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forum of diversity

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Laughter beyond provincial borders

Celebrating Canada's diverse francophonie through comedy

by LILLIAN LIAO

"A very visceral community experience of laughing together... just a communal human experience of sharing the witnessing of stories," says Franco-Manitoban comedian Micheline Marchildon about her hopes for what the audience will take away from her set.

Bringing hilarity, fun and culture, Marchildon, along with two other French-speaking comedians, Korine Côté and Mona de Grenoble, will liven York Theatre's stage on March 9 in celebration of francophone culture – one that is inclusive to all francophone experiences, including that of being a minority in anglophone environments.

"What I experienced [growing up] is that we're on this island of 'Frenchness,' and we're alone, and we watch Quebecers on TV, and they're far away," says Marchildon of her Saint Boniface, Winnipeg roots. "There's this weird little insecurity of wanting the big sister province of Quebec to see us and recognize us...but at the same time being proud of being on the fringe."

Building connections for the French minority

Organized by The Dialogue Foundation and its collaborators, including Le Centre Culturel Francophone de Vancouver



▲ Micheline Marchildon.

(Le Centre), this upcoming show is part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie (RVF), a month-long, Canada-wide event starting on March 1 that showcases French language and culture. With the theme of "Launch into Discovery," the 26th edition of this festival fosters new connections and strengthens old ties,

just in time for the International Francophonie Day on March 20.

Ajà Besler, executive director of The Dialogue Foundation, says it's important to build ties to help fight against loneliness for francophones residing in English-dominant cities, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There's so much isolation that we've been feeling lately and bringing people together for positive, fun experiences in French just helps break that isolation and build community," she says.

Having grown up in Southern Ontario as a francophone minority, these feelings of isolation are personally familiar to Besler. For her, humour, as a dialogue-based medium, is crucial to helping the foundation carry out its goal of facilitating conversations within Canada's various francophone communities, as well as between these communities and the diversities of the broader Canadian society.

"There's something about humour, about stand-up that makes it one of the easiest art forms to share stories [and] realities," says Besler. "It's one of the ways to learn about each other and different experiences...in a way that is accessible, positive, and fun."

Cultural exchange in and out of Quebec

Besler's idea of community also extends to those shared between the comedians, some of whom have repeatedly participated in this cross-Canada stand-up tour in partnership with Just for Laughs, now in its 11th year. Marchildon experienced this community first-hand when she met Korine Côté back-

stage in Manitoba while Côté was on one of the first renditions of this tour. Marchildon's connection with Côté eventually helped her break into Montréal's stand-up comedy scene.

"And now I'm going to be touring with her this year, and in a weird way, it's a full circle," says Marchildon, while emphasizing how laughter helps people grow and heal together.

When it comes to this year's line-up, Besler notes the importance of having both Quebecois comedians, French-speaking comics from other provinces, and those who speak to the theme of discovery. According to Besler, participating comedians have found these tours beneficial for their artistic growth, as it presents opportunities to visit communities not often explored.

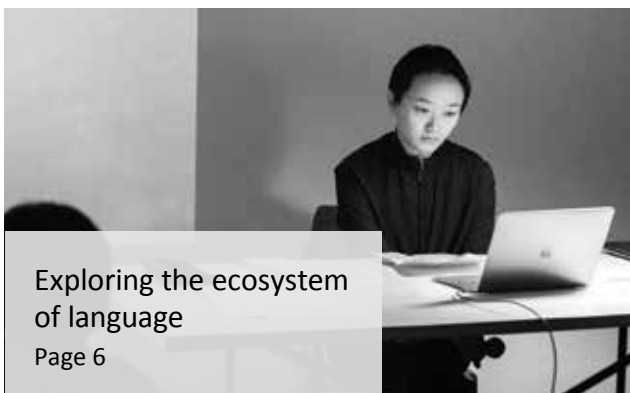
"We've had artists who did shows years ago in rural Manitoba," says Besler. "It changed their perspective on what Canadian francophonie is, and they now have numbers in their current stand-up act that are influenced by their experiences in these communities."

Besler further notes that as Quebecois comedians bring their travels home, Quebecers can learn about francophone cultures outside their province. For both Besler and Marchildon, RVF's line-up of various events, both online and in-per-

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DIVERSEcity’s Women’s Leadership Forum puts the spotlight on leading in work and life

by LUC MVONO

What does it mean to be a woman leader today? That is one of the questions that DIVERSEcity Community Resources will explore at the Women’s Leadership Forum organized in partnership with local women’s advancement charity Minerva BC. For the second year in a row, the now sold-out event will gather “emerging and established” women leaders at the Anvil Centre on March 8 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to explore a variety of questions such as this, highlighting the challenges and successes of women’s leadership.

The forum will feature talks from prominent women from across the province including Chief Rhonda Larrabee of Qayqayt First Nation, Sophie Lui of Global BC, Attorney General of B.C. Niki Sharma, and more. Participants will engage in a range of activities including DIVERSEcity’s signature DIVERSE-TALK panel discussion and Q&A. “This event, held on International Women’s Day, is a space for dialogue, empowering each other and advancing the issue of women’s equity forward. Change starts with conversations that elevate diverse voices and ignite new ideas,” says DIVERSEcity CEO Neelam Sahota. “In DIVERSEcity’s role as a community builder and connector, we want to help create

spaces like the Women’s Forum for these transformative conversations,” she adds. “At the forum, emerging and established women leaders, from diverse backgrounds and experiences, can come together to learn, forge connections, inspire action, and help advance change and inclusion, together.”

Women in the Workplace

Sahota points to McKinsey and Company’s latest Women in the Workplace report, published last October, regarding the state

positions, the report points out that their representation drops as the corporate ladder ascends, falling to just 28 per cent in C-suite positions – CEO, COO, CFO, etc. Across all levels, women of colour remain underrepresented, making up 18 of the 48 per cent of women in entry-level positions, and just six of the 28 per cent of women in C-suite roles. “It’s important for us to ask why most women don’t move past a certain level,” Sahota points out. “Is it due to disproportionate family obligations,

“The theme of our event is ‘Be the leader of your life’ because leadership is not just about getting a certain type of job, but a mindset on how we as women approach our lives...

Neelam Sahota, CEO of DIVERSEcity

of women’s leadership. Citing the latest data on the representation of women in corporate America and Canada, the report concludes that though “women are more ambitious than ever, and workplace flexibility is fueling them... despite some hard-fought gains, women’s representation is not keeping pace.” While women in the U.S. and Canada represent 48 per cent of those occupying entry-level

lack of [workplace] flexibility, or gender discrimination? Whatever the cause...supporting women to break these barriers to reach their full potential is one of the reasons behind us coming together with Minerva for our second annual Women’s Leadership Forum.”

Being the leader of your life

However, the event does not limit its focus on leadership to the workplace. “The theme of our event is ‘Be the leader of your life’ because leadership is not just about getting a certain type of job, but a mindset on how we as women approach our lives – at work, in the community, and in their families,” explains Sahota. “It’s the way we show up for ourselves and each other to share our voices and effect change.”

Lenya Wilks, Director of Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement at DIVERSEcity agrees. “To inspire inclusion, we need to practice allyship and solidarity actively,” she says. “This involves bravely standing up against discrimination, supporting marginalized women, and advocating for inclusive policies and practices. By doing so, we can pave the way for a fairer future and uplift each other with conviction.”

To foster connectedness and wellness, the event will incorporate activities such as a yogic breathing and reflective writing session, a dance presentation by the BollyFusion dance studio, and the launch of DIVERSEcity’s Survivor Guide. ✂

Please note that this event is sold out. For more information on DIVERSEcity, please visit: www.dcrs.ca



▲ DIVERSEcity CEO Neelam Sahota.

Le plaisir of the words by Le Stylo à mots

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- Horizontalement
- 1 – successes
 - 2 – prey – country – fine
 - 3 – express the possession – hurry
 - 4 – happy – Ireland
 - 5 – necessity – always
 - 6 – negation – me and other – at sea
 - 7 – foolish – take action - against
 - 8 – number – remarkable – little
 - 9 – silly – unpleasant smell
 - 10 – competitions – equal
 - 11 – close – South American birds
 - 12 – street – immoral behaviors – skill

- verticalement
- A – horreurs
 - B – boisson – tournoi – association
 - C – exprime le rire – Rassemblement National – divinité ancienne
 - D – répétées – rendez-vous
 - E – mollusque – conspuer
 - F – existence – article contracté – arme
 - G – vagabonde – contenant
 - H – illusion – écrites de façon secrète
 - I – agaçat – risque
 - J – arrivées – dialecte chinois – possessif
 - K – mauvaise qualité – imaginera
 - L – île écossaise – enzyme – connu

For answers, see page 8

Book launch

Les aventures de Frannie, la grenouille fringante

On the 40th anniversary of her leadership role as an advocate for French-language education in Western Canada, Suzanne de Courville Nicol, formerly Suzanne Sawyer, is the author of this unparalleled collection of historical facts.

“I am very proud to announce the launch of my book, in French and English! It will be unveiled simultaneously on March 2, 2024 at La Cabane à Sucre of the AFK, Association francophone de Kamloops and at the Festival d’Hiver Franco Winterfest Calgary of the ACFA-C, Association canadienne-française de l’Alberta, Calgary region. It will also be unveiled at the two French immersion schools in La Ronge, Saskatchewan, where my life as an advocate for French-language education began in 1984.” declares Ms. de Courville Nicol.

The story is set in Canada’s western provinces. Written as a beautifully illustrated fable and presented in a captivating autobiographical context, it is an inspiring and educational multi-faceted story based on real events, etched with astonishing historical facts.

Lifelong learners and readers of all ages will love this first tale of adventures full of surprising twists and turns. This educational resource portrays pivotal moments in the never-ending tug-of-war odyssey of Francophones in Canada, who have been fighting for linguistic equality and cultural survival for centuries, right across the country.

To order the book in English and/or French as of March 2, 2024, please visit Amazon.ca



The Okanagan Irish Society

Preserving and sharing Irish culture in the Okanagan

by ALISON MACDONALD

St. Patrick’s Day is celebrated on March 17 annually, and every year people dress up in green and come together to join in this celebration associated with music, dancing and food. But for the Irish community in British Columbia’s Okanagan region, the celebration is much more than a mere party. It is tradition.

“[It was] to remember St. Patrick. He brought Christianity to Ireland. Sure there were other missionaries, but he gets all the credit,” says Vincent Sherry, president of the Okanagan Irish Society (OIS).

For Sherry and other members of the OIS, it’s important to have a dedicated way to preserve and celebrate Irish culture, fostering the events and community-building necessary to do just that.

For Sherry, St. Patrick’s Day is a wonderful opportunity to reminisce and celebrate Irish heritage.

“Born in Ireland, my history of the day, was that it is a day off, a national holiday, where, as a child, we would go to Church, buy our shamrock, – it was a three-leaf shamrock not a four-leaf clover – and go downtown to see the parade,” recalls Sherry. “There would be parades all around Ireland, but the big one was in Dublin.”

Sherry says that this was often followed by a visit to



▲ The Okanagan Irish Society promotes Irish culture and community through special events and casual gatherings alike.

the pub with his parents for a meal. He adds that while the adults often returned to the pub after, the focus was on the holiday and its meaning, not getting drunk.

It is no surprise that the OIS is leaving no stone unturned when it comes to celebrating the death anniversary of the patron saint of Ireland. The celebration, complete with music, dance and a traditional St. Patrick’s Day meal, revive cultural emotions within the Irish community in the region.

In fact, the OIS has been promoting and preserving Irish culture, music, sport and language in the Okanagan region for the past 40 years. The organization has also extended charity to those in need, a tradition that has been a part of the OIS since the beginning.

“The Okanagan Irish Society concept began when a priest, Fr. Charles Mulvihill, and a parishioner, Ethna Tutt, Irish born, both agreed to come together, with the number of Irish people [they each knew] and come together to support one another back in 1982/1983,” says Sherry.

Since then, the society has organized various social events including coffees, lunches, Christmas festivities and, of course, St. Patrick’s Day celebrations with the aim of bringing its 100+ members together.

“We have ongoing monthly seniors’ coffee mornings where we visit different locations in Kelowna and eight to 14 people come out. And once per quarter, we host a senior’s lunch in various locations. COVID really did a number on us. Last Thursday, we held a Trivia Pub Night with

about 14 people, enough for two teams and we’ll try to do that every month,” Sherry says.

Bringing Irish culture to everyone

The Okanagan Irish Society also participates in multicultural activities and contributes to diversity, equity and inclusion by sharing information and education where people can learn about each other’s culture and history. Sherry notes such cultural sharing at the recent One World Festival.

“There were over 35 countries representing food, music, dance and showing off their people and culture. The Irish are very welcoming. We were giving out trinkets and talking to people in Gaelic, educating them on our history, culture, and we’re always willing to sit

and have a chat with others,” he says.

Sherry adds that he is proud that the OIS is one of only two Irish societies in British Columbia. And for all the importance of tradition and cultural spotlighting that the society brings to its members, it’s also a great opportunity to get together and have a great time.

“Any excuse to get together for good *craic* – to make fun of one another. It is comforting to be around like-minded people who understand our wit and humour, good fun, good times, a brilliant night to share stories and sing, but it doesn’t have to be a large group, two people can come together to have great *craic*,” says Sherry.

For more information, please see www.facebook.com/okanaganirishsociety

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International student policy illustrates university bias

When Minister Miller stood up to announce a new cap on international students last week, exemptions were made for Master’s and PhD students because “these are the highly skilled people Canada needs.” Graduates of short-term graduate programs were offered three-year post-graduate work permits, so long as credentials were earned at one of Canada’s universities. To hear the Minister explain it, the exemptions are designed to address labour market needs.

Has Canada’s business community found itself suddenly short of doctoral candidates and MBAs? Given that job vacancy rates in the federal government’s own analyses suggest otherwise, this policy lacks good evidence.

Instead, labour market demand data suggest shortages of advanced technical professions like cybersecurity experts, frontline healthcare workers like nurses and skilled tradespeople who are needed to address the housing crisis. By and large, these professionals graduate from one of Canada’s polytechnics or colleges.

This kind of biased policy thinking is surprisingly common in a country proud to point out it has one of the highest post-secondary attainment levels in the OECD. This statistic relies heavily on polytechnic and college results, a system that contributed more than 282,000 work-ready graduates to the labour market in 2021.



Photo courtesy of Quoi Media

Far from being a second-tier educational pathway, a third of those pursuing a credential at one of Canada’s polytechnics have a previous degree, diploma or credential. They come to polytechnics – often after graduating from university – because the training on offer boasts exceptionally high engagement with employers.

Industry partners inform program design and ensure it remains relevant by participating on advisory committees. Instructors are drawn from industry itself, with certified tradespeople in the classroom with apprentices.

It is increasingly common to see work-integrated learning opportunities offered in every program, to every student, ensuring learners are building a professional network alongside pragmatic workplace skills. Because

hands-on training requires access to up-to-date equipment, tools and systems, the business community are regular donors and frequent contributors to programs generating the graduates they hope to hire.

Further, business and non-profit partners come to polytechnics and colleges to engage in applied research activity – an exceptionally broad range of innovation supports that include prototype development, process improvement and field testing. Tens of thousands of students are actively engaged in projects every year, building an innovation-enabled talent pipeline as they work to address real-world challenges. Yet, federal investments in academic research of this kind amount to less than five per cent of the total.

These indicators would seem to suggest Canada’s post-

secondary sector is achieving its mission, delivering highly skilled graduates the labour market needs at every level, in every sector.

So, it’s infuriating to hear a federal official suggest that colleges are rooms over massage parlours offering bogus credentials to uninformed international students. Certainly, there are bad actors who have taken advantage of lax immigration policy to undermine ‘brand Canada.’

These players should not be confused with the welcoming community hubs that support students both foreign and domestic with academic counseling, career and placement services, health and mental health care, and cultural activities, to name a few. There’s not nearly enough space above a massage parlour to train paramedics,

police officers and automotive technicians.

The growth in Canada’s international student population can be attributed to several factors, very few of which lie at the feet of public institutions. While provinces have reduced educational operating grants and kept domestic tuition low, training providers have sought alternative sources of revenue often at the urging of their provincial leaders.

Canada’s immigration policy allowed for unmitigated growth in international student visas, a problem not created by institutions so much as one they recognized and acted upon.

International students destined for polytechnics, many of whom have advanced degrees from their home countries, aspire to immigrate to Canada. An international education offers an attractive pathway, particularly when the training is focused and job-relevant.

While federal officials often themselves emerge from the university system, it is contingent on our leaders and bureaucrats to ensure policies are not biased toward one academic pathway over another. Nobody can argue with evidence-informed policy-making. Let that be the guide. ✍

SARAH WATTS-RYNARD is CEO of Polytechnics Canada, a national association of the country’s leading polytechnic institutions.

Source: Quoi Media

► “Comedy” from page 1

son across Canada, encourages curiosity about Canada’s diverse *francophonie*. For Marchildon, who is also one of this year’s spokespeople for RVF, the challenges of being a part of a francophone minority also brings feelings of pride.

“There’s also a joy [in] the work that needs to be done to maintain a culture and upkeep it,” says Marchildon.

The roots of Vancouver’s French comedy scene

Before RVF, the history of Vancouver’s first French comedy show began in the late 2000s, as Pierre Rivard, the executive and artistic director of Le Centre, recalls his push to extend French language comedy to the west coast. According to Rivard, who became director of Le Centre in 1994, they had already established annual music events in the summer and fall but lacked programming for the winter months – a gap he hoped to fill with French humour.

“There was nothing in terms of having an outlet for French language comedy in Vancouver here on the west coast, or even nothing outside of Quebec at that time,” says Rivard. “So, I went to Montreal in [2008], and I knocked at the door of Just for Laughs.”

Despite skepticism at Vancouver’s market for French-language comedy, Rivard recalls how the first show in 2009 sold out. After organizing the show independently for a few years, it has now evolved into RVF’s national tours. For Rivard, humour remains an important tool for addressing sociological and political concerns within the francophone community.

“True comedy is able to tackle some issues and divisions that exist in society and transgress them and try to create change,” says Rivard, while noting how a lot of Quebecois comedy developed in response to political changes, including those brought upon by the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s.

For Rivard, stand-up comedy’s power indeed lies in this ability to form connections with the audience through relatable content encouraging a deeper thinking of one’s lived experiences. As Quebecois comedy has developed to include a diversity of experiences, from those of immigrants to the queer community, Rivard is looking forward to hosting an openly queer artist, drag queen Mona de Grenoble, for the first time.



▲ Mona de Grenoble.

“We’re talking about comedy, so we want people to have fun, and at the end of the day, to appreciate the fact that there is a vibrant French language comedy scene in Canada that is not [only] happening in Quebec,” says Rivard. ✍

For more information, see www.lecentreculturel.com/en/event-details/evenement-dhumour-francophone-2024 and www.rvf.ca.

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Vishtèn Connexions

Sharing love, legacy and Acadian culture

by ELAHA AMANI

The diversity of traditional Acadian music is vast and exciting, and Vishtèn Connexions looks forward to showcasing classic pieces with their own creative nuances. The Acadian multi-instrumentalist duo celebrates the vibrancy of francophone culture at Festival Du Bois, which takes places March 8 to 10.

“Our passion for our roots has always been a driving force,” says Emmanuelle LeBlanc, founding member of Vishtèn Connexions.

The Festival Du Bois is a lively event with francophone and French Canadian music at its forefront, allowing audiences to learn about artists’ culture in an enjoyable and creative way.

Connecting sound and heritage

Acadia, now encompassing the Maritime provinces of Canada, is the homeland of the Acadians, a cultural and ethnic group which is also deeply rooted in the history of Quebec, France and Louisiana. In the 1700s, they were caught in a military conflict between Britain and France, resulting in the expulsion of many from their land. Though they returned a decade later, the oppression they endured remains a bleak part of their history.

The upbeat and rhythmic tunes, primarily rooted in Irish and Scottish traditions, give Acadian music its distinctive groove, further enhanced by foot percussion, also known as *podorythmie*.

Vishtèn Connexions incorporates these art forms in their work, alongside mouth music – vocal music that mimics instrumental melodies.

Both Leblanc and Pascal Miousse – the other half of the Vishtèn Connexions duo – were raised in music-rich households within Acadian communities in Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands.

For LeBlanc, Vishtèn Connexions emerged organically. The

the music of their home with a flavourful twist of diversity.

The heartbeat of Connexions

Vishtèn Connexions was born out of love for LeBlanc’s late twin Pastelle LeBlanc, a founding member of a previous iteration of the group, known then as simply “Vishtèn.”

“Connexions” embodies the legacy of her spirit and the passion of her soul, serving as a heartfelt tribute that celebrates her musical contributions.

“Vishtèn Connexions is more than an album; it’s a soul-stirring celebration of love, shared experiences, and the enduring bond we still have with Pastelle,” says LeBlanc.

“Our passion for our roots has always been a driving force.”

Emmanuelle LeBlanc, musician

Pastelle left behind over 100 unfinished recordings, and Vishtèn Connexions aspires to complete as many of her works as possible through this project. Their first album, *Expansion*, scheduled for a spring 2024 release, features collaborations with talented guest artists. And her influence will undoubtedly continue to shape and enrich Vishtèn Connexions’ musical journey.

“Connexions allows us to continue creating with Pastelle. Her spirit guides us, and her vast musical repertoire remains a wellspring of inspiration,” adds LeBlanc.

Broadening musical horizons

Vishtèn Connexions aims to continue highlighting traditional and contemporary Acadian music, reaching global audiences. They are excited for future collaborations, performances and deeper exploration in their cultural music.



▲ The original Vishtèn trio. Vishtèn Connexions pays tribute to founding member Pastelle LeBlanc by sharing Acadian culture and rhythm.

duo revels in the creative process of diving into archives, experimenting with new compositions, and refining their sound.

“We’ve consistently felt compelled to bring it forward,” she says. “Share it with the world and contribute to the ongoing legacy of Acadian music.”

They are proud to share their culture and passion for music by exploring traditional techniques and revitalizing hidden gems.

LeBlanc and Miousse blend Acadian and Celtic genres with rock and indie-folk influences, infusing

To broaden their musical horizons, the *Expansion* album was made in collaboration with visual artists and dancers, elevating this project into a multi-disciplinary experience.

“Connexions is an invitation for the audience to join us in celebrating the beauty of traditional and contemporary Acadian music,” says LeBlanc, “and to connect with others and ourselves.”

For more information please visit: www.festivaldubois.ca/festival-artists-2024

Roots and words: Exploring the mirroring of language and ecosystem through art

by GEORGE SUN

In their first exhibition in Canada, Chinese visual artist and storyteller Shen Xin explores how languages act like an ecosystem. The installation, titled *this is the language we met in*; 我们在这个语言中相遇, includes a film, *Grounds of Coherence #1*, and four paintings, all created by the artist. Shen is particularly interested in the existence of language in humans and nature.

“When tracing how language emerged in different places, it is clear it was a collective sense[–] making process of our roles and capacities in the ecosystem that we are part of,” says Shen.

Shen’s display is available for public viewing at the Richmond Art Gallery (RAG) from Jan. 20 to March 31.

The art’s origin

Shen was born in Chengdu, China, in 1990 and moved to Singapore at 17 to attend La Salle College of the Arts. Since completing their MFA from the Slad School of Fine Art in London, Shen and their art has been recognized by art galleries and institutions around the world.

Their exhibitions are meant to evoke emotions from their audiences – to invite a conscious dialogue with oneself and to reflect on elements of human communication. Shen offers a unique perspective on the choice to explore the abstract side of art, including moving image installations and performances.

“I tend to think of it as a bridging, a healing of where art comes from, which is life,” says Shen. “Storytelling is a device for relational memories... [through

explain. “It’s hopeful when the work and stories can facilitate exchanges of these experiences in the complexity where Canada is situated.”

To Shen, the combination of film and paintings is an interactive approach to storytelling. Each and every one of the artist’s displays are intentionally crafted.

“It’s something I value and see as worth doing,” says Shen.

Inspiration is born

Language, to Shen, utilizes voice, facial expressions and the entire body. The installation focuses on a theme of nature, which shows how some facets of language can persist, while others undergo changes, mimicking the cycle of an ecosystem. They explain that the creation of language comes from our roles in the ecosystems that we are a part of, and that this trend is sometimes easier to trace in other languages.

“In Chinese, a lot of characters emerge from understanding of energy shifts in units of time in relation to one’s in place experience, or an understanding specific to a place, a body of water,” they explain.

Shen’s art installations find their inspiration in personal experiences and a desire to storytell. Specifically, they’re to the evolution and sharing of languages. In but this is the language we met in; 我们在这个语言中相遇, they explore communication across culture, time and space, with the work delving into the connections between humans and nature.

The film’s audio features Arabic, English and Mandarin which serve to promote an accessibility of communication. The visual aspect of the video includes im-



▲ Shen Xin’s newest work exploring language is on display at the Richmond Art Gallery.

which] a negotiation of our relations and stories are breathed into a sharing of presentation and experience.”

Like the installation at the RAG, many of Shen’s displays are paintings accompanied by a film, serving as a different medium of storytelling. The paintings and the films aim to create the feeling of an immediate surrounding. Shen’s current display in Canada inspires audiences to challenge their beliefs about language and voice.

“The works address hope of bringing the self back into right relations [...] through one’s own experience and agency,” they

ages of things in our everyday lives, like trees in various states, symbolizing the constantly changing nature of languages.

“I seek stories as refuge as my agency emerges from a people without protection,” Shen says. “The exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery is part of that journey. Since the subjects are things we see and experience everyday, like trees, teeth, our environment and our kins, I hope it helps carve an access to that perspective in people’s daily life.”

For more information on the exhibit, visit www.richmondartgallery.org

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MARCH 9, 2024 (SAT)



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Photo courtesy of Arts Club Theatre Company

Father Tartuffe: An Indigenous Misadventure

A 60s twist on a 350-year old francophone classic

by CURTIS SEUFERT

Tartuffe takes the stage in a new yet ever-fraudulent form more than three centuries after the story first shocked and delighted audiences in 17th century France. Adapting the classic tale of a fraudulent holy man who wriggles his way into a bourgeois household for personal benefit, *Father Tartuffe: An Indigenous Misadventure* sees the titular scoundrel plucked out from 1660s Paris and brought to 1960s Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

The new adaptation, written by Herbie Barnes and directed by Roy Surette and Quelemia Sparrow, involves the deception of an Indigenous family that has recently come into some money as a result of Expo 67's bountiful

economic opportunities. Surette says the adaptation takes a comedic approach to highlight many cultural conversations affecting Indigenous people today. "It's kind of like being a little bit of a fly on the wall for much of the audience," Surette says. "[There's] some insights to some of the dilemmas, quandaries and choices that we as a colonial nation have asked our Indigenous population to bear with." The show runs from Feb. 22 to March 24 at the Granville Island Stage.

Adapting a classic

When Barnes first asked Surette to direct an Indigenous-focussed adaptation of *Tartuffe*, Surette agreed immediately. After all, Molière, the playwright behind the original, is Surette's favourite classical playwright.

But he knew it would be essential to bring in an Indigenous co-director to lead this adaptation, so he asked actor and director Quelemia Sparrow to join alongside him. Surette says that Spar-

row already brought much to the show in her acting role, and that her directorial position was even more invaluable in bringing this adaptation to life. "I thought if we were going to embark on this as a project, it would be really important not to be the sole leader on it as a director, to have an Indigenous co-director," says Surette. "[Sparrow is] very talented and has a great visual eye as well."

“...this is definitely bringing much more about Indigenous culture, values and quandaries that they continue to face all of the time.

Roy Surette, co-director of *Tartuffe: An Indigenous Misadventure*

In the original play, Orgon, the family patriarch, is pushing back against the perceived extravagance of his household and tries to introduce some degree of piety by welcoming in the fraudulent priest Tartuffe. Throughout the piece, the rest of the family tries to open Orgon's eyes to Tartuffe's ambitions to dupe the family out of their property and seduce or marry multiple family members. In the Indigenous adaptation, Surette says there's an adapted

a more favourable view of the church than much of the rest of his family, but Orin's family takes issue with this, in no small part, because of the Christian-run residential schools they suffered through. "There's some distrust there, but then there [were] also some people in the Indigenous community that sort of embraced Christianity. So Orin's a bit born-again as a Catholic," explains Surette. "It's really about his kind of obsession with this charismatic, kind of creepy but powerful influence on him." Other characters are also adapted from the original play for the new context. In Molière's version, the family members have many differing opinions about extravagance, piety and religion. Meanwhile, the current production highlights differing perspectives around Indigeneity, assimilation, culture, identity and religion within the dy-

namic societal backdrop of the late 1960s. But in both cases, Surette says the common thread of distrusting Tartuffe unites the rest of the family together. "It's fun to revisit. It's really interesting to kind of interpret. [Barnes] could have done the original translation and just had Indigenous actors do it, but this is definitely bringing much more about Indigenous culture, values and quandaries that they continue to face all of the time," he says. Surette also thinks it's great to be able to showcase Indigenous perspectives on bigger stages through a lens of comedy. He says many well-received and popular Indigenous plays have a greater focus on drama and that he's happy to see increasingly more productions like this one as well: stories which thrive on the other side of the emotional spectrum of Indigenous theatre. "I think it's a unique project for sure," says Surette.

For more information on the show, visit www.artsclub.com/shows/2023-2024/father-tartuffe-an-indigenous-misadventure



▲ Roy Surette.



▲ Quelemia Sparrow.

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Cultural Calendar

by SIMON YEE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Immerse yourself in the warmth of community gatherings and festivities this month, celebrating both the spirit of Women's Day and the joyous arrival of Nowruz, marking the Persian New Year. From art exhibitions to music festivals, theatre performances to literary readings, the cultural calendar is teeming with opportunities to explore and appreciate the richness of our shared human experience. Have a great March everyone and enjoy the last few weeks of winter; see you all in the spring!

Tian Dai: The Natural Flow Meets Art
March 1–24, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.
www.artsnewwest.ca/the-natural-flow-meets-art

Arts New West is hosting the works of artist Tian Dai at The Gallery at Queen's Park until March 24. The artist aims to delve into the realms between reality and chaotic abstraction. The intention is to prompt viewers to contemplate and resonate with the presented concepts. Watercolor serves as a medium through which colour is liberated to meander, giving rise to unbridled images, be they reminiscent of clouds, flower-laden ponds or other enigmatic forms. These creations offer narratives untethered by familiarity, inviting spectators to interpret them without constraint. In the interplay, ink lines weave through the colours, and the artist strives to assume the role of a mere observer, envisioning the myriad stories that unfold without the imposition of predetermined control.

MOI – MOMENTUM OF ISOLATION
March 6–9
www.firehallartscentre.ca

Produced by Radical System Art, *MOI – MOMENTUM OF ISOLATION* bases its themes around loneliness and isolation to reveal how social bonds and connections are essential to our humanity. The performance explores the objective and subjective experiences through the individual, the group and modern society – a society with shifting values and an ever-advancing digital way of life. To shape a digital world on



▲ The Wilds features WONDERHEADS' signature masks, whimsical puppetry and enchanting music.

stage, the show places live interactive video and sound around the performers. These elements enhance ideas on how technology influences our lives, and that it can both empower and disempower us. Further distilling isolation, solo performances and the extended social isolation of one character on stage are critical to the arc of the performance. Our social bonds allow us to understand that we have an impact on what is around us – that we exist.

Jade Circle
March 6–17
www.gatewaytheatre.com

Prepare to be swept away by the world premiere of *Jade Circle*, a beautiful multidisciplinary performance by artist Jasmine Chen. Through powerful music, captivating movement and poignant storytelling in Mandarin and English, Jasmine finds her place within the legacy of her matriarchs. Yearning to reconnect with her late grandmother, she embarks on a transformative journey to relearn Mandarin and unearth lost stories of her grandmother's past through intimate interviews with her mother. As part of the show, subtitles in English will be projected for audiences while performing in Mandarin. For showtimes, artist and more information, check out the Gateway Theatre's website.

Women's Art on Women's Day
March 8, 5:30–8:30 p.m.
www.turkishcanadiansociety.org/event/art-exhibition-womens-art-on-womens-day

Join the Turkish Canadian Society for the second Women's Art on Women's Day art exhibition to celebrate International Women's Day together. Be a part of this remarkable event, where more than 200 art enthusiasts and community members come together to discover the inspiring works of female artists.

An Intervention
March 8–17
mitchandmurrayproductions.com

Mitch and Murray Productions will present the Canadian premiere of *An Intervention*, from March 8 to 17 at Performance Works on Granville Island. Written by Olivier Award-winning playwright Mike Bartlett and directed by Aaron Craven, the show is a touching and funny play about what happens when you hate your best friend. An exploration of friendship, responsibility and the murky territory that exists at the boundary between them, two longtime friends are deeply divided over a foreign war in the Middle East. The more present dilemma for them is one of intervention – when is it right to intervene in a friend's personal conflict?

Holi: Festival of Colour Plaza Pop-up
March 9, 2–4 p.m.
www.nvrc.ca

Visit the City of North Vancouver as they celebrate colour and the arrival of spring. Holi is an Indian festival where vibrant coloured powders are thrown into the air to represent new beginnings. There will be Indian food, crafts, Bollywood performances by SHIAMAK Vancouver and music by the talented DJ Roh. This is a messy, colourful, unique and wonderful experience that you will not want to miss! The powder used at this event is made with natural food safe ingredients, is gluten free, non-toxic and environmentally friendly. Wear clothing that you will not mind getting colours on!

The Phil Lind Initiative: Viet Thanh Nguyen
March 14, 6–7:30 p.m.
www.sppga.ubc.ca/events/event/phil-lind-2024-viet-thanh-nguyen

Viet Thanh Nguyen's writing is bold, elegant and fiercely honest. Coming to the U.S. as a refugee during the Vietnam War in 1975, he was driven by lack of representation to write about the war from a Vietnamese perspective – globally reimagining what we thought we knew about the conflict. Now, almost a decade since his groundbreaking novel was published, Viet revisits the developing conversations on the polemic and polarizing narratives facing migrants in the U.S. today with his Phil Lind Initiative talk titled *Speaking for an Other*. As displaced individuals contend with the physical perils of war, we consider a different conflict that has emerged within the global imaginary: how has storytelling been used by some to build a new sense of community within the United States, while being lev-

eraged by other segments of American society to efface them? With time and memory dislocated, how do narratives have the potential to be wielded as both refuge and subterfuge in the United States of both today and tomorrow?

CelticFest 2024
March 14–17
www.celticfestvancouver.com

CelticFest Vancouver brings Western Canada's largest annual Celtic festival to Vancouver, annually every March. Every year CelticFest brings the local community together in a week-long festival celebration of Celtic culture culminating in a free, all-ages, outdoor, weekend festival in downtown Vancouver. Weekend festivities include live music, performance, food and drink, Irish dancing, a Celtic-themed market, Irish Wolfhounds, a family zone, sports demonstrations and more. For information on this year's festival, check out their website.

Aban Art & Culture Society's Nowruz Celebration
March 15, 5:30–8 p.m.
www.eventbrite.ca/e/nowruz-celebration-tickets-821053482067

Join the Aban Art & Culture Society for an unforgettable Nowruz Celebration in Richmond on March 15. Immerse yourself in the vibrant culture and traditions of the Persian New Year. This in-person event is a feast for the senses, featuring live music, dance performances and mouth watering Persian cuisine. Experience the joyous atmosphere as we welcome spring and celebrate the renewal of life. Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to connect with the local Persian community and create lasting memories. Mark your calendars and get ready to embrace the spirit of Nowruz!

Wonderheads – The Wilds
March 17, 2 p.m.
www.wonderheads.com

When Wendell discovers that his wife Tilda and their beloved tree have vanished from the backyard, he must venture into the nearby forest to bring them home. Confronted with shifting landscapes, unusual creatures and a mysterious lurking presence, Wendell soon learns that the key to finding Tilda is to first unlock the mystery of *The Wilds*. Charming and profoundly touching, this wordless award-winning show features WONDERHEADS' signature masks, whimsical puppetry and enchanting music, and moves its audiences to both laughter and tears. Playing at the James Cowan Theatre in Burnaby on March 17.

Answers:

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