



Picnics, portents and  
poetry in the park /2

## Description

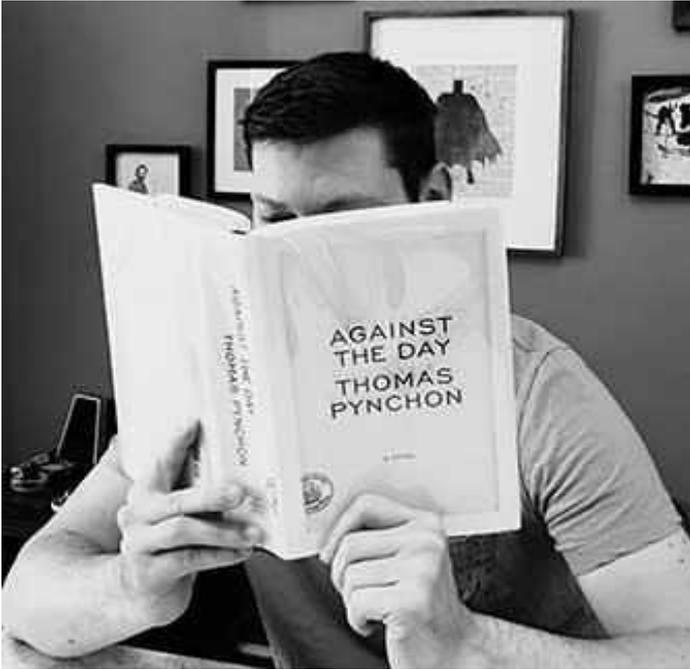
# Plateau-based spoken word poetry group at Words and Music

By **Wanda Potrykus**

This summer, **Words and Music** has invited some of the poets and musicians from the Plateau-based spoken word poetry group the **Lawn Chair Soirée**, providing an opportunity for Westmounters, friends, family and visitors to come enjoy some of the renowned Montreal Plateau vibes at our own local summer poetry event... Words and Music, **Sunday, August 11**, 2 pm to 4 pm, under the maple tree on Willow Point by the Lagoon in Westmount Park.

That's not to say when talking of style, Westmounters, West-enders and other off-island and poets and musicians don't also have their own idiosyncratic, vibrant and individualistic sense of style too since they certainly do, as this event will showcase.

## Outlaws and outliers



Devon Gallant (Outlaws don't show their faces – Devon behind a book) – Image: courtesy of Devon Gallant

**Devon Gallant**, is an outlaw poet of four collections of poetry: *The Day After*, *the flower dress and other lines*, *His Inner Season*, and recently *S(tars) & M(agnets)*, a book that [bill bissett](#) (who the Toronto Star refers to as the “rarest of literary figures: a countercultural icon who continues to compel and confound”) called “a mirakul uv a book.”

For readers not acquainted with the term “outlaw poetry”, it is unconventional or rebellious poetry considered to be in defiance of norms or laws. Wikipedia describes it as “a type of marginal poetry with Beat sensibility often categorized as Spoken Word”, an explanation which doesn't do it justice. Personally, I think it defies categorization, which is why it is called “outlaw”, since it simply doesn't follow the established rules of a lot of written poetry beyond the use of rhyme and rhythm, being freestyle but not necessarily slam. Come listen to Devon and decide what it is for yourself.

Devon's work has been featured in a wide variety of magazines including *Vallum*, *Carousel*, *Bitterzoet*, *Misunderstandings* and elsewhere. He is the publisher of [Cactus Press](#) and the ebullient host of [Accent Open Mic](#), a weekly bilingual poetry event that takes place most Monday evenings from 7 pm to 10 pm at La Marche à côté, 5043 St-Denis, Montreal, which bills itself as a “bar culturel de quartier”. Accent Open Mic was created to “give writers in Montreal a platform to share their work on a continual basis”. It features two poets every week – one Anglophone, one Francophone – followed by an open mic session. Do try it, it's a lot of fun and no, you don't have to be a poet, or even an aspiring poet, to attend and enjoy.

The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit... the arbitrariness of the constraint only serves to obtain precision of execution.

– Igor Stravinsky

Words and Music is also very pleased to feature **Maxianne Berger**, whose poetry meanders between Japanese genres, such as the haiku and the tanka, and OuLiPo or Oulipian-style constraints. Her 2016 haiku collection entitled *Winnows* combines these two approaches in a radical erasure of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. It had

taken her seven years to write it.

## To OuLiPo or not to OuLiPo?

For the uninitiated, OuLiPo is the abbreviation applied to a group of predominantly French writers and mathematicians who seek to create works of art using restrictive or constrained writing techniques. Although referring to musical composition, Igor Stravinsky summed up the idea this way: “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit... the arbitrariness of the constraint only serves to obtain precision of execution”.



Maxianne Berger – Image: courtesy of Maxianne Berger

The OuLiPo technique is short-form for *ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (workshop of potential literature). It is also offered as a way to overcome that most paralyzing of syndromes known worldwide as “writer’s block”.

“... the Oulipians constructed techniques and exercises which provided relief from this common problem in a counter-intuitive manner. They tightened the reigns on the writing process by imposing limitations. They found that by setting rules to which the writer was to strictly adhere they could free the creative process, both for ‘work-in-progress’ projects and as a method for inspiring new ideas.”<sup>1</sup>

A popular OuLiPo formula (this is where the math comes in) known as N+7 is where a writer takes an existing poem and substitutes each noun (N) with one appearing 7 nouns away in the dictionary. Care must be taken that the substituted word does not share a root with the word it is replacing. Results vary exponentially depending on the dictionary used.

To learn more about the OuLiPo writing technique I refer you to [poet.org](http://poet.org)

Maxianne writes in both English and French and her haiku, tanka, linked forms, book reviews and articles have been published in journals and over fifteen anthologies in the United States, Europe, Oceania and Japan, as well as in Canada. Her third book, the two-language tanka collection entitled *un renard roux / a red fox*, was published in 2014. With Franco-Ontarian **Mike Montreuil**, she co-edits the on-line journal [Cirrus : tankas de nos jours](#).

She arrives at Words and Music fresh from a weeklong workshop with the OuLiPo writers in France. It will be fun to see what new examples of the form she shares with us.

### “Telling the truth through poetry”

To assist in easing the imaginary divide between the east and west sides of Montreal Island, Words and Music is pleased to welcome **Deanna Radford**. Writer, poet and performer extraordinaire Deanna Radford is at home in several areas of our wonderful island city. Known to many Westmounters as the former curator of the [Atwater Poetry Project](#), which was an entertaining, monthly event of long duration at Westmount’s “other library” – the [Atwater Library](#).



Deanna Radford – Image: Vi Photographie

Sadly, however, after 15 years of support, the Canada Council refused funding for 2019 so this year the project is limping along with a greatly reduced schedule and is regrouping to deal with the loss of its vital operating income. However, the [Atwater library’s website](#) hosts recordings from past years, and it is well worth a visit to those wishing to hear a wide variety of poetic voices and ideas, as each presentation was followed by an audience Q&A session.

Currently, Deanna is completing an MA in creative writing at Concordia University. Her poems have been published in *Art + Wonder*, *The Capilano Review*, *carte blanche*, *the Headlight Anthology*, and *Vallum*. Her extensive writing on music and sound art has appeared in publications in Canada and the US.

She has been featured at the Lawn Chair Soirée readings on several occasions. Most recently she has performed her poetry thesis at academic conferences in Montreal and at Large Objects, Moving Air 2018 in London, UK, and TEXT/SOUND/PERFORMANCE 2019 in Dublin, Ireland, in April 2019. **Cloud Circuit** is her poetry, sax, and sine wave band, which we are hoping to welcome to Words and Music sometime in the future.

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They are scheduled to release an EP with Archive Officielle Publications in the fall of 2019. But until then we are lucky to have Deanna perform for us this summer.

### Wild and wacky west-end vibe



Michelle Franklin – Image: Marisa Parisella

Words and Music is very pleased to introduce Westmount audiences to a very close neighbour of ours, **Michelle Franklin**, who along with Noah Tolhurst, form the **Frewyn Music Project**. Michelle lives on Westmount's border with NDG, on lower Claremont, where, due to another of Montreal island's somewhat mysterious zoning quirks, the street and western sidewalk below Sherbrooke forms part of Westmount but the apartment buildings, houses and gardens bordering them don't.

If you haven't come across Michelle's wild and wacky, and occasionally searing sense of humour in books, such as *I hate summer* from her Introvert series, you might have read one of her other books, as this prolific local author of 17 books also writes fantasy books such as *Baba Connrith*, *the Marridon Novellas*, *Frewyn Fables*, and *Tales from Frewyn*, all part of the Haanta series of fantasy tales, appropriate for all ages.

There are many songs and poems in her books, including *Merrow in the Barrow*, *Ramblin' Heather*, and *Creature of the Deep*

, which will be showcased at Words and Music. Over the summer, Noah and Michelle are recording all the songs, which means everyone can soon enjoy the music from the fantasy world of Frewyn.

Her latest book, *Creatures of Fairytale and Myth* brings ancient monsters from Celtic and Viking mythology into a humorous fantasy setting, and a follow-up novel about fan-favourite Myndil the Missionary will be out later in 2019. More info can be found on her [blog](#).

Heads-up: if any of Michelle's local fantasy literature fans want her to autograph a book or two for them, she and Noah will be manning the book table at Words and Music (showcasing a variety of our performers' works) when they're not on stage performing that is. Drop by and say "hi". Don't be shy, Michelle certainly isn't (or at least pretends not to be).



Noah Tolhurst – Image: courtesy of Noah Tolhurst

## Need a luthier anyone?

As a multi-talented, multi-instrumentalist, folksinger **Noah Tolhurst** uses his knowledge of his family and local township history to create folk songs for a new generation. But singing, playing and composing aren't his only skills as he is also an industrial designer, local historian, woodworker, carpenter, owner of Studio Tolhurst, as well as a skilled luthier, who handcrafts all of the instruments he plays. For those interested in learning more about his wonderfully designed and unusual instruments, a visit to his studio in Howick, Quebec is a must. His debut album *Stillbuster* is now available. For more information check out his [website](#).

## Whimsical and other notions

Local resident author and poet, Westmount's own **Ann Gamsa**, will also be joining us on stage once again this year. Her poem, *How a Typo Changed the World* was a finalist in the Montreal International Poetry Prize, as was her postcard story *My Sister* in the Writer's Union of Canada contest. Ann is a psychologist and psychotherapist, specializing in pain management as well as a grandmother, a writer, a poet and an actor, and is a member of Westmount's long-running theatre troupe Dramatis Personae, based out of Victoria Hall.



Ann Gamsa – Image: courtesy of Ann Gamsa

A prolific wordsmith, Ann writes short stories, poetry, essays, and stories for children, as well as academic articles and chapters. She has taught innovative courses such as *Notions of Happiness*, *Notions of Time*, and *Notions of Love*. She enjoys writing lyrics for causes and events such as *Oh Cannabis* set to the tune of *Oh Canada* and *Jingle Bells*, *Pain is Hell* for patients with chronic pain. She has a marvellous sense of humour as when I asked for a photo, she sent some of her body drawings, courtesy of her grandchildren for whom she agrees to be a living canvas. Very artistic, Ann, as well as environmentally friendly – save a tree, be the canvas!

If we're lucky she may share one or two of her humour-laden poems. Her children's story, *Shmurky Shamoys Who Didn't Have Enough Toys* was published in 2017 by the Toronto Press, Iron Rabbit Bindery, the new operator of which is also joining us in the park.

## Tiny books to treasure

If you're not lucky enough to be acquainted with the intricate work of the **Iron Rabbit Bindery**, founded by **Kate Reidel**, they're the producers of tiny printed books that literally have to be seen to be believed. Check them out when they next resurface at [Expozine](#), Montreal's annual small press, comics and zine fair, which is Canada's largest zine and independent bookseller's fair held each year, usually in November.

## Mermaids, riddles and iron rabbits

**Anne Stratford** is a bilingual multi-disciplinary artist, actor (Dorval Lakeshore Players, Dramatis Personae, Hudson Players) and ESL teacher. Her varied skills include book creation (*Fasten Your Fascinators*, *Trapped: A Canadian Guide to the Zodiac*, *Dep-Beautiful: A Companion's Guide to Compliments in Vietnamese* with Iron Rabbit Bindery); illustration (*Cuthbert and the Merpeople*, *I Once Saw a Ship*, *Once More I Saw the Stars* and various magazines); writing; translating poetry and prose into French; and word-performance (Lapalabrava, Lawn Chair Soirée, Yellow Door Poetry and Prose Readings).

Plus she's just back from creating sketch-portraits and calendars in the Parrsboro artists' community in Nova Scotia. She says her first degree (Art History-Studio Art-Theatre BFA- Concordia) was so broad, the university discontinued the program! She comes from a family of writers, teachers, actors and architects spread both across Canada and abroad. She has taught drawing in Northern Quebec, in Toronto, Montreal and in Parrsboro,

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Anne Stratford – Image: Harry Fox

Anne's sage advice is, "Everyone has it within him or herself to learn. If you're drawn to art, any form of art, pursue learning it. The world needs your contributions. And never, ever mind the negative comments you or others feel entitled to say. Seize the positive, and progress steps in quickly."

Anne will be following her own advice as she faces new challenges in taking over the reins of the tiny Toronto based press – the Iron Rabbit Bindery. (More on that in another article.)

Looking back she says it was especially appropriate that *Cuthbert and the Merpeople* should have been her first illustrated book since as a child she had wanted to be a mermaid when she grew up. She hasn't yet realized that dream but is convinced there's still time, although I'm not sure if she was referring to growing up or becoming a mermaid?

Meanwhile, she recently adapted into French the English-language riddle poem [A Shaughnessy Village Riddle](#) composed by MC **Wanda Potrykus** that was one of the bilingual performance pieces in the Atwater Library-Concordia Promenade Parlante (Talking walk): [Episodes in Changing Neighbourhood](#) that took place in the Shaughnessy village area of Montreal in April 2019.

So are the performers at Words and Music 2019 exceptional or wonderful persons? Do come and sit awhile to see and hear and make up your mind for yourself.

In addition, a big thank you from all of us to Westmount's Community Events department for including Words and Music in their 2019 line-up of summer events.

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## Words and Music 2019

Save the date: **Sunday, August 11**

Place: Under the maple tree on Willow Point by the Lagoon in Westmount Park

Time: 2 pm to 4 pm



Rain venue: Victoria Hall, Sherbrooke W

Note: Since this event includes word artists as well as music, it is best to sit closer to the stage rather than across the lagoon in order to hear better as the words can get distorted as they float across the water. Bring a picnic, your lawn chair or a blanket and enjoy a Montreal Plateau vs. a West-end spoken word and musical vibe at our own version of a Lawn Chair Après-midi.

1 – Source: [owlcation.com/academia/Try-Oulipo-and-No-More-Writers-Block](http://owlcation.com/academia/Try-Oulipo-and-No-More-Writers-Block)

Definitions courtesy of Merriam-Webster dictionary

*Outlier*: a person or thing that is atypical within a particular group, class, or category

*Portent(s)*: 1. A sign or warning that something, especially something momentous, is likely to happen. 2. Literary: an exceptional or wonderful person or thing.

Feature image: Andrew Burlone

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**Wanda Potrykus** is a writer, editor, translator and poet. A graduate of McGill, she has spent most of her career in marketing communications, PR, event and media relations specializing in international aviation, telecommunications, education and the marketing of the arts.

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