic diversity in the workplace is as important an endeavour as it is multifaceted. While the numbers themselves didn't change substantially

between 2006 and 2016, Pham says employers seem generally more willing to embrace linguistic diversity than they did 10 years ago.

"[Our employer partners] are seeing an increasing need to better understand, what is linguistic diversity in the workplace? What is the current Canadian landscape in terms of both the growth of linguistic diversity in the workforce, and also understanding some of the language policies that exist in Canada," says Pham. "They are creating a culture that is more

accepting and open-minded when it comes to linguistic diversity in the workplace."

Making use of linguistic diversity

However, it's difficult to know the extent to which this enthusiasm for diversity has translated into policy implementation since, as Pham notes, one of the key roadblocks to implementing linguistic diversity is understanding how to go about it.

"I think one of the challenges is that people don't know where

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Cultural Spotlight



Photo courtesy of Le Winston Band

Festival du Bois

A glimpse into the musical community

by TINA QU

Festival du Bois is the largest celebration of French Canadian and francophone music and culture in B.C. Traditionally held in Coquitlam, this vibrant festival brings together music lovers to appreciate the diverse music styles in our society. This year, musicians all

electric bass, Andrew Duquette-Boyte on the frottoir and Gregory Fitzgerald on the drums. The members of Le Winston Band are very excited to participate in the Festival du Bois for the first time. For their piece, they shot a video in L'Orbite in Montréal, which they describe as a beautiful venue converted into a florist since the pandemic.

“We played a few original pieces and some traditional Cajun and zydeco songs, always blending different genres with our own style and reality.”
Le Winston Band

across Canada will be bringing their unique songs to the free online festival held from Apr. 16 to Apr. 30.

One of the most anticipated performances comes from Le Winston Band, a Montréal zydeco group whose distinctive musical style combines its French-Canadian musical roots with rock and Cajun tunes. The band comprises Antoine Larocque on the accordion, Vincent Fillion on the guitar, Antoine Fallu on the

“We were in a great mood when making it,” the band says. “We played a few original pieces and some traditional Cajun and zydeco songs, always blending different genres with our own style and reality.” The band believes that the video will bring the same joy and warmth they experienced to their audience.

The story behind the band

Le Winston Band was formed in 2012 when the members were still in CEGEP (two years post-secondary education in Québec). During a long student strike, the band had extra time to play country and cajun covers along with traditional and original folk songs in French. “It all began in Vaillant’s apartment at the time, which

was called Chez Winston because there lived a domesticated rat named Winston,” the band explains. “So when we had to find a name for our first gig, Le Winston Band seemed right.” In addition to the original trio, Vaillant, Fallu and Vince, Duke and Greg have also come to join the group. “We are like family now,” the band expresses.

Adapting to change

Le Winston Band acknowledges that there have been significant changes in the format of the celebration. “Of course, we were most looking forward to living the real experience of a festival, especially the partying, meeting all kinds of great people and great bands,” the band says. From Innu singers to Acadian musicians, the festival is truly a celebration of diversity. “We were also excited about discovering a part of B.C., learning about the people and seeing how our Louisiana-influenced music would be received there,” the band adds. Although things turned out to be slightly different, the band maintains a positive attitude as they express they need to ‘adapt and be patient.’ They believe that music can be appreciated equally online and hopes that the audience is looking forward to other surprise events and features the festival is sure to bring. ✍

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

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Working towards a violence-free society

by GEOFF RUSS

There is no vaccine for domestic violence. But that has not deterred Balbir Gurm from working to prevent relationship violence. “It’s not a shadow pandemic, it was a pandemic before COVID came around, says Gurm. Look at the definitions of pandemic and we’ve been in a pandemic of domestic violence for some time now.”

She began to do something about that pandemic in 2011, when she founded NEVR, the Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships. That project has garnered Gurm a nomination as a YWCA Women of Distinction award in 2021, coincidentally a decade after the project’s beginnings.

Working together to make a difference

An award-winning professor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Gurm had previously studied domestic violence. Prior to NEVR, Gurm had attended annual conferences with the City of Surrey on the topic of domestic violence. “The service providers who attended always discussed needing real action, but nobody was listening or working with them,” Gurm recalls.

Gurm decided to launch a new project to gain a better understanding of the systems surrounding relationship violence and how to change them to aid prevention. “We began a participatory research program in 2011,” says Gurm. “We interviewed people across the system from police to survivors and workers in the justice system.” After interviewing 70 people from diverse occupations, Gurm concluded that the entire system had to work together to make a difference.

“I was going through statistics on domestic violence and realized they hadn’t changed much. We had to focus on prevention,” Gurm recalls. “We had to make sure governments were on board and everybody was talking the same language.”

A call went out for everybody wanting to be a part of the project. Over 60 people attended the first meeting which came up with the name: The Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships, or NEVR. After that meeting, they began working on its goal of eliminating relationship violence, focusing on prevention. NEVR’s mandate goes beyond physical violence and includes sexual, emotional, and financial violence.

The network hosts annual conferences to coordinate its direction and monthly meetings to share their latest findings and research. As of 2021, over 200 organizations, groups and people have joined the organization. Gurm and the other partners have published toolkits on domestic violence. Along with 3 other authors, Gurm pub-

lished a book in 2020, *Making Sense of a Global Pandemic: Relationship Violence & Working Together Towards a Violence Free Society*.

Change won’t happen overnight

Gurm cites immigration as a reason why relationship violence will not be fully eliminated in Canada without a global change. Newcomers to Canada suffer unique stresses and anxieties that can lead to domestic violence. “We have a constant flow of immigrants and we need them. Canada’s population won’t survive without immigration,” says Gurm who came to Vancouver at the age of 6 from Punjab, India in 1966.

Gurm however, cautions against incorrectly using statistics to form opinions about a particular group. A 2019 report from the Canadian government found that regardless of ethnic background or immigrant status, women in Canada’s rural areas suffered higher rates of domestic violence.

“There is more difference within a group than a cross-group,” says Gurm.

Gurm is also realistic about her expectations of ending relationship violence. “There is generational trauma, and if we, as a global community, want to break the cycle, it will still take 25-30 years,” says Gurm. “I don’t see a violence-free society in my lifetime,” Gurm confesses. But she also insists she is not a pessimist; she observes realities.

Gurm emphasizes the role the community played in helping to build NEVR. She insists



Photo courtesy of YWCA

▲ Domestic violence is not a shadow pandemic, it was a pandemic before COVID came around says Balbir Kaur Gurm.

anyone can achieve what she and NEVR have. They recently, presented a petition on preventing domestic violence to Parliament. “You don’t need big grants; all you need is community partners, and anyone can do this,” says Gurm. ✍

For more information about NEVR, visit www.kpu.ca/nevr
For more information on Gurm, visit www.kpu.ca/health/bsn/faculty/balbir-gurm

For more information on the YWCA Women of Distinction Awards, visit www.ywcavan.org/women-distinction-awards



Photo by Laurent Guérin

Growing Pains: regular rules of childhood simply do not exist

by VICTOR VAN DER MERWE

A child going the opposite direction of their parents is not a new theme in storytelling, and Quebec filmmaker Miryam Bouchard draws from her own life experience with her debut film *My Very Own Circus* (*Mon Cirque à Moi*). *My Very Own Circus*, a French-language film with English subtitles, is one of many Canadian films featured online Apr. 14–23 at the 23rd Reel to Real Film Festival for Youth.

“When we are teenagers, we are always in opposition with our parents and we need to find our own path; and we hope that our parents will still love us even though we are not the same as them,” says Bouchard.

Straight man and clown

Usually the child wants to run away to join the circus. Bouchard turns this theme on its head.

My Very Own Circus centers around Laura, the daughter of a professional circus clown. Her

and I was his straight man,” says Bouchard.

Unforeseen challenge and pleasant surprise

Taking themes from her own family life and making it into her first feature was no small feat. The production did bring with it some obstacles.

Huard did not know how to juggle or ride a unicycle – two tasks any clown should know how to do. Bouchard just figured, since she grew up with her father, it is not such a hard thing to accomplish juggling nine balls, riding a unicycle and spinning a plate – while playing a kazoo.

“I forgot that my father practiced six hours a day for years and so it looked so easy that anybody can do this,” says Bouchard.

In the end, the idea of Huard riding a unicycle in the movie did not happen. However, he did master the art of juggling well enough to play the role. Bouchard also has nothing but praise for the actor that took on the role of the young protagonist.

Bouchard was pleasantly impressed with Lemée during cast-



Photo by Karlfessy Jomphe

▲ Jasmine Lemée plays Laura, 12, who wants to leave the circus life.

life is filled with all the things one associates with a circus and the rules of a regular childhood just do not apply in her world.

Now that Laura (Jasmine Lemée) is 12, the realities of being on the road with her single father, Bill (Patrick Huard, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*), and his trusted mute assistant are setting in and she longs for a home not on wheels. Enter her new teacher (Sophie Laurin, *The Barbarian Invasions*), who helps Laura to apply her academic potential as she relishes the opportunity to attend school every day.

Bouchard says it is a generational thing that if you have a straight man as a parent you want to be a clown, and if you have a clown as a parent you want to be the straight man.

“It was a dynamic I had with my father. He was a circus performer and an actor, and I was on the road with him. I did the presentation before his show

ing but was worried about the strenuous shooting schedule, and if the new actor would be able to keep up. Those fears were soon put to rest.



“It was fantastic, my fears disappeared. There was a maturity in her interpretation and approach,” she says.

Although a very personal story for her, Bouchard says it also has a universal reach. She hopes people walk away from the screening with a renewed realization that life is short and that we need to accept each other the way we are – a sentiment that carries a stark relevance in our current pandemic.

“We need to love each other the way we are, need to stop wanting to change people or force our views on people,” says Bouchard. ✍

For more information on how to stream *My Very Own Circus* (*Mon Cirque à Moi*) go to: www.r2rfestival.org/production/my-very-own-circus

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Red Sky Performance: 20 years of innovative works

by ISHA OHRI

Sandra Laronde wanted to make a difference in Canada. She created the Toronto-based Red Sky Performance with Indigenous art and stories for the stage, rejuvenating a community as a result of their performances.

“[There was] somewhat of a vacuum of Indigenous performance in Canada at the time as it relates to interdisciplinary or dance works,” says Laronde. “[We] have created 17 new original works that have enjoyed long touring lives, contributing to the cultural breadth and repertoire of Canada.”

More Than Dance, We Are a Movement celebrates the 20th anniversary of contemporary Indigenous innovators and exemplifies the 20 years of steadfast work Red Sky has done through creating works of arts, performing and raising awareness. The Canadian e-premiere streams Apr. 14–20.

The Indigenous community

Red Sky’s works have been seen in 17 countries that span 4 continents and they have been able to resonate with people living in urban, rural, and reserve communities by engaging in authentic Indigenous productions.

More Than Dance, We Are a Movement exposes audiences to concepts often minimized in popular culture via artistry, dance,



Photo by Wim Lanser

▲ *More Than Dance, We Are a Movement* exposes audiences to concepts often minimized in popular culture.

live music and multimedia. Also included are interviews with Laronde and her company of collaborators, and excerpts from the works *Trace* and *Miigis* – an exploration of Indigenous connections to land and water, the environment and conservation – both choreographed by Jera Wolf, of Metis heritage and an associate artist with Red Sky Performance.

Despite COVID-19 hitting them hard, they were able to employ 72 budding artists in their program.

These artists had access to opportunities that helped refine their craft and contribute to Red Sky’s mission. Furthermore, these artists have access to the Associate Artist’s program which was started in 2011 to provide mentorship for next generation Indigenous artists. This ensures Red Sky will continue to be an integral part of the Indigenous community.

When talking about their top successes, Laronde reflects upon their first project which was with

the Toronto Sympathy Orchestra at Roy Thomson Hall: it was a large scale project that did quite well and reflected Red Sky’s mission and values.

The second success Laronde is very proud of is Tono: a remarkable project as it was a three-country collaboration with Canada, Mongolia, and China. The biggest success out of this project was the family that was created.

“[We] were so close and the artistry was so beautiful. Ev-

everyone put their hearts into the work and it was such a big accomplishment,” says Laronde.

Due to this closeness, this project was executed on world stages such as at the Beijing (2008) and Vancouver (2010) Cultural Olympiads and World Expo Shanghai.

The third success is Mistatim: a work meant for children focusing on reconciliation. The story centres around “the taming of a wild horse.” It has been a huge success and Red Sky toured across the United States and Canada.

Looking ahead

Since Red Sky was unable to perform due to the onset of the pandemic, they innovated. Producing two series: REDTalks, which focuses on Indigenous artists and leaders, and Wisdom Keepers Series, which talks about the importance of wisdom and culture during these trying times.

Red Sky is planning a 2021 tour of *Trace* across the USA and Canada for three months. They would also like to return to touring Mistatim in schools and theatres in B.C. and Ontario, and performances with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and Regina Symphony Orchestra.

“We have a lot on the go!” says Laronde. ✍

For more information please visit: www.redskyperformance.com

➤ “Verbatim” from page 1
a fun, temporary homebound adventure, soon became a solitary nightmare. To make things worse, I was separated from my family and close friends by time zones, thousands of kilometres and an international travel ban.

The next six months felt like a rollercoaster of emotions. Everything seemed new and alien, yet every day felt the same. It was like being in the Jake Gyllenhaal movie *Source Code*, where he was stuck in a time loop, except “saving the world” looked very different for us. He had to defuse a bomb in 7 minutes, and I had to wear a mask and stay home. Over that period, I redeemed all my banked up TV shows, books and lazy days. I even went to the extent of dying my hair burgundy (yikes).

After sending out over 200 job applications and hearing back from merely a handful, I hit rock bottom, with my self-esteem and mental health at an all time low. I was hopeless, haggard and homesick. That’s when I decided to redeem the biggest coupon of them all, one I’d been saving for two years: a visit home. Despite the risk of not being able to enter Canada again, I decided to be with my family and take time to find myself again.

April 1 marks one year of unemployment for me. Although things haven’t gotten much easier, I’ve definitely gotten better at dealing with them. I am grateful for all the growth and learning, even though it came at the hefty price of all those coupons. It was worth it.

It’s April now, I look around and the cherry blossoms are blooming once again. Spring comes with renewed hope. The great thing about hitting rock bottom is that there’s only one way left to go, and it’s Up! ✍

Hong Kong pro-democracy movement through an artist’s lens

by RAMAN KANG

“As the Chinese government puts more measures and efforts into silencing its people in Hong Kong or elsewhere, we over here have the privilege to speak up and with this privilege we have a responsibility to keep the story alive,” says Derek Chan, writer and director of *yellow objects*, a play inspired by the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

Originally a stage play, *yellow objects* is now both an art installation and digital experience as a result of the pandemic. Audiences can begin their journey at home on April 19, and end it at the Firehall Arts Centre where the live performance/in-person installation is scheduled for May 11 to 23, 2021.

A tragic past

yellow objects takes place in both 2019 and 2050. Mostly in English with sections of Cantonese, the play imagines what the future of Hong Kong might look like after the current protests.

In the story, a young Chinese-Canadian woman, Sandra Wong, returns to Hong Kong to perform a ritual for family members in 2050.

“Through her journey she finds out that her family has a bit of a dark history,” says Chan.

While trying to find shelter from a storm, Sandra stumbles upon an old school where she meets Uncle Chan, a former student of the school and activist who was involved in the protests in 2019.

As a result of performing a ritual for Sandra to connect her with her family, Sandra learns of Uncle Chan’s tragic past.

The need to get out

Derek Chan was born and raised in Hong Kong when it was still a British Colony. He is old enough to remember the handover in 1997, one of the few evenings his parents let him stay up as a child. Even back then, there was an underlying fear, he recalls.

“That’s why so many people left,” he says, remembering wanting to leave himself when he turned 16. “Maybe it was teenage rebellion or a desire to see what’s out there.”

Whatever it was, it led Chan to Norway, where with financial help from the institution, he was able to finish his high school years. It was there Chan decided he wanted to pursue theatre.



Photo by Maria Zurillo

▲ Derek Chan remembers the Hong Kong handover in 1997 on one of the few evenings his parents let him stay up as a child.

“For the longest time I was already interested in storytelling, theatre and making art, and it was around then that I decided that I really want to give this a serious go,” says Chan.

Then one of his teachers suggested the theatre program at Simon Fraser University, Chan headed off to Vancouver.

A passion for theatre

After obtaining his degree in theatre performance, Chan and his friend from the program, Pedro Chamale, decided to create their own theatre company.

“There weren’t many platforms out in the west coast that we knew of that supported original theatre work by artists of colour, so we started our own company,” he says.

Although it was a long journey, they now have some resources to support artists who are telling stories that mean something to them, the community and the world. In the case of *yellow objects*, Chan is telling a story that he can’t tell in his home in Hong Kong due to national security laws; as many people have been arrested and sentenced for their activism.

Although the play began as a response to the democracy movement in Hong Kong in 2019, Chan says it also became his way of reconciling with his different identities. Living in Canada, Chan thought he had to speak perfect English and pretend that he didn’t understand Cantonese, so he suppressed core parts of himself and rejected his identity.

“It’s a terrible thing. I don’t want anyone to feel the impulse to do that, especially as a new settler,” says Chan.



Photo by Heidi Taylor

▲ *yellow objects* is a story Chan that can’t be told in Hong Kong. Now, he’s trying to work Cantonese into his plays.

Chan’s hope is that people will walk away with a sense of curiosity and action to learn about what’s going on and take part, whether it be on the frontlines, through advocacy or with education.

It’s a relay, says Chan. “All we can do is carry the baton in the ways we can and pass it on with all of our energy, spirit and concern to the next person so they can run their miles and maybe one day, 400, 500 or a thousand miles later, we’ll see the finish line.”

This is not the last story Chan will tell about Hong Kong. ✍

yellow objects is scheduled for production in May 2021 at the Firehall Arts Centre, in collaboration with Playwrights Theatre Centre. Find out more at www.riceandbeanstheatre.com

Farahnaz Samari, artist taking inspiration from the city

by ANINDITA GUPTA

It has been more than 25 years since Iranian-Canadian artist Farahnaz Samari began painting.

She has showcased her art in more than 80 solo and group exhibitions in both Iran and Cana-

lectors, designers and galleries across the globe. As seen on her website, she has many series that she paints under, namely New wave, Dreamscapes, Inner child, Crow collection and Flower collection. Living on the edge of the ocean, in the city of North Vancouver is inspirational for Samari.

“...images of floating in an emerald blue sea have been my inspiration for the series of my paintings.

Farahnaz Samari, artist

da. Having participated in several ‘art battles’ alongside other artists, she won the ‘Battle of the Brush’ position at two of such art competitions.

“My first style was inspired by artist J. M. W. Turner; images of floating in an emerald blue sea have been my inspiration for the series of my paintings,” explains Samari, who graduated with Honours in Fine Arts & Interior Design from the University of Tehran.

After coming to Vancouver, she went on to further her education and graduated with a degree from Emily Carr University.

Inspiration and style of painting

“With a flair for the abstract, my art is contemporary and formative,” says Samari.

Over the last few years, her art has been purchased by col-

lectors, designers and galleries across the globe. As seen on her website, she has many series that she paints under, namely New wave, Dreamscapes, Inner child, Crow collection and Flower collection. Living on the edge of the ocean, in the city of North Vancouver is inspirational for Samari.

“It gives me a positive energy and a feeling of silence,” she says. Eventually, she changed her soft blending background with the foreground influenced by the duality of cubism, geometric shapes and colour. For her most recent series, Living on the edge and Inner child, she has taken inspiration from the works of Matisse and Picasso.

Her series, *Living on the edge*, is inspired by and an ode to the city of Vancouver. For this series, she focused more on the composition between colours and shapes, forms and lines and on layering to depict the many layers of the city herself.

Samari’s paintings attempt to show the change and constant movement of people, the states and life in them. Her attempt is to depict light at the end of every



▲ Farahnaz Samari’s series, *Living on the edge*, is inspired by and an ode to the city of Vancouver.

turn of life and for this, she uses a unique symbol – the crow.

“For me, the crow is a symbol of light – a sign that people are searching for in the hopes of rescuing the only planet they have to live on,” Samari explains.

The North Vancouver art crawl and other exhibitions

Before COVID-19 hit the world, Samari had a pleasant experience through the North Shore Art Crawl. It shed light to her studio, and she was happy to have many visitors.

“Honestly, I prefer live shows to virtual ones,” admits Samari.

Unfortunately because of the situation in the city, she did not have any visitors at her studio this year. Fortunately, most of her paintings are available in galleries all over Vancouver, and there are many that are available in her studio, where she even accepts commissions and various sells prints.

In this year’s North Shore Artists’ Spring show, Samari will have three of her paintings exhibited. This is a virtual art show

that will begin on April 25, 2021 and will go on for three weeks, until May 16.

In addition to creating art, Samari also hosts art classes and workshops. ✍

More information on Samari’s art and her classes can be found on her website: www.farahnazart.com, and more information on the North Shore Artists’ Guild, including their upcoming exhibition, can be found on their website: www.nsaltists.ca and www.northvanarts.ca.



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Home Within: an audio-visual tribute to Syria

by XI CHEN

The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC will present an emotional audio-visual performance *Home Within* by Syrian composer and clarinetist Kinan Azmeh and Syrian-Armenian visual artist Kevork Mourad as a tribute to the Syrian tragedy as part of the Spring 2021 Dot Com Series.

Home Within is a reflection of the duo's feelings during different moments over the last ten years regarding Syria, starting from the 2011 uprising to the ensuing and still ongoing war.

Recently recorded in New York City, where they both reside, the upcoming performance will showcase eight musical compositions by Azmeh and 14 pieces of artwork by Mourad, including pre-recorded animations and live illustrations.

The pre-recorded artworks, which took months to make, are a compilation of music, painting and technology and tell stories of the Syrian experience during the chaos,

During the live music performance by Azmeh, Mourad inserts live drawing sessions in-between where he uses his signature technique to squeeze paint out of a small metal pen and smudge it to quickly create illustrations.

A tribute to Syria

Mourad says the project was originally conceived to support the Syrian refugees after the 2011 Syrian uprising.

"We created *Home Within* and donated all the proceeds including my drawings to charities. We didn't think the project was going to last but we started doing it as a duo performance. The upcoming performance is an extension," he explains.

Azmeh says he feels he owed it to himself as a Syrian to have his voice heard, even though he initially found himself paralyzed

tation of one of the world's oldest literature and mythology recorded on stone tablets from ancient Mesopotamia.

As both artists are part of the Silkroad Ensemble, they aim to expand and include more instrumentalists in the near future. Founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, Silkroad Ensemble is a broad-ranging cross-cultural collective of musicians from more than 20 different countries collaborating together to create a new musical language.

Feeling and creating the home within

Though both connected to Syria, the duo has different perspectives that they bring to their artistic expressions.

Azmeh started learning music when he was very young, growing up in a family that very much values culture. He studied both music and electrical engineering in university and came to the United States to further pursue his studies.

"I would like to think of my music as being inspired by multiple traditions but not limited by any of it," he says.

For him, the project *Home Within* raises the questions what is home? and how dynamic can that concept be?

"*Home Within* is a response to what happened in Syria, which is not just a Syrian tragedy, but also a human tragedy," shares Azmeh.

Mourad, whose grandfather moved to Syria as an Armenian refugee, grew up in a poor household with little to do so he occupied himself with drawings since he was little.

"My grandfather learned Kurdish and he started playing a string instrument and composed



▲ Kinan Azmeh, clarinetist and composer, says his music is inspired by multiple traditions but not limited by any of them.



▲ Visual artist Kevork Mourad says art is a powerful tool to capture memory and history.

songs in Kurdish. It was the first thing for me to understand the concept of diversity as we celebrated other cultures," Mourad recounts.

Influenced by his grandfather, Mourad has always had music at the back of his mind, which inspired his audio-visual collaborations with musicians as early as the late 90s.

"For me, *Home Within* is a layered concept. My ancestors were forced to leave home, when we lived in Syria, the home was Syria and what we brought to it. Home is what you can capture from the past and put it in people's hearts," says Mourad. "And art is a powerful tool to capture memory and history. I want to put that into my works so people will resonate with the imageries. We are recreating home for them so they can feel safe to rebuild their future." ✍

For more information please visit www.chancentre.com

April 13–27, 2021

Cultural Calendar

by SIMON YEE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The coming third wave of the pandemic has forced another lockdown in B.C., which means fewer in-person events and festivals to go to. But we all know the drill: observe social distancing, go out for essentials only and enjoy events and activities from the comfort of your home. Follow the directives of the Office of the Provincial Health Officer – stay safe and have a great April!

Playthings
April 8–17
www.phtheatre.org

The Presentation House Theatre is livestreaming *Affair of Honor's Playthings*, a thrilling, hilarious and daring tale of mortals and Gods. With the ongoing onslaught of the Trojan War, tensions between the Greek Gods come to a head. Ares and Athena, two Gods of War, vent their frustrations by playing with the lives, deaths, and sanities of two mortal Warrior-Queens. This original story flashes across eras and fight styles, providing a dazzling display of fighting prowess and ability, interspersed with the modern, lively banter of the Gods. Underneath the fiery exchanges of words and swords, the play takes a hard-hitting interrogation of what drives humanity to violence. For tickets and more information, check out the theatre's website.

More Than Dance, We Are A Movement
April 14–20
www.dancehouse.ca

DanceHouse is proud to offer a new film celebrating Red Sky Performance's 20th-anniversary story as a leading company of contemporary Indigenous performance in Canada and worldwide. *More Than Dance, We Are A Movement* contains excerpts from their award-winning work and interviews with collaborators who have participated in this remarkable journey. This film captures the creative drive of founder and Artistic Director Sandra Laronde and the exceptional artistic vision that propelled Red Sky Performance to



▲ *Playthings* at Edmonton Fringe Festival 2019. Performers Elizabeth Young and Nathania Bernabe.

prominence and critical acclaim. For streaming and more information, check out the DanceHouse website.

Identity: From Holocaust to Home with Elke Babicki
April 20, 7–8:15 p.m.
www.nvdp.ca/event/identity-holocaust-home-elke-babicki

What happens to a child as the offspring carrying the legacy of Nazi Germany and that of a Jewish Concentration Camp survivor? The war that should have separated the parents of Elke Babicki actually brought them together and made them rise above prejudice. In *Identity: From Holocaust to Home*, clinical counsellor Elke Babicki makes an unusual contribution to the literature of the Holocaust. Babicki weaves a story of survival and heroism in Nazi Germany and shows how this affects the next generations. *Identity* demonstrates it is not the hand we are dealt with that matters, but our resilience in the face of adversity, the ability to move forward despite. The book is for people interested in history, the Holocaust and the effects of immigration, attracting readers of bestselling memoirs and containing a spiritual component which speaks to

readers who are seeking greater meaning in their life.

Earth Day 2021
April 20–22
www.earthday.org

From April 20–22, join the world's leaders for Earth Day 2021. Earth Day 2021 begins with a global youth climate summit, consisting of panels, speeches, discussions, and special messages with today's youth climate activists. There will also be digital events examining climate and environmental justice, connecting the climate crisis to issues of pollution, poverty, police brutality and the pandemic, all within a racial justice framework. World climate leaders, grassroots activists, nonprofit innovators, thought leaders, industry leaders, artists, musicians, influencers and the leaders of tomorrow will come to help push us towards a better world.

The Crossroads of Cantemir
April 21, 7:30 p.m.
www.earlymusic.bc.ca

Ensemble Constantinople performs the music of Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), a Moldavian prince, scholar, composer and

diplomat. A fascinating historical figure, Cantemir's compositions are considered part of the Ottoman music repertoire. More influential though are the over 350 instrumental works that he preserved in his book, *Edvar-i Musiki*, using his own innovative notation system, which remains as one of the most important collections of 16th and 17th century Ottoman and Middle Eastern music. To watch this online performance, check out the Early Music B.C. website.

National Canadian Film Day
April 21
www.canadianfilmday.ca

Now in its eighth year, the National Canadian Film Day has taken root as one of the largest annual celebrations of Canadian culture. It is about giving Canadians an opportunity to gather together and celebrate the incredible achievements of our nation's filmmakers. Every year hundreds of screenings take place on every conceivable platform and, in normal times, in every conceivable venue. There will be many streaming events on the day, including 11 original short films, dozens of screenings of Indigenous-made films and a tribute to the late Christopher Plummer. Check out their website for more information.

Ethics of Ambiguity in Chan and Existentialism
April 22, 9–10:30 a.m.
www.tianzhubuddhistnetwork.org/ubc-tianzhu-hurvitz-distinguished-lecture-wendi-adamek

Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies and University of Calgary professor Wendi L. Adamek will explore resonances and disparities between "doubt" as evoked in the dialectic of Buddhist Chan practice and the phenomenology of ambiguity that existentialist Simone de Beauvoir explored in her early work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Adamek will take de Beauvoir as a voice from the turning point into modernity, and amplify its resonance with voices from the Chan/Sōn Buddhist tradition. Comparing the challenges de Beauvoir articulates with perspectives from Chan, Adamek will

engage with the following perennially irresolvable postmodern questions: How might authentic grounding for ethical practice be argued while eschewing dualistic and objectifying universal propositions? Is it possible or desirable to be completely free from existential ambiguity and doubt in the world of consequential action? Or does one at best become free to make choices whose degree of skillfulness depends on the extent to which one recognizes the infinite tension of ambiguity?

Verses Festival of Words
April 22–May 1
www.versesfestival.ca

The Verses Festival of Words is a ten-day online festival featuring the best of slam poetry. The festival will include plenty of music and poetry, spoken word open mics, workshops and more. The festival contains several events, including Hullabaloo, a youth spoken word jamboree, masterclasses and The Canadian Individual Poetry Slam competition featuring several competing spoken word poets going head-to-head in intense matches in order to crown the slam poet champion for 2021! Check out the festival's website for more information.

UNION at Richmond Art Gallery
April 24–June 5
www.richmondartgallery.org

Featuring a new body of works created by interdisciplinary media artists Nancy Lee and Kiran Bhumber, *UNION* is a speculative sci-fi exhibition centred around a narrative of two beings discovering their ancestral memories through the longing for touch and the rituals practiced in their post-apocalyptic wedding ceremony. The exhibition incorporates XR, performance, sculpture, multi-channel sound and video installations. Drawing on parallels between our world and the speculative future while working through the artists' diasporic identities, *UNION* is a potent critique of modern surveillance capitalism, but also a gesture towards hope through the generative possibilities of intimacy, performativity and presence.

► "Linguistic diversity" from page 1
to start. They get a little bit overwhelmed by all of the possibilities, given the lack of capacity they may have," says Pham. "So, it's about prioritizing and understanding what fits within your broader business priorities, operations, and making the link clear. If you don't talk about it, if you don't have a business case, people won't understand why you're doing it."

Indeed, for companies eager to promote linguistic diversity, it can be difficult to know where to begin, especially when the term encompasses such a broad range of policies, attitudes, and efforts.

Because of this, Pham says that implementing linguistic diversity will look different in every workplace, depending on a multitude of factors. These include the size of the business, the capacity of a business to implement bilingual or multilingual features and services, the de-

mands of its client base, whether it is a business that works with the general public, and many more factors.

"There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, but it could look like individuals feeling that they can be authentic, that they can use different languages at work as long as it doesn't impact their performance and the ability to be understood by others. Or it could be understanding within your policies and practices when it is important to use the common language at work and when there are opportunities for people to use linguistic diversity," says Pham.

Inclusion within the workplace

Indeed, when it comes to external operations, implementing linguistic diversity will look different for every business. It can be harder for smaller businesses and businesses with more strin-

gent operational requirements to put a premium on multilingual service, for example.

"We don't expect all organizations to do everything at the same time, and there's always the context that needs to be considered," says Pham. "A small organization may not have the capacity to fully hire linguistically diverse individuals, even though they could have a much broader market by tapping into linguistically diverse potential clients. So, we always have to take the context into consideration, but not lose sight of the long-term vision."

That said, while every business cannot commit to a more formal, external pursuit of linguistic diversity, encouraging it internally within a workplace can always be a priority. Pham says that promoting linguistic diversity within a business not only promotes workplace cohesion but is also important to



▲ For companies eager to promote linguistic diversity, it can be difficult to know where to begin.

rooting out negative cultural biases or exclusionary tendencies.

"I think that we really want to help people to understand the potential negative impact of having a lack of linguistic diversity [internally]. It leads to exclusion, which leads to a bias in the workplace, and even a sense of superiority based on how well

one speaks a good main language, or has the better accent compared to other people. So, it's about finding the potential judgements that we may have on people based on their language proficiencies and accents that they have," says Pham.

In all, whether internally or externally, Pham encourages businesses to continue to pursue linguistic diversity however they can, as the values that it engenders are nothing short of invaluable.

"There is a critical role for communication at work that is inclusive. And the outcome of inclusive communication, whether it's in English, French, or another language that is being used by colleagues at work, is respect and trust. So, at the end of the day, it feels like they belong to the organization, and there's something of value that they can bring to the organization," says Pham. ✍