

# The Source

forum of diversity

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Photo by Eric Damer

## Truths to be Told at the Burnaby Village Museum

by DREW STEWART

The Burnaby Village Museum is currently hosting two feature exhibits which look to showcase two different stories pertaining to B.C.'s South Asian community. *Truths not Often Told*, curated by Jane Lemke and Anushay Malik, and *OVERCASTE*, curated by Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra and Anita Lal, are aiming to bring attention to underrepresented and under-discussed stories in British Columbia.

With B.C. Museums week taking place from May 13 to 19, the

exhibits mark an opportunity to engage with both the past and present, including challenging truths that audiences stand to learn a great deal from.

“This is a good example of how museums can be such a wonderful conduit for conversation and education.

Jane Lemke, curator of *Truths not Often Told*

“This is a good example of how museums can be such a wonderful conduit for conversation and education in a way that’s so subtle,” says Lemke.

*Truths not Often Told* is fo-

cused on the story of Burnaby’s South Asian communities in the early 1900s. The exhibit tells these stories by documenting the experiences South Asian

families were going through at the time. It uses photographs, documents and possessions to support and bring their stories to life in a way that people of all ages can engage with.

“I think that was an important part, for me at least,” says Malik. “How academic work should be accessible for everyone. It should be tactile.”

*OVERCASTE* was developed by The Poetic Justice Foundation. It addresses the presence of caste discrimination in Canada through the stories of people who have experienced it.

Like *Truths not Often Told*, *OVERCASTE* consists of interactive and visual elements to help museum visitors engage and learn more effectively from the material.

“We need to be able to have a space and a setting to hold these really conflicting conversations and truthful conversations around things like caste-based oppression. The impact and power of museum exhibits are huge,” says Sandhra.

### Building an experience

Telling stories like these and educating people about subjects

See “Museums” page 5 ➤



Celebrating Sri Lankan Heritage  
Page 5



Songs from Anatolia  
Page 6



Adobe art and architecture  
Page 7



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# The Chinese Canadian History Society of B.C. celebrates 20 years of bridging the gaps in Canada's history

by KATRIANNA DESANTE

**The Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia (CCHSBC) celebrated its 20-year legacy last weekend. Since first being established in 2004, the society has aimed to be a national leader in research, preservation and education about the experiences of Chinese-Canadian immigrants.**

To that end, the non-profit organization has led numerous field trips, published several books and collated several documentaries and resources onto its website to encourage public access to online learning,

For CCHSBC director Rob Ho, this legacy has proved well worth celebrating for the educational value it has offered to Canadians looking to learn more about Chinese-Canadian history, as the society has grown to become a rich and renowned resource.

## Turning back the clock

The roots of the CCHSBC first began with the late Edgar Wickberg. While working as a professor in the department of history at the University of British Columbia, Wickberg noticed very little education offered at the elementary and secondary level existed about the Chinese experience in B.C.

Bothered by the lack of available resources for students, he gathered a group of academics from UBC together to form the CCHSBC. The goal was to research, document and preserve Chinese Canadian history, and

educate the public about Chinese Canadian experiences.

Their first major event was a way to invite the public into this history: in 2004, the society held its first history fair, a day where young students province-wide presented projects on Chinese Canadian history to members of Vancouver's community. At this event, winners were presented with a medal, and the supporting schools were presented with a book to add to their library collection.

“It was like a children’s science fair, but it featured Chinese Canadian history.”

*Rob Ho, director of the Chinese Canadian History Society of British Columbia*

“Today, we continue co-sponsoring history fairs with the BC Heritage Fair Society for grades four to 12 in schools province-wide.”

The history fairs have since become an annual tradition with the CCHSBC, but before then many British Columbians lacked easy-to-access ways of learning about Chinese Canadians’ history, including many fourth and fifth-generation Chinese in Canada, like Ho himself.

For Ho and many others, the annual history fair has illuminated the gaps in knowledge, providing them with a deeper understanding both the hardship and socioeconomic differences that first generation Chinese immigrants faced, as well as the legacy they’ve left on the province.

“The railroad and head tax were two big things they were always known for. But [Chinese Canadians] did a lot more, like opening up businesses and supporting stores, and of course, they faced a lot of exclusion,” says Ho.

## Expanding the narrative

Over the years, the CCHSBC has hosted

various events to encourage community engagement and learning about this rich history. These include film screenings and book readings on topics like Chinatowns, experiences of discrimination and memories of family gatherings and food.

“We have also published books and education tools that scarcely existed back in the day,” says Ho. “The books have been super helpful because they’re tan-

gible things that we can send to schools... [which] didn’t [always] have the resources to tackle the wide breadth of our history.”

The society has also led historical tours that take B.C. students to places filled with lesser-known Chinese-Canadian history like Vancouver Island, Seattle and Lytton. After fostering a series of networks and resources, the society even raised money to help rebuild Lytton following its hugely destructive wildfire season.

Indeed, Chinese-Canadians of B.C. have had a long-standing history with the Nlaka’pamux territory, so after learning that a fire engulfed the town on June 30, 2021, destroying the Lytton Chinese History Museum along with the 1600 artifacts that it housed, the CCHSBC embarked on a fundraiser. To date, they have received \$22,406 in donations.

Each spring, the society also hosts an annual banquet to commemorate one person or organization working hard to promote Chinese-Canadian education.

Looking back on the CCHSBC and its evolution, Ho is happy with how much the society has accomplished. In particular, he feels proud of Wickberg’s and past initiatives, and current efforts to develop a variety of educational events and resources and increase the representation of Chinese-Canadian history nationwide.

“People are doing a labour of love, and we recognize the hard work we have put into promoting and preserving Chinese history in Canada,” says Ho.

## Le plaisir of the words by Le Stylo à mots

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
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### Horizontally

- 1 – determination of a place
- 2 – a public walkway – remarkable
- 3 – aromatics spices – to form an idea
- 4 – to form – period of time
- 5 – to drive roughly – senior – avenue
- 6 – can you repeat? – you and me – former partner
- 7 – saint – continent – in addition
- 8 – drops – award
- 9 – bird – passion – myself
- 10 – from Scotland – location – tellurium
- 11 – hen product – great scientist
- 12 – germ – again – piece of land

### verticalement

- A – revêtements de bois isolant
- B – vague de joie – protection de berges
- C – plante piquante – danger caché
- D – désagréables – champion
- E – blessates – enzyme
- F – de même – jour passé – fin de verbe
- G – robes sans poils blancs – péruvienne
- H – ruisseau – offrandes
- I – éliminée – salé – à toi
- J – déesse ancienne – article – unité de mesure thermique
- K – intervalles musicaux – fondatrice d’Israël
- L – ami des animaux – long voyage – arrivé

For answers, see page 8

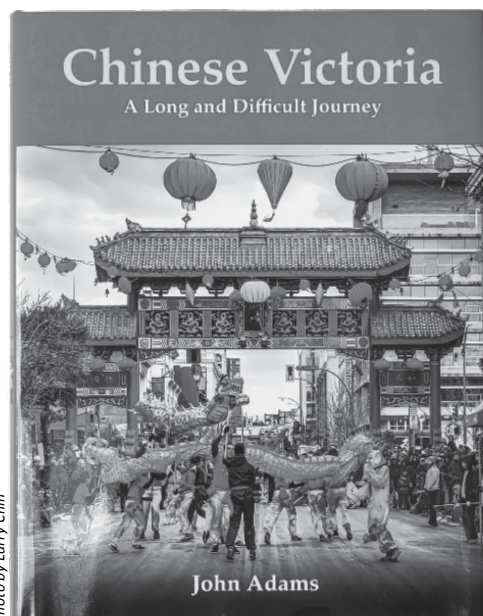


Photo by Larry Chin

▲ The Chinese Canadian History Society of B.C. publishes numerous books as part of its effort to educate the province on Chinese history in the province.



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Photo courtesy of the ICA of Greater Victoria

## Collaboration for inclusion: How the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria reaches thousands yearly in the capital region

by LUC MVONO

**“It takes a village to raise a child.” This adage has been appropriated countless times and in countless contexts to communicate the value of community-mobilizing efforts. Despite the cliché it has become, organizations such as Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) aim to prove its veracity.**

Each year, the not-for-profit organization pursues its mission to facilitate the integration of thousands of newcomers in the B.C. capital region by leveraging the collective capacity of its many partners, community agencies and donors.

In light of the upcoming World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on May 21, they hope to join in celebrating the B.C. groups that foster collaboration to champion belonging and inclusion in the province.

### Trust for change

For over 50 years, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria has welcomed and supported newcomers through its wide-ranging services. Last year, the ICA organized over 30 programs, including language programs, community-building and employment support for around 3,000 newcomers in the Greater Victoria Area. And while responding to the immediate needs of newcomers has become an integral part of ICA’s mission, its manager of strategic engagement Quinton Gordon says the organization was initially focused more on encouraging intra-communal dialogue in the region.

“ICA was established 52 years ago, originally as a cultural organization celebrating diversity in the community and bridging inter-cultural connections”, recalls Gordon. “As the organization moved into newcomer services for those fleeing the Vietnam war, ICA retained its focus on community alongside the growing requirements for client services.”

Since then, the ICA responded to unexpected fluxes of newcomers in their region, helping them settle in. In the past eight years, the organization has served more than 1,500 refugees, most recently including 500 displaced Ukrainians following the 2022 Russian invasion.

In 2015, the ICA played a key role in the settlement of Syrian refugees in Victoria at the height of the country’s refugee crisis. The organization was awarded Royal Roads University’s Chancellor’s Community Recognition Award in 2016 for this. With the ICA being a trusted provincial

partner to support government-assisted refugees in B.C.’s capital, Gordon attributes the ICA’s impact and recognition to its goal of meeting any person’s needs, and having the network and programs to do it.

“Our decades of community work and our focus on working with community partners who are already doing great work, has established a lot of trust and a well-developed muscle for collaboration”, Gordon says. “This means that we can respond to emerging needs relatively quickly and engage the skills and knowledge of our partners to provide quality services to those that need them.”

### Fostering community connections

Gordon says the ICA also aims to help people thrive by going a step further and facilitating their access to employment and settlement resources, skills and other necessities. For example, its recently-created biking groups aim to allow the people that the ICA serves to better explore their environment, improve their physical health and promote meaningful connections.

And beyond helping newcomers improve their mental health, Gordon says there’s a keen focus on giving new arrivals room to express themselves and find and create a community in that process.



Photo courtesy of the ICA of Greater Victoria

▲ The Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria aims to help new arrivals to not only make their way on the island, but to thrive as well.

“Through initiatives like our arts-based outreach projects such as *im:print*, community theatre productions that bring Indigenous, immigrant, refugee and settler stories to the stage, we create opportunities for people to come together, and that helps shape a stronger future through open dialogue and shared human experiences,” says Gordon.

For more information on ICA, please visit: [www.icavictoria.org](http://www.icavictoria.org)

For more information on World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, go to: [www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day](http://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day)

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## SEE YOU THERE!

# Jewish Heritage Month in Canada Remembering history and celebrating legacy

by STAFF WRITER

**May marks the celebration of Jewish Heritage Month in Canada, as the country takes an opportunity to learn about the rich history of Jewish Canadians, as well as the substantial role that they play in all areas of Canadian life.**

Jewish Heritage Month has been celebrated in Canada ever since 2018, when Parliament unanimously passed a bill proclaiming its recognition. But it is only to highlight a history that goes much further back than the 21st century.

### A deep history

It is believed that many of the first Jews who came to Canada arrived throughout the early-to-mid 18th century. Many of those joined as part of a regiment of British Forces, troops of General Jeffrey Amherst who overthrew the city of Montreal in 1760. This, at a time when the forces of Upper and Lower Canada, colonial territories belonging to the British and French empires respectively, continued to clash in an attempt to claim control of Canada as a whole.

Early census numbers indicate only around 200 Jewish people living in Canada around 1831, and about 1000 Jewish people before Confederation in 1867. Throughout the 20th century, however, Jewish immigrants continued to arrive in larger Canada along with numerous other cultural and ethnic groups. After thousands sought

After 1947, Canada did once again open its doors to Jewish immigrants, including more than 40,000 Holocaust survivors in the years that followed. And in the decades since then, as Jews have continued to face varying levels of persecution in different places around the world, Canada has continued to serve as a popular place to emigrate.

In that time, many Jewish Canadians have contributed numerous cultural and political impacts on the country, particularly in British Columbia.

### Lasting legacies

David Oppenheimer was arguably one of the most influential Vancouverites in the city's history. Born in Germany, then moving to Canada via the United States, Oppenheimer arrived in 1858 to cash in on the gold rush taking place at the time in British Columbia. An entrepreneur and a businessman, he was elected as the second mayor of Vancouver in 1888, and during his tenure established the fire department, a ferry across the Burrard Inlet, the streetcar system, Stanley Park and more.

In more recent history, Vancouver-born Seth Rogen is one of the more well-known faces in television and comedy in the Western world. The Emmy-nominated actor served producing and acting roles in many of the most popular and critically well-received R-rated comedies of the 2000s and 2010s, including *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Superbad* and *Pineapple Express*. He's also known for his numerous voice acting roles in family-friendly animated movies including *Shrek the Third*, the *Kung Fu Panda* series, and *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*.

Beyond B.C., numerous other Jewish Canadians have left



Photo courtesy of the British Columbia Archives

▲ David Oppenheimer, Jewish-Canadian mayor of Vancouver from 1888 to 1891.

refuge in Canada from violent pogroms in Eastern Europe during the late 19th century, immigrant families became more established, and synagogues, Jewish schools and Jewish cultural facilities began to appear in nearly every city in Canada.

But as the 20th century rolled on, antisemitic rhetoric grew more prominent, and despite the well-known increasing plight of Jews in Europe, Canadian politicians enforced increasingly strict immigration policies in the 1920's onward. Arguably one of the most noteworthy, tragic events in Canada's history pertaining to this growing antisemitic trend was the case of SS St. Louis in June of 1939. Carrying 937 Jewish immigrants from Nazi Germany, just months before the start of World War II, the St. Louis was denied entry into port in Canada, and forced to return, where many from that voyage would ultimately perish in the Holocaust.



Photo by Stephen McCarthy (CC BY 2.0)

▲ Vancouver-born, Jewish-Canadian actor and producer Seth Rogen.

lasting legacies on Canada's political, social and cultural landscape. These include the critically-acclaimed singer-songwriter and poet Leonard Cohen, pop rap all-star Aubrey Drake Graham – better known by his stage name middle name – acclaimed radio and television host Barbara Frum, social activist and filmmaker Naomi Klein, and many more.

With Jewish Heritage Month well on its way, this May marks an opportunity to celebrate and remember the history and legacy of these Jewish Canadians, as well as the many more that call this country home. ✌

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# New friends, old ties: Building a Sri Lankan community in B.C.

by LILLIAN LIAO

A huge influx over the last five years, in a younger generation of immigrants moving into Canada – most as students – has created a need for a support outreach system. May is Asian Heritage Month, and Renuka Amaradasa, president of the Sri Lankan Friendship Association of BC (SLFABC), reports that the organization has quickly become a hub of resources and connections for Sri Lankan newcomers to Canada.

“This association has become a very important platform for newly immigrated Canadians to interact and know their family members,” he says. “They need a lot of support.”

## Community through friendship

“At the end of the day, it gives quite a bit of satisfaction and happiness to look back at some of these photographs...it’s all about the love...I have [for] Sri Lanka,” Amaradasa says, referring to photos from their most recent New Year’s celebration in April.

Challenges, such as navigating mortgage applications and purchasing new vehicles, are the same as those facing any new immigrant. Although SLFABC does not provide support in the form of a designated settlement department, Amaradasa notes how their word-of-mouth networking leads to strong community bonds – highlighting the word “friendship” in their moniker.

“What they were really looking for was to have that warmth and companionship with their colleagues from a Sri Lankan background,” he says, noting the intentions of the original founders nearly four decades ago.



▲ The Sri Lankan Friendship Association of BC hopes to bring all Sri Lankans together through community events and gatherings.

Not only has Amaradasa been involved with SLFABC since 2012, previously serving as the vice president during the COVID-19 pandemic, he also remains close with those who founded the club. He says the association started as regular, informal gatherings between friends. Since its formalization, the SLFABC has been operating as a non-political, non-religious connecting force for Sri Lankans.

“This association does not represent a particular religion. We’re looking at the overall culture of the country,” he emphasizes, noting the cultural and religious diversity in Sri Lanka. “That’s the beauty of this association – it really [is] a catalyst and creates harmony amongst quite a diverse community.”

According to Amaradasa, Canadian perceptions of Sri Lanka are often coloured by

its recent history of civil war, which involved an attempted establishment of a separate Tamil state between 1983 and 2009. And while the SLFABC has traditionally been mostly attended by Sinhalese people, Sri Lanka’s major ethnic group, he says there’s recently been more participation from B.C.’s Tamil population.

Amaradasa sees it as a welcome sign the historical gap is in the process of healing, and that all Sri Lankans in British Columbia are welcome to join the community and engage collectively in its rich cultural celebrations.

“I’m glad that I’m making progress with engaging not only the Sinhalese majority but also the Tamils,” he says.

## Representing Sri Lankan Canadians

For Amaradasa, an example of this inclusive spirit is their an-

nual new year celebration, which was attended for the first time by the president of the Tamil Cultural Society of BC. Traditionally an agricultural society, the Sri Lankan new year falls on April 13 to mark the harvest season. This year’s event, held on April 6, was attended by over 450 guests dressed in bright colours and included traditional dancing, new year games and food.

“Mostly, it is about exposing that to the new generation, to the kids, for them to see where [their] parents are coming from, what are the cultures, how they get together, how they celebrate,” Amaradasa says.

SLFABC also holds an annual formal dinner and dance later in the year. Amaradasa notes that in the past, they have brought over a traditional Sri Lankan band for this event. Another key gathering is the Sports Day (July 6), a full day event featur-

ing the popular Sri Lankan sport of cricket. Aside from events, SLFABC also serves as a communication channel for the Sri Lanka High Commission in Ottawa.

“If there would be any Sri Lankan dignitaries [or] government representatives who would come to Vancouver, Ottawa will reach out to us and communicate that; and we try to represent the Sri Lankan community,” he says, citing the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka’s visit as an example.

Amaradasa also notes the opening of a Sri Lankan consulate in BC last year. While Sri Lankans have had to travel to Ottawa for consulate services in the past, the SLFABC is working to spread the word of the new, local consulate. ✉

See [www.facebook.com/slfabritishcolumbia](http://www.facebook.com/slfabritishcolumbia)  
[www.slfabc.com](http://www.slfabc.com)

## ► “Museums” from page 1

they may not have previously understood or even been aware of are often some of the most prominent and key functions of museums. However, Lemke notes, the task of putting together a comprehensive window into historical events that have not been well-documented can be a challenge.

“To start, we went into archives and libraries, looked at newspapers, photographs, textual documents and spoke to people in Burnaby to try and find out what the Burnaby South Asian community was like 100 years ago,” says Lemke. “How did they arrive? What were their experiences like? And what we found is that there wasn’t very much to find.”

For various reasons including racism, discrimination, language and cultural barriers, a lot of information about Burnaby’s South Asian community was not recorded in the early 1900s. As such the curators were faced with the challenge of finding another way to unearth and present the stories they were looking for.



▲ From OVERCASTE, at the Burnaby Village Museum.

“You’re unable to see a particular event from the perspective of South Asians or people of colour, people who don’t have access to English,” says Malik. “The strategies that you would use to look at it from the archive don’t work.”

To develop the exhibit, rather than starting with records and moving forward as would normally be the case, Lemke and Malik started looking into the current state of Burnaby’s South Asian community. Through a variety of outreach efforts, they were able to find stories from families still living in the com-

munity and essentially trace them back to the time period they wanted to examine.

“We began a process of working backwards,” says Lemke. “We started with people that were living today and then tried to find out what they had to contribute, looking back to when they arrived and what they knew when they did arrive.”

Although OVERCASTE’s focus was different, it took a similar approach to building its story. To flesh out its depiction of caste discrimination there was an emphasis on first hand accounts and

experiences. That meant that Sandhra and Lal had to reach out to the community to gather the information they needed.

“We went to [Vancouver Island] and interviewed people together, interviewed people here in the Lower Mainland,” says Sandhra. “So our exhibit is really decolonized in that way. We are only looking to the communities’ experiences and opinions as fraught and controversial as they may be. They are the driving force behind the exhibit.”

## The sore need for a permanent display

Both exhibits have been on display at the Burnaby Village Museum for over a year now and in that time Malik says they have had a profound impact on many visitors. With both exhibits, the curators highlight that they have seen a lot of young people take interest with the material, something which Malik says she is happy to see as they tried to make each exhibit as accessible as possible for young people.

“The feedback that I got from students and the way that they engaged with it, they got so ex-

cited by seeing those stories represented at the museum,” says Malik. “So I think it was really meaningful to students to see that these stories matter.”

However, while these exhibits have impactful stories to tell and important conversations to provoke, they are still temporary and both will be gone within the next year. That means a substantial lack of learning potential for any future generations on these important histories.

As such, while attempts to continue these exhibits and projects like them are in progress, Malik stresses how essential it is to ensure that a designated space exists to tell these kinds of stories, and says that relevant parties must show a much more substantive commitment to preserving and displaying these under-discussed histories.

“It’s always amazing to see the glimmer of potential when we do smaller scale exhibits like this,” says Malik. “But the elephant in the room is that we were promised a museum four years ago by the province, and we have not received s--- all.” ✉

# Singing Anatolia's sorrows and joys

by CURTIS SEUFERT

**The stories of Anatolia will be on full musical display this month as the Turkish-Canadian Society's Choir Ensemble takes the stage for their major annual concert.**

The 30-member choir will be led by conductor Sevgi Dogan and accompanied by a dozen musicians, as they look to share a variety of folk and classical songs whose histories are rooted in the Turkish peninsula.

While the choir is composed of members of the Turkish-Canadian Society of Vancouver, Dogan says the "multinational and multicultural" choir is open to all. She adds that this open-door policy of cultural sharing extends to inviting all audiences who are interested in the show.

"Our guests will have a great time for sure," she says. "[The] music is lovely, beautiful people are on stage singing their hearts out. We believe our success is not a coincidence, it is [the] result of hard work and deepest care about our Turkish culture and history."

For TCS vice president Ezgi Kilic, showcasing the history of Turkish music is an opportunity to open a cultural window into the greater spirit of Turkey itself.

"This concert underscores the Turkish-Canadian Society's commitment to nurturing and showcasing Turkish arts, celebrating

diversity and fostering connection within Vancouver's vibrant community," says Kilic. "We believe in the transformative power of art to unite people, showcasing our dedication to enriching both Turkish and broader communities in Vancouver."

The show will take place at the Chan Centre on May 12.

## A history and community of Turkish music

Dogan says she's been inspired to see the growth in both scale and passion that the choir ensemble has seen over the years since it was established in 2003. She joined the choir in 2011 and became conductor a year later.

Before then, Dogan says she had some level of experience with conducting before moving to Canada, but since that time she's been pleasantly surprised to see her conducting role with the TCS expand to leading a full-fledged choir for annual performances and weekly rehearsals.

"I did brief [conducting] experience when I was back home, but never imagined to conduct the scale of this 40+ ensemble," she says.

Although Dogan is at the front of the choir in a directing role, she notes that deciding which songs to perform involves input from all members of the collective. Musicians and choir members submit their song suggestions and decide on the concert lineup collectively. This year the group chose a



Photo courtesy of the Turkish Canadian Society

▲ The Turkish Canadian Society's Turkish Choir Ensemble looks to offer a rich showcase of Anatolian culture and history.

mix of folk and classical pieces, including songs with themes of nostalgia and yearning for homeland.

"We gather all the info, make a list, present the list and we collectively decide which folk and classic songs to perform," explains Dogan. "So, it is not

only my decision which makes it very exciting."

That theme extends to this year's most challenging song, *Bahcemde acilmaz seni gormezse cicekler*, which roughly translates to *Flowers won't bloom in my garden if they don't see you*. Dogan says that every year she

suggests one particularly challenging piece for the group to perform, in this case, a piece from a well-known musician – Münir Nurettin Selçuk – based on a poem by a well-known Turkish poet – Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel.

"Every rehearsal we practiced this piece until we perfected it," she says.

Beyond *Flowers won't bloom*, Dogan says the lineup includes a mix of different emotions and songs pulled from both Anatolia's folk and classical music history.

"Anatolia's sorrows, joys, love of each other and love of the country... Uplifting, joyful, colourful pieces with a very happy beat on it. But we have a few very sad songs. When [the] choir sings them, I know it is from the heart," she says.

Overall, one emotion that stands out among the rest is pride, as Dogan is happy to continue to lead a team that is just as rewarding for audiences as it is for its members.

"[We] build a great team as a choir and there is a real chance we can reflect this to the whole community. Being a part of this amazing group of people is a privilege," says Dogan. "Sharing [the] same values mutual respect to our music, selfless act of volunteering. All good examples for the future generations." ✍

For more information, visit [www.chancentre.com/events/turkish-choir-ensemble-vancouver-2024-concert](http://www.chancentre.com/events/turkish-choir-ensemble-vancouver-2024-concert)

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## Errata

Vol 24, Issue 19

**When it comes to mental health support, community is key**

A photo caption in this story misidentified a person in the photo as being SAMHAA founder Kulpreet Singh. The person being referred to in the photo caption is SAMHAA member and SOUDA founder Gurkirat Nijjar Singh. We apologize for this error.

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Photo by Tiron Tim

## unearthed: Mitra Mahmoodi & Jamal Tabasinejad Creating art out of memories

by PRISCA TANG

The works of Iranian-Canadian artists **Mitra Mahmoodi and Jamal Tabasinejad** will be on display at the Evergreen Cultural Centre this month, as the centre is set to host an exhibition highlighting their representations of Iranian adobe architecture, as well as the meaning it holds for the artists themselves.

The exhibition, *unearthed: Mitra Mahmoodi & Jamal Tabasinejad*, will be on display from May 18 to July 21.

### Memories and making

Mahmoodi's work looks to shine a light on adobe architecture, a style of building which she describes as "simple but smart." Despite the buildings being primarily located in desert areas, the practice uses simple materials such as clay, sand, straws, and animal hairs to cool down the inside without air conditioners.

"There are different buildings in different cities in Iran," Mahmoodi says. "In the city of Yazd, there are tall structures that are called the wind catchers. They capture the wind and transform it into cool air to cool down the inside of the houses," she says.

But beyond highlighting the architecture itself, there's a deep emotional and historical element to the art on display at *unearthed* as well. Mahmoodi says that she created her sculptures for this exhibit based on the memories and feelings she had when she visited her grandparents' adobe houses in Iran as a child.

It's a set of feelings she hopes to reflect within the sculptures. But while there was plenty of joy to be had, she also hopes to showcase the uncertainty as well, the emotional complexity of being a child and exploring cool dark places.

"I remember one of my grandfather's houses had a long corridor that led to the courtyard. Along it, two really dark rooms

stored food for the cows." recalls Mahmoodi. "When I created the sculpture with the long corridor and very dark rooms, I remember the feeling of fear as a kid as I looked into those rooms. When I showed the sculpture to my friends, they said they were genuinely interested to see what was inside [...] I love that my art can result in

"I'm interested in memories, I am interested in texture and I am really intrigued by a small hole that's completely dark. Then I started remembering those holes I saw as a child. Then it led me to my childhood memories of living and visiting adobe houses," she says.

Unfortunately, the pandemic struck the city when she was

“I’m interested in memories, I am interested in texture and I am really intrigued by a small hole that’s completely dark.

*Mitra Mahmoodi, artist*

different reactions from people," Mahmoodi says.

### A change of art

The idea of using adobe building in her craft is not something Mahmoodi always had in mind. During her time at university, she explored many different forms and structures, but it was during her final year where she remembered her experiences of living in adobe houses.



Photo by Arefeh Saberi

▲ Mahmoodi Mitra's *The Spirit of Grandpa's Home*, on display as part of *unearthed* at the Evergreen Cultural Centre.

developing her idea. As schools were forced to close, her project was left undone. But as a result, it ended up leading to an even broader emotional focus that is present in the works she's set to present.

"It was only in recent years that I could really focus on these sculptures. Back in 2020, I was only interested in the structure of adobe houses, but now I wanted to look into the texture of the building, like the way I used to be able to see straws in the wall," says Mahmoodi.

Even though she was working on her workshop and teaching classes for these four years, Mahmoodi says this was the only project that she has continued working with until the exhibition and presentation. In the end, it was a project focussed on emotional history that would end up making its way to the present.

"I think it was because of the personal connection that I have with adobe houses that makes me keep coming back to create new pieces," she says.

For more information about the exhibit, visit: [www.evergreenculturalcentre.ca](http://www.evergreenculturalcentre.ca)

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Join us for the 2nd Pump Couture Fashion Show and help us reach our goal of raising \$100,000 to support sending 40 children and youth to Diabetes Canada's D-Camps program. Join over 250 guests at the Italian Cultural Centre. The Italian Cultural Centre has been an essential part of Vancouver's cultural landscape for more than three decades. It opened in 1977 when its founding members, 13 existing Italian Associations, came together to promote and share Italian culture, values and heritage with all communities.

Mix and mingle with friends, colleagues and our models during our cocktail hour, featuring light food and beverages, interactive entertainment, live music and more. The Fashion Show, featuring emcee Dr. Akshay Jain, the first Canadian physician to be triple board-certified by the American Boards in Endocrinology, Internal Medicine and Obesity Medicine, will leave you inspired and cheering on the models who are living with diabetes as they bravely share their stories while wearing unique fashion from Canadian designers.

All funds raised will help send kids from your community to Diabetes Canada D-Camps, Camp Kakhamela, located on the shores of the Howe Sound on the beautiful sunshine coast outside of Gibsons, B.C.

Fri May 31 2024 at 07:00 am  
Italian Cultural Center, 3019 Slocan St, Vancouver, BC

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May 7-28, 2024

# Cultural Calendar

by SIMON YEE  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I hope everyone is enjoying an amazing spring this month. From captivating performances that transport you to distant lands to thought-provoking exhibitions that challenge perceptions, there's something for every cultural connoisseur. Why not enjoy the long Victoria Day weekend by checking out some of the events below?

\*\*\*

**explorAsian Heritage Month**  
Now until June 7  
[www.vahms.ca/may-festival](http://www.vahms.ca/may-festival)

In honour of Asian Heritage Month in May, the 2024 explorASIAN festival is being held with various PanAsian Canadian arts and culture, presenting the diversity of traditional events and new works that are unique to the region. This year's theme is "Sparkling Bonds: From Family to Community." It will be presented throughout the festival's signature events to engage the community with art and realize strengthened bonds from family to community. For a complete list of events and exhibits happening, check out the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society's website.

\*\*\*

**Biodiversity Days 2024**  
May 1-23  
[www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca](http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca)

Biodiversity Days is a month-long event in May, to honour the International Day for Biological Diversity on May 22 with a series of engagement opportunities that aim to celebrate and raise awareness of the fragile species, genes and ecosystems that sustain our communities. In 2024, the theme is "Be Part of the Plan," where everyone has a role to play to advance The Biodiversity Plan. This year's fourth annual Biodiversity Days includes a diversity of in-person and online events. Check out the UBC Botanical Garden's website for their 2024 program information.

\*\*\*

**Eunoia**  
May 8-11  
[www.firehallartscentre.ca/event/eunoia](http://www.firehallartscentre.ca/event/eunoia)

*Eunoia* is a dance-theatre production and adaptation of Christian Bök's award-winning book of poetry of the same name. It is a conceptual book written in the form of a lipogram where each of its five chapters is constrained to the use of one vowel. It is much lauded as a work, won the 2002 Griffin Poetry Prize and became a bestseller in the U.K. and Canada.

*Eunoia* means 'beautiful thinking' and is the shortest word in the English language to contain all five vowels. In the book, the author imposed the severe constraint of working with only one vowel in each chapter. Remarkably, and despite the severe limitations to the usable vocabulary, Bök was able to create oddly narrative poems with characters, scenes and coherent action.

\*\*\*

**The Papa Penguin Play**  
May 15-June 2  
[www.carouseltheatre.ca/season/papapenguinplay](http://www.carouseltheatre.ca/season/papapenguinplay)

Written by Vancouver playwright Dave Deveau, this colourful play is inspired by the true story of Roy and Silo, two male penguins who were gifted an egg at New York's Central Park Zoo, and the beloved children's book about their story, *And Tango Makes Three*. Penguins Peaches and Izzy are the Zoo's main attraction: two male penguins who put on daily shows to visitors' delight. But when other penguin couples lay eggs and go on to have a chick, these two pine for parenting life. With the help from the Zoo Keeper, dreams do come true.



▲ The Cloverdale Rodeo returns to the Cloverdale Fairgrounds this year from May 17 to 20.

**The HAFU Project**  
May 25-26  
[www.cityoperavancouver.com/season/hafu-project](http://www.cityoperavancouver.com/season/hafu-project)

*The HAFU Project* is an emotional journey of navigating identity through music, dialogue and media. Adapted from the existing digital series of the same name, this live presentation will be the first public performance in the next stages of the project. Combining traditional and adapted song, while drawing on cultural touch points from Japanese, Swedish and Canadian culture, *The HAFU Project* shares a semi-autobiographical story in the struggle with identity and seeking new meaning in community. As a person growing up between cultures, what does it mean when you don't engage with your identity for fear that you won't be taken seriously? This multimedia theatre performance takes the audience along a musical exploration in peeling back the layers of how identity manifests as a product of social circumstance.

\*\*\*

**Ourofest**  
May 25-28  
[show.ourocollective.com/ourofest](http://show.ourocollective.com/ourofest)

The festival will include youth and adult street dance battles, performances by local artists and national guests and accessible community workshops. Ourofest aims to provide local and national artists with a public platform to share their work, create visibility for B.C.'s street dance culture and unite a diverse audience in celebration at different public spaces. Check out the Street Dance Battles on May 25, discover the incredible lineup of national artists set to grace the stage at Ourofest on May 26 for an unforgettable day of free performance and attend workshops on May 27 and 28. For locations and more information, check out the festival's website.

\*\*\*

**Festival of Israeli Culture**  
May 26, 12 noon-4:30 p.m.  
[www.jccgv.com/event/festival-of-israeli-culture](http://www.jccgv.com/event/festival-of-israeli-culture)

Join the community at the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver to celebrate Israeli Culture with Israeli food, music, art, wine tasting, cocktails and much more. Share in the vibrant traditions of Israel during the festival. For more information, check out the JCCGV website.



▲ A dance-theatre adaptation of Christian Bök's *Eunoia* will be on display at the Firehall Arts Centre from May 8 to 11.

*The Papa Penguin Play* welcomes audiences of all ages to a penguin chick first birthday party, a celebration like you've never seen. Recommended for All Ages. For more information, check out the Carousel Theatre for Young People's website.

\*\*\*

**A Case for the Existence of God**  
May 16-June 9  
[www.pacifictheatre.org](http://www.pacifictheatre.org)

Playing at the Pacific Theatre from May 16 to June 9 is director Kaitlin Williams' *A Case for the Existence of God*. Two young fathers - a mortgage broker and a plant worker desperate to buy a

piece of land - meet to discuss a loan in an unassuming cubicle. As Keith and Ryan grapple with the realities of adulthood, a shared quest for meaning and belonging transcends the systems that fence them in. Check out the theatre's website for tickets and more information.

\*\*\*

**2024 Cloverdale Rodeo and Country Fair**  
May 17-20  
[www.cloverdalerodeo.com](http://www.cloverdalerodeo.com)

The Cloverdale Rodeo will host some of the world's best cowboys and cowgirls in a unique Invitational Rodeo Format that ensures

the sports premier athletes are showcased throughout five rodeo performances. There will also be an indigenous village, live music performances, 40+ food trucks, 30+ carnival rides, family-friendly events and more than a little bit of action - the 2024 Cloverdale Rodeo and Country Fair is bigger and bolder than ever! For a complete list of events and happenings at the fair, check out their website.

\*\*\*

**Fort Langley's 102nd Annual May Day Parade**  
May 20, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.  
[www.maydayfortlangley.com](http://www.maydayfortlangley.com)

The Fort Langley Lions are excited to host the May Day Parade followed by a Family Fun Festival in the Park. This free community event was established in 1922. It brings together local musical talent, community members & vendors to the Fort. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets, umbrellas (rain or shine) + good spirits to Fort Langley where you will enjoy all that their beautiful town and May Day parade have to offer. Check out their website for an events timeline and list of activities.

\*\*\*

**Answers:**

- |                      |                       |                    |                      |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 - LOCALIZATION     | 7 - ST - ASIA - ALSO  | A - LAMBRISAGES    | G - ZAINS - ANDINE   |
| 2 - ALAMEDA - UNCO   | 8 - SUPS - ENDUE      | B - OLA - TUNAGE   | H - RU - DONS        |
| 3 - MACES - IDEATE   | 9 - ANI - ARDOR - ME  | C - CACTUS - PIÈGE | I - TUEE - SAUR - TA |
| 4 - TRAIN - ERA      | 10 - GAELS - IN - TE  | D - AMERS - AS     | J - INARA - LE - TEC |
| 5 - ROUST - SR - AVE | 11 - EGG - EINSTEIN   | E - LÉSATES - ASE  | K - OCTAVES - MEIR   |
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