Death by a thousand cuts – saving the ocean and its species

by XI CHEN

As June 8 marks the annual World Ocean Day, one is called to pay more attention to the sorry state of our blue planet, which is facing a cocktail of assaults from human pollution to climate change.

"The ocean is getting tired – it is not going to solve our problems, it cannot assimilate all the wastes, it is already overwhelmed," says Juan Jose Alava, the principal investigator of the Ocean Pollution Research Unit from the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries at UBC.

The ever-growing plastic problem

It isn’t news that the world has a plastic problem, and the pandemic just aggravated it further, causing even more havoc on the ocean.

"Millions of metric tons of PPE (personal protective equipment) were released into the ocean since the pandemic. No where is plastic-free, even in remote areas of the world," says Alava, who is originally from Ecuador.

According to multiple media reports from last year, plastic waste weighing 25,900 tonnes has already leaked into the ocean since the onset of the pandemic. The plastic hasn’t officially ended yet, and, on top of that, there is also climate change.

"It is the interactions of many pollutants and many stressors that are impacting the health of the ocean," says Alava. "We assume the solution for pollution is dilution but that is not true. Because we know that the contaminant remains for many years and pollutants accumulate and biomagnify. Biomagnification means that the contaminant concentration increases in each trophic level of the food web. We need to look for preventive actions."

In March, the United Nations has just signed a landmark agreement to create the world’s first-ever global plastic pollution treaty, making it the most significant environmental deal since the 2015 Paris Accords. Canada is also expected to pass country-wide legislation to ban single-use plastics sometime this year.

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However, Alava believes just regulatory changes are not enough and there needs to be a bottom-up approach from society.

"There is only one planet Earth, one global ocean. We need to change our behaviours away from being plastic dependent. We need to stop using plastic bags and plastic bottles or think carefully about whether we need a new electronic item," Alava says.

He adds that fossil fuels also need to be phased out as plastic is made from petrochemicals.

Salmon and the Indigenous community

The unhealthy state of the ocean is also impacting all the species in it.

In a recent publication in the journal Science, scientists show that under a high-emission scenario from the continuing burning of fossil fuels, many creatures could face conditions too warm and with too little oxygen to survive in the ocean, leading to a mass extinction event by the end of the century.

Closer to home, Alava points out that the stocks of a few species of salmon in B.C. such as the Chinook salmon are already being diminished.

"The salmon is the canary in the coal mine. It connects the marine life and the inland freshwater. They bring all the nutrients to all the animals, for the bear, for the wolf, and for us," says Alava.

Andrea Reid, the principal investigator at UBC’s Centre for Indigenous Fisheries and a citizen of the Nisga’a Nation, offers more insights on the state of salmon in B.C., given that it is also a culturally significant fish for the local Indigenous communities.

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A mural for Reconciliation

by STAFF WRITER

Even though Reconciliation can be a daunting and confounding subject, Port Coquitlam’s Riverside Secondary School’s art department decided to engage with it after hearing about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. The budding artists then used John Johnson’s digital painting to recreate a section in the form of a mosaic and add it to their newly acquired understanding of Reconciliation. This has allowed each individual’s understanding of Land and Reconciliation to be depicted while still remaining faithful to the original artwork.

Sharing these collected perspectives with the community has allowed students to enact many of the First Peoples’ Principles of Learning as per the B.C. curriculum.

Gestation of an art project

When Riverside Secondary School asked their students before the art project began if they had a “personal action plan for Reconciliation,” 23% per cent replied that they did not. When the school also asked if students felt comfortable with talking about Reconciliation with people outside of school, 19% replied negatively. While visiting the exhibition, visitors too are welcome to ask students about Reconciliation.

The school intends to re-survey their students after the opening night of the show, and ask them the same questions they did before the project began. “Do you have a personal action plan for Reconciliation? Do you feel comfortable talking about Reconciliation with people outside of school?”

With an awareness of space and place, we thought to create this image of the land by enacting collaboration and reciprocity.

Art Students at Riverside Secondary School

mis-siology’s Calls to Action. The school asked students to work collaboratively on one call to action, and to come up with one way that they as high-school students could rise to action.

Around two dozen students replicated local Indigenous artist Kurtis Johnson’s image of the Coquitlam River on their chosen piece of mosaic, adding symbols representing their individual participation in re-conciliation, while acknowledging the occupation of First Nations’ unceded ancestral territory. Their en-deavour are reflected in a mural titled River of Reconciliation.

The collaborative artwork that addresses many aspects of Reconciliation is on display at The Leight Square Community Arts Village in Port Coquitlam May 2–June 9, 2022.

How to create a Reconciliation-inspired mosaic

To spearhead the project, the students decided to first familiarise themselves with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. The budding artists then used John Johnson’s digital painting to recreate a section in the form of a mosaic and add it to their newly acquired understanding of Reconciliation. This has allowed each individual’s understanding of Land and Reconciliation to be depicted while still remaining faithful to the original artwork.

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“With an awareness of space and place, we thought to create this image of the land by enacting collaboration and reciprocity,” the students explained in their statement.

The school intends to re-survey their students after the opening night of the show, and ask them the same questions they did before the project began. “Do you have a personal action plan for Reconciliation? Do you feel comfortable talking about Reconciliation with people outside of school?”

While visiting the exhibition, visitors too are welcome to ask students about Reconciliation.

The school is hoping that the artwork will inspire further discussion on the topic in order to bring about change at large.

River of Reconciliation exemplifies the power of art, and the means that individual students have to address Reconciliation on a personal level.

For more information visit:

www.portcoquitlam.ca/recreation/
leight-square-community-arts-
village/exhibitions-2

https://myriverside.sd43.bc.ca/
art/river-of-reconciliation/
fileid=ART3JWcEeCamh8Noy8jyoiB7-
pzOQh1kWbK9Z1igc3BkNgY5h_U-
qgyO7y

www.fnecs.ca/first-peoples-
principles-of-learning

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Please call 604-324-7733, go to www.pics.bc.ca, or visit us at 200-8161 Main St., Vancouver, to find out how we can best help you.
Basic income is an affordable and compassionate response to poverty

A n act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income has been introduced to the House of Commons (C-223) by MP Leah Gazan, and in the Senate (S-233) by Senator Kim Pate. The Bill is a response to the years of neglect that have undermined our social safety net to the point where medically assisted death seems preferable to legislated poverty among people with disabilities, where people are without housing shelter in city parks and bus shacks, and food banks are over-run.

Despite years of evidence demonstrating the health and social benefits of basic income, there are critics. Some, like the QAnon-inspired whose emails flooded the inboxes of Senators recently, claiming that basic income is a plot by a shadowy global elite intent on controlling the masses. Others trot out the same old criticisms, based on deeply held suspicions rather than evidence.

Some, such as Senator Diane Bellanose, have argued that basic income would require negotiated contributions from the federal government and each province, independently, all of whom could reconsider the dozens of inconsistent ways they now attempt to address poverty by delivering cash to individuals. Replacing the GST credit, re-imagining the Canada Workers Benefit and harmonizing benefits is challenging, but not inconceivable – and long overdue. Some provinces have already begun that work.

Would a basic income mean paying everyone the same amount making it impossible to respond to differential needs? The Bill explicitly says otherwise.

People with disabilities are hard at work designing a basic income that meets their needs. Did BC and Quebec declare that a basic income was not feasible as has been recently claimed? They only investigated a provincial program – not a federal basic income. Many critics forget that current programs (such as provincial social assistance) also have hefty price-tag attached to them. Some claim massive labour market disincentives, even though the Parliamentary Budget Office estimated that a basic income would only be feasible in hours worked of 1.3 per cent – hardly an immense effect.

Would a basic income impose intractable constitutional difficulties? Provinces, in this country, have authority to deliver social assistance. It makes little sense to report strong public belief that all working-age adults in Canada should work to earn a living when 70 per cent of social assistance rolls are comprised of people with disabilities, some of whom can’t work at all and others of whom need supports to make work possible.

Let’s get past the ideology and think about how we can make life better for all Canadians.

EVElyn L. ForgeT is an officer of the Order of Canada, an economist and professor at the University of Manitoba. She is author of Basic Income for Canadians: From the Covid-19 emergency to financial security for all, and (with Hannah Owczar) Radical Trust: Basic Income for complicated lives.
"After a big war driven by an extreme exploitation of natural resources, Retornar (Spanish for to return / to come back) narrates the story of the last survivors on Earth and their forced journey into a big global reset," says Colombian visual artist Santiago Tamayo Soler about his piece Retornar at the Polygon Gallery’s new exhibition Ghosts of the Machine.

I wanted to create a world where queer latinamericans would survive and live past the crisis of power. One that – as soon as these oligarchs and politicians would leave – would become non-violent: a universe becoming one about patience, and waiting, and acceptance to change,” he says.

For this project, the artist thinks it was inevitable to approach ecology and its correlation with humans and technology – or more so the lack of a sustainable environment. This theme links his work with a critique on an exploited Latin America where the land has nothing left to give.

Eco-pessimism as narrative structure: the exploitative relations of post-colonial Latin America

Within his creative process, Soler also claims that some kind of eco-pessimism grew inside him during the first year of the pandemic – when the artist found himself witnessing what seemed to be millions of micro apocalypses: the feeling of being trapped, the waiting for a tragic outcome, and finally, nothing.

In Retornar, this cycle was ultimately what defined the narrative structure of the piece. “I also found myself fixated on the way that online communities were thriving as a way to keep a sense of togetherness alive,” he muses.

Narratively speaking, Soler adds, when fantasy juxtaposes real life threats and conditions, something clicks. In his film, a quite depressing story brings the hopefulness of starting again, and the possibility of seeding a new Earth.
In Yellow Fever, a play written by R.A. Shiomi, central character Sam Shikaze investigates the disappearance of the ‘Cherry Blossom Queen.’ The drama is set in the 1970s on Powell Street and highlights key issues such as racism and police corruption while keeping the audience engaged with comedic relief.

Directed by Donna Spencer, the play is performed by Hiro Kanagawa, Craig Erickson, Yukari Komatsu, Henry Mah, Jay Ota, Evan Reit, Agnes Tong and Raugi. For the first time in 30 years, the award-winning comedy will be presented in Japantown, otherwise known as Nihonmachi, at the Firehall Arts Centre from May 28 to June 12.

The Cherry Blossom Queen is at the heart of the story. Although Yellow Fever is set in the 1970s and speaks to the effects of the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War, the issues are still very much evident today.

In the play, the disappearance of the Cherry Blossom Queen is a plot orchestrated by a racist group (Sons of the Western Guard). She was kidnapped in hopes of stirring tensions amongst groups. These people tried to create racial tension to eliminate Japanese-Canadians. Police intrigue and corruption are involved as well, and Shikaze, the main character, is forced to confront these issues and problematic people in order to save the Cherry Blossom Queen.

Shiomi speaks to his inspiration of the play and why he was motivated to pursue such a story. Shiomi recounts his encounter with a nisei man named Gordon Kadota who he worked with in 1977 at the Powell Street Festival. Kadota’s style and aura drew Shiomi to first write a short story that was later turned into this play. Shiomi doesn’t shy away from explaining just how big of an influence Kadota was on the story and for the creation of Sam Shikaze.

“He reminded me of the TV detective Columbo with his trench coat and droll sense of humor,” he says.

Kadota was one of many people who inspired the writer: Takeo Yamashiro and members of Powell Street Revue influenced him as well. Phillip Gotanda is credited for his role in the creation of the play as he urged Shiomi to work with the Asian-American Theatre Workshop in San Francisco. Furthermore, Marc Hayashi and Lane Nishikawa helped to adapt the short story for the stage.

“Marc played the key role of dramaturg and Lane was the director for the first production where I did major revisions in the rehearsal process,” Shiomi says. Shiomi has not been in rehearsals but is excited to see how this format will impact the reception of the play. He looks forward to seeing if this structure is viable for the future.

History repeats itself

Yellow Fever is an attempt to capture the essence of the generational trauma that was brought about by what Japanese-Canadians experienced at the internment camps. The racism which motivated the creation of such camps still exists to this day.

“I have lived in the US for the past several decades and have watched in horror at the recent wave of anti-Asian incidents here and the rise of white supremacist groups,” says Shiomi. “It is so unfortunate that the fictional group like the Sons of the Western Guard in my play has reflected a new reality where groups like that actually exist and are proud to spew out their racist ideology, [something that is] perhaps more evident in the US than Canada.”

For more information please visit: www.firehallartscentre.ca
by STAFF WRITER

Separation, both animal and human, from the natural world needs to be healed through musical connection, says Leah Abramson, singer-songwriter/composer of Songs For a Lost Pod. Using orca vocalizations as rhythmic beats, Abramson explores themes of interspecies communication, intergenerational trauma, and sorrow for a polluted planet.

The show is imbued with compassion for orcas, who have suffered inhuman treatment; and as well, Abramson has built in elements of her own family’s plight during and after the Holocaust.

Co-presented by Music on Main and Simon Fraser University School for the Contemporary Arts, Abramson’s world premiere (May 27-29) Songs for a Lost Pod intends to serve as a means of reconnection – natural and human – through musical communication.

From thesis to music

Originally written and composed for her Masters of Fine Arts thesis at UBC, Abramson researched the history of the resident orca near Vancouver and its surroundings. From 1965-1973, groups of killer whales in the Pacific Northwest were regularly rounded up and sold to marine parks. Many died during the process of capture or within a few years of living in captivity. A family of northern resident salmon-eating orca, named the A5 pod, lost at least three of their family members to capture on December 11, 1969. The story of their capture is told in the song Pender Harbour.

The A5 pod serves as a muse. Several songs from Songs For a Lost Pod were, in a way, written in collaboration with the pod. Musicians Andrew Lee (Holy Hum), Sandro Perri, and Aidan O’Rourke (Lau) used selected A5 pod orca vocalizations, along with Abramson’s other field recordings, to create beats and tracks.

The new sounds synced to Abramson’s underlying foundation of her songwriting and musical process.

Originally, Songs For a Lost Pod had three performances in 2017-18 with a 12-piece musical ensemble and narrator, all directed by Abramson. The show’s narrator, Barbara Adler, provided details included in the comic book, while also adding original writing to regroup the songs thematically.

Following these performances, Abramson – adding playwright, producer, and music director to her credits – put together a creative team to further development a full-length stage show. With the participation of director/dramaturg Megan Stewart, producer and musician Joanna Danday, the nine-cycle song now features live narration, six vocalists, and a five-piece band.

Added for imagery, shadow puppetry and projections from Mind of a Snail visual artists, whose handmade projections create a dreamlike, abstract visual world to underpin songs and narrative, leading audiences into a world of contemplation.

For more information visit: www.musiconmain.ca/event/songs-for-a-lost-pod
www.leahabramson.com

Leah Abramson looked towards salmon-eating orcas to find inspiration.
Music to sustain perseverance and triumph

by CURTIS SEUFERT

Pianist Ian Parker brings his classical talent, and a handful of musical friends, to the Kay Meek Centre for a Ukraine benefit concert on May 29. The performance features an assortment of classical music pieces from Bach, Saint-Saëns, Brahms and Schumann, that were either composed or arranged for a more intimate chamber group. The net proceeds of the event will go directly to the Canadian Red Cross Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal.

“We’re not doing this for the money, as there’s no pay. So we’re doing this because we want to make music that can maybe do something much more powerful than what finances can do,” says Parker.

Performing together

Having seen and heard about the continued pain that Ukrainians face, and the growing trend of benefit concerts towards Ukraine’s relief, Parker was inspired, especially by his classical musical friends, to do his part in helping out.

“I’m not a huge Facebook person, but the few times I go on Facebook, I see someone else putting on another concert for relieving the pain of war in Ukraine,” says Parker. “A lot of us are trying to find a way that we can somehow give back or provide some sense of assistance.”

For this upcoming benefit concert, Parker has brought in his own talents as a long-time classical pianist, as well as a handful of other musicians with expertise in various strings and horns. And while Parker himself has more experience as a soloist, he’s excited for this concert to come together, with other talented musicians, to perform as a cohesive group.

“It’s been a soloist my whole life. And as much as I love what I do, I find it so much more gratifying to communicate with other musicians in concert, on stage and in performance,” says Parker. “So I absolutely love the music we’re not alone. We’re making music together and we’re doing it without communicating in a verbal language.”

How music can help

For Parker, it was important the music worked to the strengths of the group performing for this concert: a uplifted soul I promise. This music is some of the most gratifying music that’s been written,” says Parker.

As moving as music can be, it can be difficult to measure the impact of music itself. So Parker is somewhat tentative but hopeful about the impact concerts like these can have on the human spirit.

“I don’t want to sound cheesy, but hopefully some kind of spiritual, maybe do something much more effective group. The net proceeds of the event will go directly to the Canadian Red Cross Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal.

“I find it to be our way of prescribing some sense of relief, either for those who are from the Ukraine who are here, or who have Ukrainian heritage who are here.”

For more information about the concert, visit kaymeek.com/events

A Ukrainian我说

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“One of my favourite comments from after a concert, from an audience member, was saying to the performer: ‘Don’t you find that that’s the medicine we all need?’”

In addition to the relief provided by the concert proceeds itself, Parker hopes the performance itself can bring a sense of hope and relief to those affected by the war, or any of those whose hearts are close to Ukraine.

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May 24–June 7, 2022

by Simon Ye

It’s finally June! The long sunny days are here with the sun setting past 9 p.m. all month, and summer being right around the corner. Enjoy a plethora of both online and outdoor events happening around the city, from film and food festivals to artistic and musical performances. Why not check out some of the events below happening around town?

**rEvolver Festival 2022**
May 25—June 5
www.rtptheatre.com

rEvolver takes place each May at The Cultch in East Vancouver and will be returning to live, in-person programming. One of the themes in this year’s submissions is the theme of interdependence: the need for community togetherness in order to work through something. Much of this year’s programming hinges on connection: between strangers, within communities and between performer and audience. Many of this year’s shows engage the relationship to one’s own mind and body, the impacts of systems of oppression, and the discovery of how we can heal and move forward. Our experiences with other people’s.

For a list of events, check out the Up in the Air Theatre’s site.

* * *

**Human Rights Watch Film Festival**
May 26–June 2
https://hotdocs.ca/whats-on/-cinema-series/hrw-film-festival

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival (HRWFF) bears witness to human rights violations in direct storytelling and exposé form, and creates a forum for courageous individuals on both sides of the lens to empower audiences with the knowledge that personal commitment can make a difference. One of the films will be Klaxon Keepers, which follows a small group of determined Elders in the village of Iskut as they heal from the wounds of colonization to push back against law enforcement, the government and some of the world’s largest multinational companies. The festival runs from May 26 to June 2 – for a complete list of shows and showtimes, check out the film festival’s website.

* * *

**Songs for a Lost Pod**
May 28–29
Music on Main and SFU School for the Contemporary Arts will be presenting the world premiere of singer-songwriter/composer Leah Abramson’s Songs for a Lost Pod in late May. Told from the perspective of various whale species, the songs explore interspecies communication, intergenerational trauma and grief for a polluted planet. Songs for a Lost Pod highlights separation - both animal and human - to another and to the natural world, with the goal of reconnection through musical communication. For more information, check out Music on Main’s website.

* * *

**Yellow Fever**
May 28–June 12
www.firehallartscentre.ca

Yellow Fever is an award-winning comic mystery by R.A. Shiomi that follows hard-nosed private eye ‘Sam Shikane’ as he investigates the disappearance of the mysterious ‘Cherry Blossom Queen’. Set on post-war Powell Street, Yellow Fever delves into a complex thread of political intrigue, racism and police corruption with a sharp wit and fast-paced dialogue. A cornerstone in the Japanese-Canadian theatre canon, this is the first time in over 30 years that Yellow Fever will be presented in the Powell Street area where it is set. This special production will mount Yellow Fever in the style of a radio play. Check out the Firehall Arts Centre website for more information.

* * *

**15th B.C. Polish Festival**
May 29–31, 9 a.m.
www.polonezcity.org

The 15th B.C. Polish Festival will be held on May 29 from 1 to 9 p.m. in Port Coquitlam. There will be a free outdoor dance party with bands, traditional cuisine and beverages and arts & crafts, raffles and attractions for children. There will also be an art auction by Polish Artists for Ukraine. Check out the Polonez Tri-City Polish Association website for more information.

* * *

**Vancouver International Children’s Festival**
May 31–June 5
(May 31–June 2 online)
www.childrensfestival.ca

The Vancouver International Children’s Festival inspires and motivates young minds with professional artistic experience that transforms a child’s understanding of the world around them and what is creatively possible. This year’s festival is from May 31 – June 5, 2022 (in person) or June 3 – June 12th (online). Join them this Victoria Day weekend and engage children of all ages. For a complete schedule and list of shows, check out the festival’s website.

* * *

**Day of Music**
June 4
www.dayofmusic.ca

The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra will be returning the Day of Music to Downtown Vancouver with free performances by artists and organizations from across the Lower Mainland, and a host of family-friendly activities by the VSO School of Music. Enjoy performances and activities by the VSO and others as people come together and celebrate the joy and fun of music. Check out the Day of Music website for more information.

* * *

**Planted Expo Vancouver**
June 4–5
www.plantedlife.com

Over 200 vegan edible and lifestyle businesses will be at the Vancouver Convention Centre along with a stage packed with insightful, informative, inspirational speakers from around the world to discuss the present and future of plant-based alternatives in our daily diet. Check out the expo’s website for tickets and more information.