



Blue Met as varied and interesting as ever

Description

Blue Metropolis Literary Festival takes place virtually from April 24 to May 2

By **Byron Toben**

Hard to believe that the annual Blue Metropolis Literary Festival is now in its 23rd edition.

Brief history

The world's first multilingual literary festival was founded in Montreal by **Linda Leith** in 1999. In 2011, she left to pursue her own activities as a writer and publisher. (Her memoir *The Girl From Dream City: A Literary Life* has just been published).

The Blue Met is now presented by the non-profit **Blue Metropolis Foundation**, currently headed by Ms. **William St-Hilaire**.



Amjad Iraqi

It has presented readings, on-stage interviews and panel discussions. Originally dealing with French and English authors, it expanded to include many Spanish authors and an occasional contribution of German, Italian, Portuguese, Yiddish or Arabic as well.

In 2000, it instituted several annual awards, headed by **The Blue Met International Literary Grand Prize**.

In 2013, a **Premio Metropolis Azul prize** for any work of fiction in Spanish, French or English exploring Hispanic culture or history was added.

In 2015, two new prizes: **First Peoples prize** (North American indigenous writer in any genre) and **Words to Change prize** (connecting communities)

In 2016, the **Literary Diversity prize** (migrant to Quebec residing in Montreal for a first publication)

In 2018, **Violet prize** (established LGBTQ writer for their body of work)

2021 program

The overriding theme of this 2021 Festival is **The Challenge Of Our Times**. As in 2020, that intruding pandemic virus has caused a shift to streamed events. A full program can be viewed at bluemetropolis.org

Kudos to the many Government and private sponsors who made it possible for the hard-working Blue Met team to once again proceed with a varied and interesting program despite all.

In this article, I limit my highlight suggestions to some English language events only but urge readers to check out the excellent French and other language items they may be attracted to.

While viewers may miss the personal face-to-face encounters of the past, there are three advantages to the streamed viewings of 2021.



- No conflicts over which event at the same time, on the same day, since events will be filmed and available to watch later.
- No tickets, so no sold-out meetings.
- No payment is required to watch.

Here are eight items that caught my eye listed in order of initial time and day available:



Ayelet Waldman

April 24

At 3 pm

FIRST PEOPLES LITERARY PRIZE

Richard Van Camp, storyteller /author and a Canadian member of Dogrib (Dene) nation, has written dozens of books.

April 25

At 7 pm

TRENCHANT WITNESS

David Grossman, an Israeli author/peace activist, seeks to have people view each other as humans.

April 29

At 10 am

THEATRE AFTER COVID: MONTREAL

Marianne Ackerman (playwright, author) hosts **Amy Blackmore** (Mainline Theatre/Fringe Festival/Bouge D'ici), **Annabel Souter**



(Porte Parole) and **Jessie Mill /Martine Dennewald** (Festival des Amériques)

Also at 10 am

DUBLIN BOOK FESTIVAL JOINS BLUE MET with three subjects:

Where Are You, Puffling? (children's books)

Emerging Writers Podcast

Neil Jordan/Nuala O'Connor (includes musical interludes)

At 7 pm



Marianne Ackerman

ART AND ACTIVISM

A panel with **Kim Scott** (Australia), **Gregory Scofield** (Canadian Metis) and **Devon A. Mihesuah** (U.S. Chocktaw), three indigenous authors who discuss the environment, systemic racism and technological changes affecting art.

May 2

At 12:30 pm

ALL PEOPLE SHARE THE SAME RIGHTS

Jim Torczner, a long-time community activist, has a new book.

At 1 pm

GABRIEL SAFDIE EVENT: JERUSALEM OF THE MIND

This is the third year that Mr. Safdie has sponsored discussions on the search for Israeli/Palestinian peace. Host **Joseph Rosen** introduces **Ayelet Waldman**, **Ala Hiebel**, **Amjad Iraqi** and **Ayelet Gundar-Goshen**.



At 2 pm

LINDA LEITH BOOK LAUNCH

of her memoir, *The Girl From Dream City: A Literary Life*.

Post festival events

In addition to these Festival events, there are a few POST FESTIVAL LITERARY WALKING TOURS.

Check out the **May 20 Yiddish Circuit**, a virtual tour that will explore the haunts of several fine Montreal Jewish writers not as well known as Mordechai Richler, Irving Layton or Leonard Cohen. **Shelley Pomerance** is the coordinator and facilitator, with speakers **Goldie Morgenthaler**, **Norman Ravvin** and **Sherry Simon** discussing writers **Ida Maze**, **Rochi Korn**, **J.I. Segal** and **Yaacov Zipper**.

Closing salutation

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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Date Created

April 2021