

The Source

forum of diversity

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Photo courtesy of Vancouver International Dance Festival

New ways to love and live: Vancouver International Dance Festival explores the complicated, innermost self on stage

by CHERIE TAY

The 24th annual Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF) provides opportunities for dancers to dig deep into themes that spring from their personal experiences through the years, melding technical prowess with social commentary. Aside from dance performances, the festival also features sculpture, photography exhibits and life-drawing sessions.

Artists Tony Chong and Jennifer McLeish-Lewis number among the festival's solo dance

performers whose craft draws inspiration from sources as diverse as Bruce Lee's influential film *Enter the Dragon* or the daily meditational act of yoga.

This year's festival will be held from Feb. 25 to Mar. 9.

Breaking through internalized limitations

A choreographer and dancer from Montreal, Tony Chong partnered with long-term collaborators from his dance collective *Remember Not To Forget* to helm the contemporary dance solo *Invisible*. He found himself incorporating themes into the piece that he was turn-

ing over in his mind during the pandemic as a member of the Asian-Canadian diaspora.

"We grew up in a place where we always make excuses for taking space; our existence is always being excused or not looked at properly," Chong explains. "My mother was always like 'don't make waves or just hide, go under the radar,' and that mindset, I kind of took it into myself whether or not it was real or not. I was coming back to that feeling during the pandemic when there was Asian hate coming back again."

Chong wondered if those feelings of inadequacy were self-im-

posed or whether they emerged from others' judgments as well, blurring his own sense of self. As Chong revisited these feelings amidst the onslaught of anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic, he formed the theoretical basis of *Invisible*, which uses lasers and mylar (silver foil) to reflect the illusory racial boundaries or stereotypes that he fights his way out of.

"I was creating this work with Bruce Lee's work *Enter the Dragon* in mind, with his glass houses," says Chong. "So I started working with lasers and there was a mental image of walls and structures and barriers and how

I break through it. But it's all an illusion; how do I surpass that?"

Despite the racial implications of his work, Chong resists the idea of pigeonholing himself as an Asian artist; he resisted doing work about being Asian until the last few years with *Invisible*. The piece is tied to the fundamental concept of racial 'other-ness', but he wants viewers to relate to the universal concept of struggle and the realization that some of our obstacles can be attributed to internalized limitations.

"I hope they get something out of it. They might not get the feelings of racial exclusion,

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Sámi dance takes centre stage
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▲ A scene from Vancouver Finlandia Club's wife-carrying competition, a sport of Finnish origin.

Keeping the spirit of Finland alive in the Lower Mainland

by SANDRINE JACQUOT

For over 50 years, the Vancouver Finlandia Club (VFC) has been an important point of cultural connection for the Finnish community in the Lower Mainland.

Based out of the Scandinavian Community Centre in Burnaby, the VFC hosts year-round activities to bring the community to-

gether and celebrate Finland and Scandinavian culture. They also offer Finnish language learning classes for all ages and abilities at their FinnFun School, as well as an extensive library of books in Finnish or about Finland and Scandinavia free for anybody to borrow.

The VFC welcomes anybody who wants to learn about Finnish culture, whether they have Finnish heritage, have recently moved to British Columbia from Finland or aren't Scandinavian at all.

"You don't have to speak Finnish to turn up to events or be involved," says Karina Linder, president of the VFC. "You can just come and enjoy. We're quite open and welcoming to everybody," she adds.

“It’s a really good way, especially for people who have moved here, to stay connected to Finland through some events and activities.”

Karina Linder, president, Vancouver Finlandia Club

on VFC's board of directors, eventually becoming president of the organization for almost three years. Though she'll have to hand over her presidency at the annual general meeting next month, she's loved being able to connect with her culture by organizing and participating in traditional events like the wife-carrying contest and hobby-horse race at the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival.

with a connection to Finland and an annual Finnish Your Dinner potluck every summer.

"It's a really good way, especially for people who have moved here, to stay connected to Finland through some events and activities," she says, adding it's an opportunity for people to share the culture, either because they have Finnish heritage or just enjoy it.

Seeking cultural and social connection

Throughout its history, the VFC has been a place for Finnish and Finnish descendants to maintain a connection to their heritage.

"When the Vancouver Finlandia Club was established back in the 70s, there was the need for a community because people were coming and not knowing other people and there were fewer cultural activities offered," Linder says.

A joyful space

"I really just enjoy the community that I've become a part of," says Linder.

Linder first became involved with the club when she took Finnish language classes to learn to speak with her grandmother, who immigrated with Linder's mother in the 50s.

"She was speaking English a little less and Finnish a little bit more, and I thought, 'Well I'm going to try and learn,'" she says.

In her classes, Linder ended up making friends, joining the sports club and found herself

"My favourite thing is the wife-carrying contest that we've managed to bring over here," she says. Whoever completes the obstacle course first while carrying another person on their back wins that person's weight in beer.

Beyond wife-carrying contests, the VFC also hosts other cultural events like Laskiainen, a midwinter sliding festival organized just before the religious season of Lent to enjoy hearty food and go out in the snow. The Club also held an annual arts night to showcase local artists

together and celebrate Finland and Scandinavian culture. They also offer Finnish language learning classes for all ages and abilities at their FinnFun School, as well as an extensive library of books in Finnish or about Finland and Scandinavia free for anybody to borrow.



▲ A serving of pea soup at Vancouver Finlandia Club's most recent Laskiainen midwinter festival.

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"When the Vancouver Finlandia Club was established back in the 70s, there was the need for a community because people were coming and not knowing other people and there were fewer cultural activities offered," Linder says.

"With the sprawling expansion of Vancouver, it's not as easy to get people together ... At one time you could walk down the street and find 10 other Finnish people, everyone's now spread out across the Lower Mainland," she adds. This means Linder and her team at the VFC are always thinking of new Finnish-inspired activities to bring people to the club.

Language classes and immersion opportunities – like their new monthly knitting club – are some of the ways they're keeping the community together.

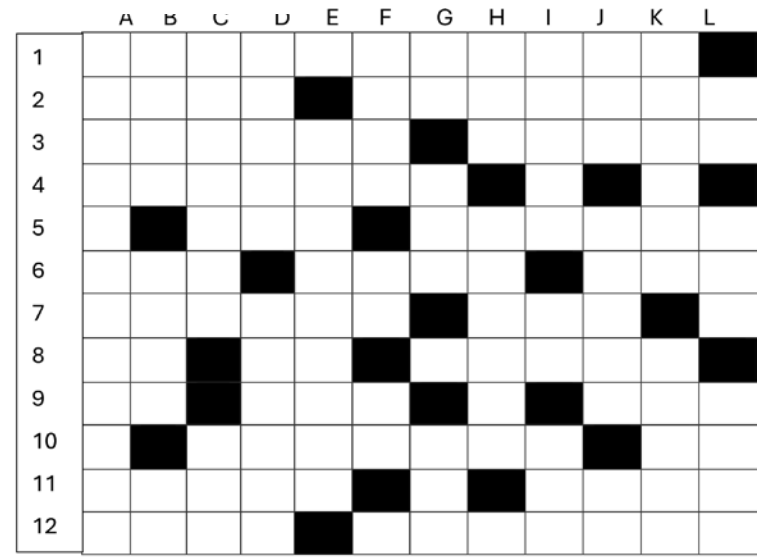
"I think maintaining the language is difficult for people who move away. Especially because Finnish is not something that's really widely spoken anywhere else, having that connection to other people who speak the language is quite nice as well," she says.

But as a cornerstone of the Nordic diasporic community, VFC values maintaining and celebrating a cultural connection to Finland.

"I think it's still a worthy endeavour [and] people enjoy the little community that we have," says Linder.

For more information about the VFC, visit www.vancouverfinlandiaclub.com

Le plaisir of the words by Le Stylo à mots



Horizontally

- 1 – living or working space
- 2 – house employee – book lovers
- 3 – from peruvian mountain – bright light
- 4 – aquatic larvas
- 5 – not young – corridors
- 6 – electrically charged atom – peruvian ancestor - utilize
- 7 – old Spain currency – mother
- 8 – artificial intelligence – Greek letter – boy's name
- 9 – timeline – informal written agreement – a hard-shelled dry fruit
- 10 - competition – take place
- 11 – heated compartments – by the mouth
- 12 – sport frames – family members

verticalement

- A) éveil
- B) jeune fille – organe coloré – cale en métal
- C) sortions le contenu – démonstratif
- D) parfait – regardons de près
- E) ajouts
- F) décore – sodium – vieux do
- G) négation – contenant – orgueil
- H) peine – vers grecs
- I) fromages – pronom indéfini – repas maliens
- J) apparatus – unité de mesure lumineuse – d'un verbe joyeux
- K) pauses – ficelle colorée
- J) senior – possessif – identiques

For answers, see page 8

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Building skills and confidence

PotteryWorks helps disabled artists develop their craft

by BONNIE GILL

The third and final piece in a series about art and disability in Metro Vancouver.

Artist Deidre Blackmore opened a studio 23 years ago with the hope of giving artists with disabilities an opportunity to pursue their passion. Now operating out of a ground-floor studio in New Westminster, the PotteryWorks program, supported by the B.C.-based Community Living Society, is home to over 40 artists who are encouraged to learn, create and eventually sell their pieces of art.

“To give them a platform into the community with their work, that’s the core of what we do,” says Blackmore.

An atmosphere of community

After being a professional potter for nearly 20 years, Blackmore opened the PotteryWorks studio in 2000 with the intention of passing on her skills as an artist. Working with people with disabilities, Blackmore says the idea to open the studio came from a change she felt within herself, in which she began thinking about what she had to offer to the field. “The only thing I had to offer was my experience as an artist,” she says.

What began with “six individuals and some supplies in a closet”, now has over 40 artists

who use their facilities. In addition to pottery, the studio also has programs in painting and photography.

The classes are taught by their own artists, some of whom have been with the studio since its beginnings. Blackmore explains that the development of skills is a goal they strive for their teachers as much as their students.

“They should progress, so that teaching also means that the staff are constantly learning and upgrading,” says Blackmore.

Overcoming self-doubt

Blackmore says she realized the importance of establishing self-esteem early on when working with artists. Blackmore explains that for some of the studio’s artists, feelings of self-doubt as a result of their disabilities are something they contend with when beginning to make art.

Artists in the studio are encouraged to sell and make money from their work. But, according to Blackmore, many want to showcase their pieces to family first.

“When they started to produce high-quality work, I would say, ‘I can sell this for you and make you some money.’ Invariably, they would say, ‘No, I want to give this to my mom,’” explains Blackmore. “Now they’re out there in the community and they want to sell and make money. But first they had to show people that they developed these skills and they could make these beautiful things.”



▲ Dan Tell is one of many artists at PotteryWorks who has improved their craft with the organization.

One of PotteryWorks’ artists, Dan Tell, comments on the sense of community that is present in the studio and the friendships he has formed there.

“They all make me happy,” says Tell.

According to another staff member, Lisa Tougas, Tell is known around the studio as “Dr.

Dan.” Regularly wearing a doctor’s jacket, Tougas says Tell is often “complimenting everybody on their work and telling us we’re doing a good job,” which adds to the inspiring atmosphere.

A source of income and pride

The studio’s artists are encouraged to develop retail

skills by selling their pieces of art. They currently operate two retail locations, one out of their studio in New Westminster and the other at River Market. According to Blackmore, one of PotteryWorks’ roles is to act as an agent for their artists to sell their art. She notes how important it is for them to be able to sell their work as a source of income.

“Because many of them are living on disability allowance, which isn’t very much, so it just helps them,” she says.

Sheri Lynn Seitz, who has been with the studio since 2000, has been successful in selling her art. She is both a photographer and potter, who finds inspiration from phones and music. Blackmore, says that the studio regularly participates in painting, pottery and photography shows and competitions. In a recent open call with the City of Vancouver, Seitz was one amongst 36 artists selected for their photograph submission, which Blackmore says was a “highlight.”

“Our artists, they often buy their lunch out in downtown New West and the restaurants all know them by name and know what their favorite meal is,” says Blackmore. “They’ve become part of the landscape... we’re in a community here.”

For more information about PotteryWorks, visit www.potteryworks.ca

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“Three steps forward, two steps back”

The Nikkei Museum showcases resilience in the face of racism

by ALISON MACDONALD

Showcasing the tenacity, resolve and responses to the injustice of the Japanese Canadian internment and forced relocations, the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre hosts the permanent exhibit *Taiken: Generations of Resilience*. Depicted on the panels on the museum walls and through the programming offered, the exhibit looks to honour and share the history and heritage of Japanese Canadians and culture in Canada.

Kimiko Yoshino, education coordinator for the Nikkei, shares her perspective of the Japanese Canadian experience as a non-traditional half-Black, half-Japanese individual who was raised with an American education on a military base. She says her guided tours of the exhibit look to build community and dialogue around this dark time in the country's history. In building a safe space, dialogue, education and diversity, equity and inclusion are encouraged and Yoshino comments that she, as the voice of the exhibit, seeks to:

“Open up and make it a dialogue, a Q&A dialogue as a Japanese-American and permanent resident in Canada, to push back on boundaries, assumptions and create a safe space without judgement, to give security and honour the courage



▲ TAIKEN: Generations of Resilience.

and build a sense of belonging,” says Yoshino.

Loyalty and the depiction of Japanese Canadians as ‘the other’

“Japanese Canadians were ‘the other,’” says Yoshino. “As [World War II] started, they were assumed to be spies and taken away from the protected area with no communication with the homeland.”

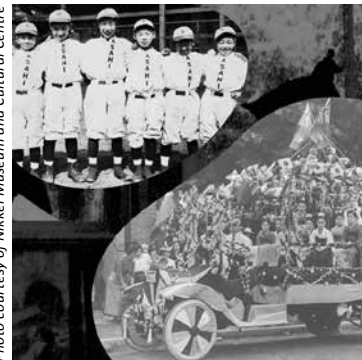
She says the challenges of racism that Japanese Canadians have lived through is often ex-

pressed by the phrase “Sanpo aruite niho sagaru,” or “Walk three steps forward, two steps back.” She explains that this sentiment of struggle and resilience was pervasive, despite the success of many early Japanese Canadians, the Issei, early immigrants in the late 1800s, who became involved in fishing, mining, logging and farming.

“[They] made Canada part of their identity and [created] second generation Japanese Canadians who were born and raised in Canada, their alle-

giance to Canada, with their identity as Japanese Canadians who saw themselves as Canadians,” says Yoshino.

But this racism dramatically increased following Japan's increased militarism and the threat that the Canadian government felt. In addition, Yoshino explains, fear mongering and the perception that successful early Japanese Canadians were supposedly taking away jobs led to a greater conflict between how the Japanese Canadians felt about Canada and how Canada felt about them.



▲ A display from TAIKEN: Generations of Resilience.

“[They had a] culture about resilience, integrity, upholding honour and responsibility, to earn enough to send home and building for posterity for assuring success for generations to come,” she says.

But as Yoshino explains, that culture of responsibility, providing for family back home, was

twisted through a lens of racism and fear mongering about threatening jobs, leading to unfair questions about Japanese Canadians' loyalty to Canada.

“Japanese Canadians were always loyal, being Canadian. [Their] loyalty should not have been questioned,” she explains.

With World War II and the Canadian government's fears of espionage and disloyalty, the internment of all Japanese Canadians was ordered and the letter to pack up and leave within 24-72 hours with one suitcase, was issued, with their property sold off by the government.

The exhibit shares other themes of the Japanese Canadian experience including the Redress Settlement in 1988 whereby the War Measures Act was repealed and Japanese Canadians were compensated by the federal government for the injustices experienced.

This exhibit, revamped in 2022 by the museum, credits the Japanese Canadian community and all staff and volunteers. Yoshino is also grateful for the photos, objects, quotes and memories of the families and loved ones of the internment live on as their personal experience is shared at the museum for all. ✍

For more information on the exhibit, please see <https://centre.nikkeiplace.org/museum-exhibits/current>

Stories told and heard

Joseph Kakwinokanasum reflects on Indigenous ghost stories

by LILLIAN LIAO

“It's not all doom and gloom, there's a future for us if we play our cards right,” says Joseph Kakwinokanasum, Vancouver Public Library's (VPL) 2024 Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, about the message behind his writings. In addition to working on a new horror fantasy novel inspired by Indigenous ghost stories, Kakwinokanasum's residency at VPL, from now until May 25, will also host adult and children programming to celebrate libraries' integral role in building communities.

“Libraries have been around for thousands of years – they are the mark of any successful civilization,” he says, hoping to attract more people to the library through speaking engagements focused on the writing process and storytelling consultancies.

Inaugurated in 2008, this VPL residency program not only emphasizes storytelling as an indispensable medium for learning about Indigenous cultures, but also aims to facilitate intercultural exchange. Kakwinokanasum, who is part of the James Smith Cree Nation and whose mother is a residential day school survivor, first encountered the power of storytelling as a child, sitting at the kitchen table with his elders.

The intimacies of memoir writing

“[My uncle or my aunties] would hit that punchline, and it would just make everybody laugh,” he

recalls. “And I thought, wow, that is such an amazing power, an amazing talent to be able to pull people in [and] captivate them.”

Even though Kakwinokanasum's elders were sharing stories in Cree, a language that he didn't understand, he credits these shared experiences of storytelling for sparking his interest in writing. He then started vigorously reading and felt drawn to the efficiency and accessibility of the short story genre, particularly after his sister gave him Stephen King's collection of short stories, *Night Shift*.

“As years went on, I felt I had to take myself seriously, I really do want to write, and I like the practice,” says Kakwinokanasum.

Having relatives who survived residential schools, his path to writing involved work-

ing through this intergenerational trauma caused by the Indian Act. This process involved twenty-years of journaling, which culminated into a memoir submitted to Simon Fraser University's The Writer's Studio and eventually to his publisher.

“I didn't move forward, I moved sideways,” he says, while noting the emotionally draining nature of writing about one's life. “[My editor] asked me, are you ready to write this, are you ready to put this out there, are you wanting a break from memoir?”

Remaking in fiction

Choosing to take that break from memoir writing, Kakwinokanasum turned to crafting fiction based on his childhood experiences growing up in poverty and his mother's struggles with alcoholism. Well-known for his first novel, *My Indian Summer*, which won the 2023-2024 First Nations Communities READ Award, Award, he is now working on a second book inspired by the Cree ghost stories of his childhood, including that of the cannibalistic *wihtikow*.

“The way my mother told this story was just so creepy, so scary,” he says. “That is what she said is the *wihtikow* – people

who resort to cannibalism become unhuman.”

Besides the *wihtikow*, Kakwinokanasum has also been inspired by stories of the sasquatch and the Northern Lights. Taking up the Indigenous worldview that there are multiverses, he is currently building out the different worlds that these creatures inhabit. His interest in these stories, particularly that of the *wihtikow*, lies in their realism.

“One thing that bothers me about the way the world is going, especially now, is all this greed you see,” says Kakwinokanasum. “Nobody wants to share, and that's my idea of a *wihtikow*, anybody in a place of power who is rich and unwilling to bring people up.”

In considering cannibalism, Kakwinokanasum also draws on historical events, such as the Andes plane crash, to reflect on the human condition and need for survival. As for what he hopes readers will take away from his works, he wishes for more empathy.

“Humanity wouldn't be here if we didn't have people who sacrificed,” says Kakwinokanasum. “When you get right into the minutiae of the messages, it's ‘be good to each other, be kind.’”

The VPL will be hosting a free public event where attendees can learn more about Kakwinokanasum and *My Indian Summer*. The event takes place on March 7 at the VPL Central Branch. ✍

For more information, see www.vpl.ca/storyteller



▲ 2024 VPL Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, Joseph Kakwinokanasum.

Errata for Vol 24, No 14

SFU panel aims to counter misinformation and give a more accurate perspective on SOGI: The story erroneously named an interviewee using their deadname ie. their incorrect, pre-gender-transition name. The interviewee's correct name is Travers. The Source takes matters of gender identity very seriously, and we sincerely apologize for this error.

The building blocks of a good life: The story stated that last November MOSAIC CEO Olga Stachova spoke to the House of Commons in Ontario. Olga spoke to the Federal House of Commons Finance Committee in Vancouver. We apologize for this mistake.

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Rendez-Vous Film Festival celebrates a feisty 30-year legacy of French film in Vancouver

by CURTIS SEUFERT

For Régis Painchaud and Lorraine Fortin, being smaller players in a big budget industry is a challenge – but one that is well worth the effort. They’re the co-founders of Visions Ouest Productions, a B.C.-based organization that has hosted numerous cultural and educational events highlighting French film in the province, including their annual Rendez-Vous French Film Festival.

As the fest reaches its 30th anniversary this year, Painchaud and Fortin look back on a hard-fought history to bring French films to audiences across the province, and look forward to what should be an exciting lineup for this year’s festival both online and in-person.

“The key word is *decouvrabilité*: how we let people find us, find what we do – and it’s always

an ongoing job,” says Fortin. “We try to put our films where there’s a demand for it.”

The festival takes place from Feb. 24 to March 8.

Bringing French film to British Columbia

When Fortin and Painchaud first met each other at a film

small little festival... we are not a big player.”

But with time and persistence, Painchaud and Fortin have been able to get better access to film screenings that can help sustain their goal of promoting French film in British Columbia. And in the meantime, they’ve been able

“The key word is *decouvrabilité*: how we let people find us, find what we do – and it’s always an ongoing job.

Régis Painchaud, President, Visions Ouest Productions

exhibition in Vancouver over 30 years ago, it proved just as fateful to their careers as it was to their personal lives.

“I always said I fell in love with Vancouver, fell in love with Régis, and I fell in love with the

to showcase other films that sometimes go under the radar, occasionally going so far as paying for the subtitling of a French film they really want to showcase to English-speaking audiences in Vancouver.

Stories of displacement and home

For this year’s festival, Rendez-Vous will be showcasing dozens of films online and in-person from filmmakers in Canada and around the world. Two that stand out for Painchaud are *Ru* and *Kanaval*.

Ru is based on the award-winning novel of the same name, and shares the story of a Vietnamese girl looking to navigate a new culture, language and life in Quebec after fleeing the Vietnam war. Meanwhile, *Kanaval* tells the semi-autobiographical story of director Henri Pardo, a story about a mother and son moving to Quebec to escape the dictatorship in their home country of Haiti. Prior to its screening, there will be a discussion with director Pardo about the film.

For Painchaud, it’s important to be able to showcase films that speak to displacement, as well as the Canadian aspiration for inclusivity and acceptance. As Painchaud notes, stories about displacement continue to be deeply relevant.

“It’s not different right now, because that is what happened in the Mediterranean right now, with climate change... so we have those two subjects made from Haiti, from Vietnam, but at the same time it can be anywhere around the world,” explains Painchaud.

As such, Painchaud hopes that showcasing films like these inspire acceptance, all while entertaining franco-phones and francophiles alike.

“The young kids, they arrive from all over the world, or from different situations... We can give them an example of what society can see, and what chance we have to live here in Canada. All the details are not perfect, but I’m pretty lucky to get to be here. I wish we can accommodate a lot of people,” says Painchaud. ✍

For more information on the festival, visit www.rendez-vousvancouver.com/festival-de-films-rendez-vous-french-film-festival-2024

Exhibitions run
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▲ From *Kanaval* (2023, Dir. Henri Pardo), one of the dozens of films being shown at this year’s 30th annual Rendez-Vous Film Festival.

Photo courtesy of Rendez-Vous Film Festival

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whole group of artists working in the movie industry,” says Fortin. “It was fascinating.”

Shortly thereafter, Fortin and Painchaud founded VOP, and have endeavoured ever since to spread their love of French film throughout British Columbia – this includes presenting at schools from Kelowna to Victoria – and facilitating online film screenings to reach audiences across the province.

“In 2021, the festival in February was all online. But like other festivals, we just loved it and we kept it,” explains Fortin. “It’s a way to reach everybody, and the small French communities everywhere are able to use it.”

In their years of running the Rendez-Vous Film Festival specifically, some aspects have become much easier. As Painchaud notes, Canadians can nowadays screen a movie from Europe without having to ship 150 pounds of 35 millimetre film across the Atlantic.

However, other parts remain challenging. While it is now physically easier to screen a film than ever, screening it at Rendez-Vous at an early, opportune, audience-grabbing time is tricky without the right connections, since filmmakers hope to be choosy about where to present their debut.

“It’s really complicated, because that period of the year, the end of February, beginning of March, that is all the international competition,” says Painchaud. “Since we are a

Elle Sofe Sara centres on land and reclamation in Sámi dance

by ANABELLA KLANN
HARRINGTON

Inspired by Sámi culture and history, spiritual dance performance *Vástádus eana – The answer is land* centres themes of community, reclamation and the importance of land. The Sámi people are Indigenous to Sápmi, also known as northern Scandinavia, and, similar to Indigenous peoples in Canada, have suffered cultural assimilation and violence from colonialism.

"I think our performance is as relevant in Canada as it is here in Sápmi Scandinavia," Sámi choreographer and filmmaker Elle Sofe Sara says.

“It feels very right to start outside, where we all, both the audience and the performers, stand on the land.

Elle Sofe Sara, choreographer

Presented with DanceHouse and Dancers of Damelahamid, Sofe Sara brings *Vástádus eana* to the Vancouver Playhouse on Feb. 23 and 24.

Reclaiming culture

Sofe Sara's process of creating and producing *Vástádus eana* was long and complicated. Working without a script, she started with big themes and loose visual ideas before developing the music and accompanying movements. From this she got the idea to use polyphonic yoiking – layering multiple different melodies of traditional Sámi singing. Themes like community and the importance of land to culture and identity were central to creating the performance and Sofe Sara wanted to capture that.



▲ From *Vástádus eana – The answer is land*.

"In the beginning, togetherness and mass movement was my inspiration, and also connection, disconnection to land. We used a lot of time developing the performance and finding the way to create certain moods and take the audience on a journey," she explains.

One creative decision to this effect was having the show begin outside before moving indoors, a reflection of the importance of land and nature and a way to challenge traditional Western theatre norms. Sofe Sara stressed that she did not want to explain the meaning be-

hind this creative decision, instead she wants the audience to make their own interpretations.

"It feels very right to start outside, where we all, both the audience and the performers, stand on the land," adds Sofe Sara.

Freedom to create

Before conceptualising the show, Sofe Sara had actually decided to quit being an artist due to the lack of income and opportunity. However, after getting a residency at the Davvi Centre for Performing Arts in Arctic Norway she found guidance and inspiration. For her, this show is a reminder to have faith in herself.

"This show reminds me of the fact that one must keep going. Not give up. Believe in new beginnings," she says.

That belief characterises her approach to art. When creating *Vástádus eana*, Sofe Sara says that the lack of script was a deliberate but terrifying choice that required a lot of faith went into the work. There was no script to fall back on if the choices they made did not work out.

"This freedom of working with dance and music is both wonderful and scary as hell," she says.

Sofe Sara's dedication to creating a show that pays tribute to the history and culture of the Sámi people was part of that process. *Vástádus eana* centres the resilience and strength of the Sámi people in resisting colonial efforts of assimilation through language suppression, residential schools and religious conversion.

Similar to Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Sámi are reckoning with generational trauma and the need to rebuild and heal. Sofe Sara thinks the cultural and historical similarities in Sámi and Indigenous people in Canada are reflected in *Vástádus eana* where community and reclamation are central.

"The first time I was in Canada was back in 2007 at the Arctic Winter Games in Yellowknife [as a cultural performer]. We met so many other Indigenous people

and got to learn a little bit. There is so much in common," she says.

Sofe Sara hopes audiences leave *Vástádus eana* interested in learning more about Sámi culture, arts and history. She says the most important part of the show is the feelings it evokes for the audience, whether they can easily relate or not.

"I hope they feel hopeful and also get reminded of their own connection to certain places and to the land," she says. ✉

For more information of *Vástádus eana – The answer is land* visit www.dancehouse.ca

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New grunt gallery exhibit celebrates East Asian culture alongside the experiences of incarceration

by ABBEY BILOTTA

Inside/Out: the art show my dad never had, a new exhibit currently on display at grunt gallery, examines the life and work of the late Sue Dong Eng, co-curated by his daughter Mercedes Eng.

The exhibit is composed of archived family images, copper etchings in handmade frames and literary work, featuring some of Mercedes' own work. The exhibit takes a specific look at Sue Dong by showing images of his family and upbringing in Vancouver's Chinatown, as well as the art he created in the car-

ceral facilities he frequented during his adult life.

Inside/Out brings about themes of cultural invisibility, institutional violence and community building that remains relevant in Vancouver today. The collection of the two artists' work is a response to both the prison industrial complex and colonialism in Canada.

"As someone who is in community with folks who have been incarcerated, folks who are drug users and people who are more surveilled or criminalized under our current systems, the prison industrial complex affects all of us," says Keimi Nakashima-Ochoa, co-curator of the exhibit.

Giving voice to the voiceless through art

Mercedes' own role in the exhibition was as an artist, archivist, collector, family historian and co-curator. Her own work can be found in the show next to her father's work and their family archive.

"Like many of us, her life was shaped by her caretaker's presence in and out of her life," says Nakashima-Ochoa. "She, along with her relatives, has been holding onto a rich history of her family's branches, one of which includes the [tender] and wayward path of Sue Dong's life."

Embedded in the father and daughter's family branches is their position within Vancouver's rich and deep history with East Asian immigrants. The family was able to build community and wealth through their participation in cabarets, contributing to a high level of cultural visibility, representation and community in the city.



▲ Mercedes Eng and her father, Sue Dong Eng, at Drumheller penitentiary circa 1983. Mercedes expresses a debt of gratitude to the unknown prisoner-photographer of this family portrait.



▲ Sue Dong Eng and his mother, Gam Hoe Lee, in China, circa 1940.

Photo courtesy of Mercedes Eng

Photo courtesy of Mercedes Eng

ver's rich and deep history with East Asian immigrants. The family was able to build community and wealth through their participation in cabarets, contributing to a high level of cultural visibility, representation and community in the city.

Alongside these experiences, however, is a prevalence of xenophobia, anti-Asian sentiment and the complexities that comes along with being an immigrant settler. Nakashima-Ochoa notes how the deep and lasting effects

of the prison industrial system, demonstrated in the showcased copper etchings and frames created by Sue Dong during his incarceration, sit alongside more tender images and family photos.

"To me, sitting with the archival images we present in this exhibition shows the joy, performance and confusion that comes with being an immigrant settler, along with our complicity in settler colonialism, being immigrant settlers on this land," says Nakashima-Ochoa.

Mercedes and Sue Dong's experiences speak to those of many others, both through their family's position as East Asian immigrants in Vancouver and their exposure to the prison industrial complex.

Sue Dong's work, now being showcased only after his passing, is an example of the many voices alike that have been unable to break into the art scene due to their similar experiences.

"There are so many artists, people who make things, whose work is not seen as valuable in the context of art presentations because they are either drug users, poor, unhoused or formerly/currently incarcerated."

Despite the difficulties that come with those who have faced addiction, poverty, homelessness and incarceration, Nakashima-Ochoa notes the rich and unique stories that stem from their experiences. Sue Dong is only one of many who was able to translate his distinctive life story into his craft.

"There are so many artists doing amazing things, and we can honour and celebrate that, if we bother to look."

Inside/Out: the art show my dad never had, is currently open and will be available at grunt gallery until March 16, 2024.

For more information, visit www.grunt.ca/exhibitions/inside-out-the-art-show-my-dad-never-had



Drop-in Program

► "Dance" from page 1 but there's something fundamental about struggle and the idea of liberty and revelation," says Chong.

Expressing all types of love

For Jennifer McLeish-Lewis, the process of creating her interdisciplinary work *New Skin* was as smooth as she'd originally hoped, resting on input and help that she received from multiple contributors. After meeting dancer James-Amzin Nahirnick at a dance festival as attendees, the two quickly struck up a conversation, leading to their dancer-choreographer partnership that propelled the show into existence.

The technical details of the work span diverse mediums, including song, dance and theatre. In *New Skin*, McLeish-Lewis says Nahirnick relies on his expansive skill set to play the piano, sing, dance and voice monologues.

"I really like that cross-pollination of contemporary dance culminating in what we can do in front of an audience that is different, unique and in the moment. I have to give credit to James for that because I think he's really strong in all three of those," she says.

Although the piece touches on themes of gender identity and auto-eroticism, McLeish-Lewis ultimately wants the viewer to form their own interpretation of its meaning. As a gender studies scholar, she has been studying gender dysphoria for the last two years. Her past relationship with someone facing gender dysphoria influenced the work's depiction of being transgender, and functions as a meditation on being comfortable in one's skin or not.

While the work depicts the sadness and frustration accompanying the feeling of gender incongruence, it's also suffused with lightheartedness.

"I want the audience to have the experience with it that they have, and I don't necessarily want to put [exact] meaning into their heads. I think it's a bit multidimensional because it takes you through many different emotional states. There's emotion to it, but there's also lightness to it," McLeish-Lewis says.

When it comes to the work's focus on auto-eroticism, she asserts that there's a balanced approach to love inside everyone.

"I think most people identify as allo-erotic, or having attraction to other people's bodies, and then for an auto-erotic person, the attraction goes inwards instead of outwards. There's no judgment, it can be healthy if it's understood, it can be romantic instead of sexual, and it has to do with self-acceptance and embracing every part of yourself."

Beyond *New Skin*, McLeish-Lewis is working on a new piece with multiple dancers using expandable screens made of paper to explore emotional and physical boundaries on stage.

She has also just premiered the dance piece *To Fetch a Pail of Water* at the Scotiabank Dance Centre which was inspired by the nursery rhyme *Jack and Jill*.

"To always have a creative imagination flowing for me is really life-giving. Even with [two ongoing projects], I feel like there's enough imaginative energy inside of myself that I'm already working on the third thing," says McLeish-Lewis.

For more information on the festival, visit www.vidf.ca

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February 20–March 5, 2024

Cultural Calendar

by SIMON YEE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I hope everyone had a great Family Day this past weekend! As winter winds down and spring creeps in, get ready for a burst of excitement. Vancouver is gearing up for some awesome events. From the Vancouver International Dance Festival to the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival, plus tons of live music and theatre, there's so much to dive into and check out. It's the perfect time to soak up Vancouver's cool culture and community vibe!

**Gwenessa Lam:
The Articulate Object**
Until April 7

www.vancouverchinesegarden.com

The Articulate Object considers a particular Chinese legend, where objects become key players in blurring the lines between historical fact and fiction. The legend of Fusang is a 7th Century tale describing the travels of a Buddhist monk, Hui shen, along the coast of the Americas in the latter part of the 5th Century. Fusang was the name given to the land where Hui shen had travelled. There is little historical and archaeological evidence of the monk's journey; however, there have been claims that a few ancient Chinese urns and coins were found off the coast of British Columbia. Amateur archaeologists have used these findings as proof of early encounters between Indigenous and Chinese communities related to Fusang. As an artist of Chinese heritage raised in British Columbia, Lam is interested in these reports, even if speculative. *The Articulate Object* builds on these narratives through a series of drawings and photographs examining the documentation of these found artifacts.

**A Lens on Vancouver's Past:
Walter Frost's Arctic Explorers**
Feb. 15–April 30

www.hal-vas.com

The Port of Vancouver's South Shore served as homeport for many of the vessels that have and continue to explore the Western Arctic, trade with its indigenous peoples, extract the Arctic's natural resources, transit the Northwest Passage and project Canada's sovereignty over the North from Herschel



▲ Sunrise Betties.

Island (Qikirtarjuaq) in the Yukon Territory to the Arctic Archipelago which comprises most of Nunavut. In a new exhibition East Van photographer Walter Frost's select black-and-white photos of ships illustrating Vancouver's pivotal role in the establishment of Canada's presence and sovereignty in the Arctic will be on display at the City of Vancouver Archives. The gallery had been updated to reflect Frost's photos of some of the vessels that have called Vancouver home or visited the port. They range in size from small wooden-hulled ships like the RCMP Schooner St. Roch to the Hudson's Bay Company's cargo steamer SS Baychimo, the heavy icebreaker CCGS John A. Macdonald and huge bulk carriers such as the MV Dordrecht.

B.C. Heritage Week

Feb. 19–25
www.heritagebc.ca/events-activities/heritage-week

Heritage is the layering of stories that describe the uniqueness of a community's past and present while informing the future. Heritage Week is an annual event that takes place during the third full week in February. It celebrates and showcases local heritage across the province. This year's Heritage Week: Layer by Layer, invites you to dig deeper into your community's past and explore the many layers and stories that your unique community holds. Take some time this week to learn something new about the many "layers" of the place you call home. Check out their website for full details.

Sunrise Betties

Feb. 21–March 10
www.itsazoo.org/project/the-sunrise-betties

The Betties. A fiercely loyal, all-female street gang run by a ruthless matriarch. They operate a small-time drug trafficking operation out of the basement of her home. Sometimes the cat gets in the way. When the Betties accidentally start a turf war with a prominent mobster, a corrupt VPD officer shows up offering an easy way out. But this is East Van in 1972. And there's no such thing as an easy way out. Inspired by the street gang crisis of the era – and the infamous Clark Park Gang – *Sunrise Betties* is a work of historical fiction revealing a sordid part of Vancouver's history few know about. It explores the origins of drug trafficking and police corruption in the once notorious – and rapidly gentrifying – area. Check out the website for tickets and more information.

2024 Winter Arts Festival

Feb. 22–27
www.winterartsfest.com

Winter Arts Festival is a celebration of light, art and storytelling, featuring sculptures, projection mapping, augmented reality (AR) and live performances. The festival was launched in 2021 at the height of the pandemic. As Canada's first-ever augmented reality festival, it received critical acclaim, including the IDA Award of Excellence. The festival continues to evolve with the addition of new public art and light installations, tours, pop-up parties and an all-ages Hub featuring art, a licensed bar and free daily live entertainment. The festival seeks to light up our city and connect diverse communities through meaningful art and inclusive experiences that reflect its many stories and cultures.

**Vox.Infold II at MOTHER
CLOUD, Spatial Sound Festival**

Feb. 23, 7:30 p.m.
www.rubysingh.ca/vox-infold

Ruby Singh's *Vox.Infold* is a cappella offering, composed and (remarkably) recorded at a time when singing together was something that could kill us. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and amidst potent social unrest, this powerhouse vocal ensemble of Indigenous, Inuit, Black and South Asian voices, reimagined how to sing together. The resulting work is so much more than a convergence of diverse vocal traditions but a complex rendering of what's possible when we can hold each other's humanity. The album dives into a full bodied, resonant and sensuous expression housed in polyrhythm, lush harmonies, mimicry and polyphonic poetry. The resulting sonic landscape encompasses a non-linear journey in which we may find and care for each other.

**Vancouver International
Mountain Film Festival**

Feb. 23–March 3
www.vimff.org

The Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival will celebrate their 27th anniversary with a specially curated program that features both in-person and online options. They've lined up accomplished guest speakers, engaging workshops and panel discussions and films about climbing, snowsports, adventure, mountain culture, the environment and more! There will be numerous World, North American and Canadian Premieres, showcasing powerful stories that will inspire your next adventure. For a complete list of films, check out the festival's website.

Paths

Feb. 28–May 5
www.evergreenculturalcentre.ca

What story does a pathway tell? How do paths connect us? *Paths*,



▲ Ross Penhall, Summer Walk, 2007, etching on paper, 14 x 14 in. Collection of Artists for Kids and the Gordon Smith Gallery.

on display at the Evergreen Cultural Centre starting Feb. 28, features artwork by 22 Canadian artists exploring paths, both real and imagined, through the mediums of painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, collage and printmaking. The exhibited works show us that a path can be used to communicate a direction, a line of thought or a plan for action. Paths can also be seen in representations of the natural world, taking the form of forest trails, migratory patterns, maps and waterways, as well as within our built environment. We can find pathways through abstraction by exploring gesture, pattern, line and form and we can seek our own paths of understanding through personal journeys and the creative process.

**Song from the Uproar:
The Lives and Deaths
of Isabelle Eberhardt**

Feb. 29–March 3
www.thecultch.com

Isabelle Eberhardt (1877–1904): explorer, nomad, journalist, novelist, Sufi. A passionate romantic and one of the most adventurous women of her era or any other, Isabelle Eberhardt was unique. At age twenty, after the death of her mother, brother and father, she left her life in Switzerland for a nomadic and unfettered existence in the deserts of North Africa. She traveled extensively through the desert on horseback, often dressed as a man, relentlessly documenting her travels through detailed journals. At age twenty-seven Isabelle drowned in a flash flood in the desert. Playing at The Cultch, *Song from the Uproar* uses texts inspired by her writing to immerse the audience in the surreal landscapes of Isabelle's life; she describes the death of her family, the thrill of her arrival in Africa, her tentative joy at falling in love, the elation of self-discovery and the mystery of death.

Coastal Dance Festival

March 1–3
www.damelahamid.ca/coastal-dance-festival

Dancers of Damelahamid will host their annual Coastal Dance Festival, honouring Indigenous stories, song and dance from the Northwest Coast, Canada and around the world, from March 1–3, at the Anvil Centre in New Westminster. The Festival is a celebration of the stories, songs and dances of the Indigenous peoples with guest national and international artists. For more information, please visit their website.

Answers:

- 1 – ENVIRONMENT
- 2 – MAID – READERS
- 3 – ANDEAN – LASER
- 4 – NAIADES
- 5 – OLD – AISLES
- 6 – ION – INCA – USE
- 7 – PESETA – MOM
- 8 – AI – PI – ABNER
- 9 – TL – IOU – NUT
- 10 – CONTEST – BE
- 11 – OVENS – ORAL
- 12 – NETS – COUSINS

- A) ÉMANCIPATION
- B) NANA – CEIL – VE
- C) VIDIONS – CET
- D) IDÉAL – ÉPIONS
- E) ADDITIONS
- F) ORNE – NA – UT
- G) NE – SAN – EGO
- H) MAL – IAMBES
- I) EDAMS – ON – TOS
- J) NÉS – LUMEN – RI
- K) TRÈVES – RUBAN
- L) SR – SES – TELS



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