



Bloomsday Montréal celebrates 10th anniversary

Description

Another successful streamed festival that was free for all

By **Byron Toben**

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In 2011, Chemistry professor **David Schurman** and his English professor wife **Judith** co-founded the annual **Bloomsday Montréal** celebration.

Bloomsday, now celebrated in about 60 cities around the world, is based upon June 16, 1904, the date in **James Joyce's** landmark 1922 novel, **Ulysses**, in which **Leopold Bloom**, its fictional half Jewish, half Irish protagonist, wandered around Dublin while his Irish singer wife, **Molly**, entertained her “manager.”



Judith and David Schurman – Image: Bloomsday
Montréal

In 1954, several Dublin literary critics of the day gathered to re-enact Blooms' meanderings, with frequent pub stops. Since then, the celebration has spread worldwide. Most places seem to be one-day affairs. Montreal has evolved into a five-day adventure, with workshops, music, readings, walks, etc., supplementing the tip of the glass.

COVID-19 drove the 2020 version to an impressive streamed event, as has 2021.

In the meantime, David Schurman has passed the baton to scholar **Kevin Wright** as president and actor/singer **Kathleen McAuliffe**. Sadly, Judith Schurman passed away unexpectedly in February. **Kathleen Fee** was a host and the artistic director of the Festival.

The 2021 celebration opened on June 12 with **Molly in Motion**. What a pleasure to see **Dennis Trudeau** acting as overall moderator. The onetime CBC television anchor is the host extraordinaire with his perfect bilingualism, wide knowledge, tact, wit and humour. These qualities served him well as he, for a time, moderated the annual Atwater Library fundraiser cocktail and the Cinemania film festival.

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The *Molly in Motion* session opened with a commemoration of the passing of co-founder Judith Moneychuck Schurman. Trudeau went on to remind us that an estimated 40% of Quebecers had some Irish ancestry and that Joyce's book, banned at first from import to the USA, written in the aftermath of WWI, changed the boundaries of writing, much as has guest Montrealer **Margie Gillis** challenged the boundaries of dance.



Kevin Wright and Kathleen Fee in 2018 – Image: Bloomsday Montréal



Internationally acclaimed, she has some 150 creations blending humanism and emotion. Ms. Gillis, influenced by **Siobhan McKenna's** classic reading of Molly Bloom's reverie, has already created some group dance choreography on the "whole Blooming thing" but is now working on a solo version. After showing some clips of her work, she volunteered her observation that dancers, as well as all artists in Canada, benefitted from its socialized health care system, freeing them from fears of destitution from their sporadic income, should they fall ill.

Variety Concert

June 13 featured a variety musical concert. Joyce loved music and had a superior tenor voice. Though not mentioned in this session, he even competed in a contest against the great **John McCormack** who went on to greater fame in the USA.

This session opened with Kathleen Fee singing the 1884 parlour tune *Love's Old Sweet Song* whose refrain "Just a song at twilight" is often confused as being its title. This selection was apt as, in *Ulysses*, it was the song Molly Bloom was to rehearse with her manager while Leopold was out walking. (John McCormack has a [3:31 record](#) of it on the Internet). Ms. Fee ended the session with a rendition of *King of The Fairies*.

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In between were bits by **Mark Evans**, in England, who sang accompanied by his own concertina; a talk with **Peter Bennett**, author of a book about Irish passengers on "packet ships"; **Jose Raphael Silva** in Argentina and **Johanne Patry** with song on guitar; and a special appearance by popular Montreal actress **Julie Tamiko Manning** describing her research on her documentary play about the forced imprisonment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Their internal exile contrasted with Joyce's self-exile to Trieste, Paris and Zurich, inspiring him to write his one play, *Exiles*, rarely performed.

Academic Panels

These took place on June 14.

Panel #1, hosted by **Geraldina Mendez**, featured three authors: **John Francis McCourt**, a professor of English currently at the University of Macerata in Italy, has authored several books, including *Years of Bloom: Joyce in Trieste*; **Casey Lawrence**, a grad student in English literature at Trinity College in Ireland, currently weathering the COVID-19 travel bans at her mother's in Chicago, has studied and written on Joyce. Joyce's cinematic style of writing was heightened by his many eye operations when, wearing eye bandages for long periods, he experienced a "theatre of the mind"; and **Mary Lawton**, a Ph.D. researcher in Cork, Ireland, has written on anatomical references in Joyce's writings. Previous Bloomsday Montreal years have featured Joyce's listing of various foods and other items.

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Panel #2 spotlighted **Cleo Hanaway** of the University of Bristol in the UK. She discussed Joyce's blindness which enhanced his senses of smell and touch. She was followed by **Marcello Zabaloy**, a writer in Spanish.

Lessons From History of Irish Cinema

Began June 15 with speakers **Kerry McElroy**, a part-time professor of cinema at Concordia University, and from Cork, Ireland, **Cian Gill**, who runs a podcast there focused on *From Joyce to John Ford*. Joyce, while living in Trieste, befriended a group there who were investing in starting a cinema theatre in Dublin. They hired him to manage it, which he returned to Ireland to do in 1909. Financially, this did not work out well, as it played European films, whereas the market preferred American films.

Back in the U.S, **John Ford**, a first-generation Irish American born in Maine became a successful Hollywood director and eventually produced the first big feature Technicolour film made in Ireland, ***The Quiet Man***, in 1952. It featured John Wayne as an American returning to the old sod and Maureen O'Hara as the local lovely lass, as well as Barry FitzGerald as a crusty old character. Officialdom disapproved of the film as showing Ireland as too backward, and the Church disapproved in general. Locals, hired as extras, loved it, as did audiences.



The Quiet Man with John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara – Image: Republic Pictures

An interview with **Ann Lewis** concluded the day. Ms. Lewis was born in Belfast. As the troubles increased, her family moved to Dublin and then England. She won a scholarship for further study in Paris, where she met a Montrealer and moved here to be with him. Now married to a medical doctor and her being the child of a medical doctor, she felt that she could excel in different fields than medicine. Her artworks, many photographic, have been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts as well as at various galleries and government buildings.

She has written two books and acts as a life coach. She also became a TV host on CTV for 28 years. As such, she interviewed **Leonard Cohen** in Los Angeles. I thought that interview would be the focus of this session, Leonard and Ireland, but it wasn't so I will add my own comment. Mr. Cohen appeared in concert in Ireland several times mostly in Dublin. He often included the ballad *Kevin Barry* in his show. That song, written anonymously after the 1916 Rising, bemoaned the hanging of 18-year-old Kevin as a result of its put down. It became a staple of reform and was also voiced by **Paul Robeson** on his Irish trips.



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Readings from Ulysses

Opening this key day, June 16, various locals including **Howard Krosnick**, **Pat Machin** and **Kevin Wright**, read passages from the book.

Concluding the day, Kathleen Fee again voiced Molly Bloom's reverie. And yes, yes, oh yes, many women volunteer to be featured in this one, but Kathleen does it so well she is called upon again.

I did not get to watch an **Irish Soda Bread** streaming nor attend a **live walkthrough of Irish Montreal** but list them to be complete and show the breadth of Bloomsday Montreal's efforts. And so farewell to the many contributors until next year. Thanks to them, the technicians and the financial support that enabled this to be a free event for all.

And as Dennis Trudeau added in signing off, special thanks too, to a certain Mr. James Joyce.

Feature image: Donovan King's live walkthrough of Irish Montreal, Bloomsday Montréal

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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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