



WINTER 2009

The newsletter of the Vancouver International Writers Festival

INSIDE: Festival Wrap | Spreading the Word
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The Vancouver International Writers Festival strives to encourage an appreciation of the written word and to promote literacy by providing a forum where readers and writers can meet. We produce special events and an annual Festival featuring Canadian and international writers for readers of all ages.

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Writers Festival sets record for sold-out events

The 2009 Vancouver International Writers & Readers Festival broke all previous records for sold-out events, with an average attendance of 87% capacity and 65% events sold out.

“It’s rewarding to have so many people flock to Granville Island to see and hear writers,” says Hal Wake, the Festival’s artistic director. “For thousands of people, this Festival strikes a chord, putting them in touch with other readers and writers who share their enthusiasm. But this is also an arts and culture event that brings an economic benefit to our city, the direct result of 14,000 people coming out to events.”

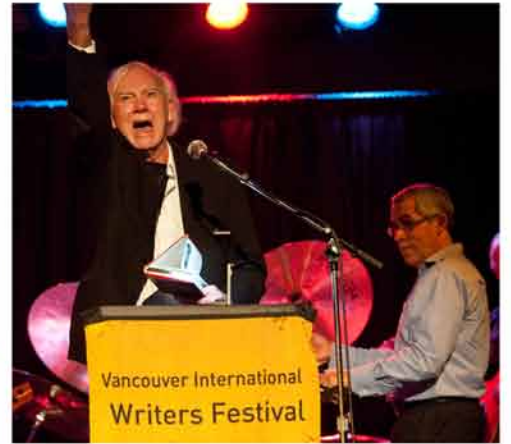
More than 100 national and international authors appeared at the Festival, drawn to Vancouver from Australia, the UK, the US, Belgium, China, Italy, France and Bolivia. Internationally acclaimed Canadian authors were also in abundance. “Even during a year when the economy was on everyone’s mind, we were able to match our record-breaking attendance numbers of last year,” says Wake. “Even before the Festival week began, more than 1,100 people came to hear Margaret Atwood, resulting in another sold-out event. Audience turnout like that makes us confident that the arts are important to people in this province.”

The Writers Festival ended Sunday evening, Oct. 25, with CBC’s senior correspondent Peter Mansbridge telling stories about his experiences interviewing US President Obama, volunteer nurses in Sri Lanka, a mother in Holland and other ordinary and extraordinary people, which had the capacity audience both laughing and somber before they handed Mansbridge a standing ovation at the end of the evening.

A record number of school groups also attended the Festival’s first three days, with 91 different schools from the Lower Mainland, Squamish and Vancouver Island coming to see authors talking about writing and reading in both French and English.



Students at a Festival event with Gordon Korman. Photo: Chris Cameron



Margaret Atwood, Jane Mortifee, Linda Kidder and Rebecca Jenkins - The Year of the Flood performance at Christ Church Cathedral. Photo: Tim Matheson. Mariatu Kamara talks to a school audience about her experiences as a child victim of war in Sierra Leone. Leon Rooke and Sal Ferreras at the Literary Cabaret. Photos: Chris Cameron.



Audrey Niffenegger. Spoken word artist C.R. Avery at the Festival's Word! event for secondary schools. Literary Cabaret participants Tash Aw and Chelsea Cain. Students at an event with Gordon Korman.



Sarah Waters and Bill Richardson. Gordon Korman. Graphic novelist Seth signs and illustrates a copy of his book. UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy at the Poetry Bash.

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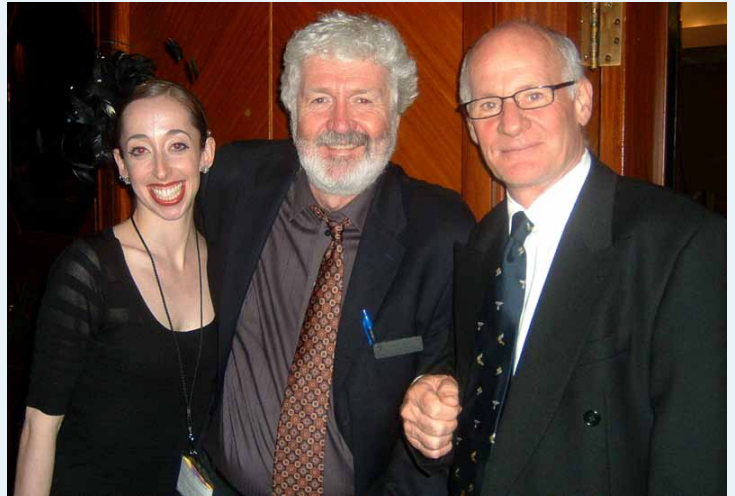
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spreading the word



Gala volunteer Rivka Lipsey, VIWF Artistic Director Hal Wake and Allan MacDougall
 Photo: Ann McDonell

Literati Gala Honours Allan MacDougall

Allan MacDougall, long time VIWF supporter and co-founder of Raincoast Books, was honoured at the Festival's Literati Gala at the Four Season Hotel on October 19. Literati raised \$28,500 for Spreading the Word, the Festival's education programs for BC students.



The Alma Lee Legacy Fund was established in 2006 to honour the achievement of the VIWF's founder Alma Lee, who retired in 2005. Revenue from the fund will help us present acclaimed Canadian and international writers to Festival audiences and inspire young readers and writers by offering Spreading the Word programs for schools. For more information on contributing to the Alma Lee Legacy Fund please call Ann McDonell at 604 681 6330.

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spreading the word

YOUTHWRITES

More than 1500 students entered the 2009 YouthWrites contest. At the beginning of a class period, students were given the following words: compost, Skytrain, Facebook, sob, what if, labyrinth. They had to write any form of prose, poetry, short story, screenplay etc. within the class period, incorporating all those words. The overall winner was **Alyson Kissner**, a grade 11 student from West Vancouver Secondary School, for her poem *The City*. Read the winning submissions from each grade level on the VIWF website, www.writersfest.bc.ca. The winners spent a day behind-the-scenes at Youthink Magazine, the YouthWrites magazine partner, learning how to put a magazine together.



Alyson Kissner. Rukhsana Khan.

WRITER IN RESIDENCE: RUKHSANA KHAN IN PRINCE RUPERT

Award winning author **Rukhsana Khan** took Prince Rupert by storm in late October, teaching a creative writing class each day at Charles Hays Secondary School, giving a multi-cultural workshop to teachers, and talking at elementary schools, the public library, a book club, bookstore. Within five days, Rukhsana told her stories and shared her love of writing and reading with approximately 700 people.

"This was an exceptionally successful writer-in-residence project," says **Ilona Beiks**, VIWF's Education Coordinator. "The entire community of Prince Rupert embraced this opportunity. Even when she was walking down the street, someone would come up to Rukhsana and thank her for being there, and inspiring their child."

Rukhsana had an equally rewarding experience. "I love this country. I love discovering all the little nooks and crannies of it. Having grown up in a small town in a little-known corner of Canada, it is a dream come true for me to come to this small city and share my hard-won expertise with students who I bet are not so different from the kid I was three decades ago," says Khan.

Dianne Rabel, teacher-librarian at CHSS, went all out to make this residency the best for the students, the author, and community. Follow the events of the week and the writings of the students in the workshop on writology.wordpress.com

The Writer in Residence program is sponsored by BC Transmission Corporation and supported by the Michael R. Shaw Fund.

READING WITH WRITERS

Inner city schools were served up a veritable feast of Festival authors this year thanks to support from HSBC Bank Canada. Each author charmed and inspired students, in an up close and personal experience students normally wouldn't have — even compelling students to line up to sign out the author's books from the school library.

This fall's visiting authors were: **Matthew Skelton** (Hastings Elementary); **Rukhsana Khan** (Byrne Secondary and Queen Victoria Annex); **Mariatu Kamaru** (Britannia Secondary School); **Tim Wynne-Jones** (Sir Charles Tupper Secondary); **Paul Yee** (Chief Maquinna Elementary); **Rochelle Strauss** (Nootka Elementary); **Billeh Nickerson** (Mini Ideal School); **Jude Isabella** (Lord Brock Elementary); and **C.J. Taylor** (Beaconsfield Elementary).

"On behalf of Britannia Secondary, I would like to thank Mariatu for coming and demonstrating the power of compassion, love and strength. Our students were so impressed by her grace and intelligence. When the students were able to talk to her they could really see what makes her so blessed. Truly we are the ones who were blessed for having met her. Many many thanks for the opportunity."

- David Low, English Department Head, Britannia Secondary

"Thanks for sending us C.J. Taylor. She is lovely and the students really warmed to her. Her energy is thoughtful and gentle and her art work is stunning. I was able to pick up her newest titles at the Writers Festival and she signed them all. It was a great morning!"

- Lynne Marie Russell, Beaconsfield Elementary

The Reading with Writers program is sponsored by HSBC Bank Canada



Students in Rukhsana Khan's writing class, Charles Hay Secondary. Tim Wynne-Jones signs books for fans. Students from Lord Byng Secondary at a Festival event.

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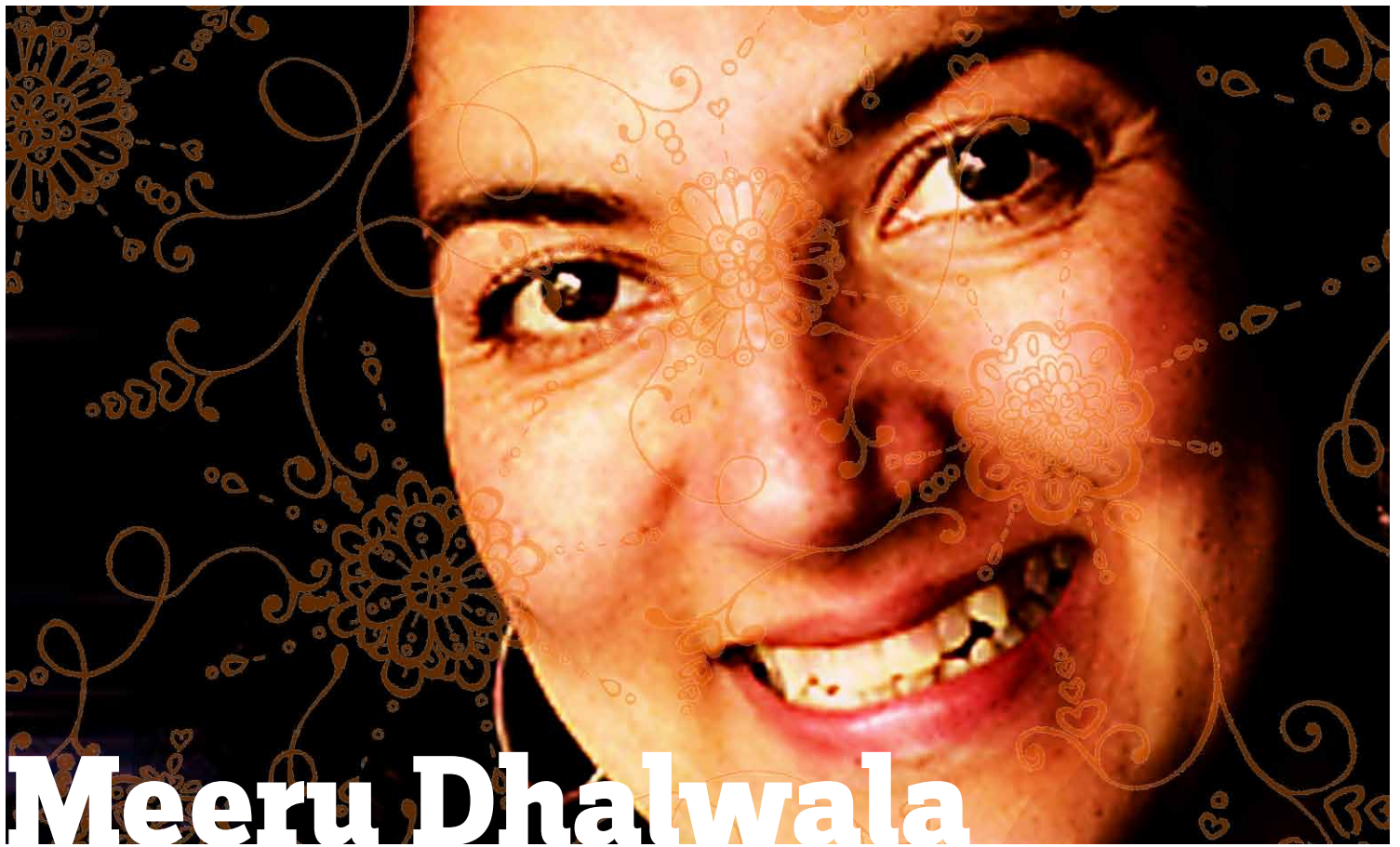
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VIWF Board Chair and novelist Anne Giardini interviewed Festival supporter and restaurateur Meeru Dhalwala.

On paper Meeru Dhalwala is notable. As one of the owners of Vancouver's beloved Indian restaurants, Vij and Rangoli, both on 11th Avenue, she and her husband Vikram Vij have been aptly called Vancouver's "gastronomic royalty". Dhalwala is also known as an energetic mother of two daughters, a writer and compiler (one best-selling and award-winning cookbook was published in 2006 and another is on the way), and a passionate supporter of human rights. She has recently agreed to share what she has learned about blending art - cooking, in her case - with the sometimes harsh realities of business with students at Emily Carr.

But Dhalwala in person outshines the many accomplishments that make up her impressive CV. She fairly bounces with energy. Her conversation is engaging and lively. She embraces ideas and bounces them back again with her own spin and force. She sums up situations and problems in a blink and is swift with opinions, advice, solutions and thoughts. Her laughter could be bottled and sold as an antidote to any ailment or gripe.

"What do I do?" she says, when asked to sum herself up. "I cook. And I do so many other things. I help to run two restaurants; I cook and create and write."

Dhalwala is also a loyal friend of the Vancouver International Writers Festival. This year, Vij and Dhalwala hosted a lunch for several of the Festival's authors at their restaurant Vij, providing the authors, including Elizabeth Strout from the US, Joan London from Australia, and Canada's Alistair MacLeod among others, with the very best blend of hospitality on a cold, autumn day: delicious food, an embracing setting, good company, and expansive conversation.

When I spoke to Dhalwala in mid-November, she was fighting viral laryngitis, which added a rasp to her voice, but did not seem to have slowed her down.

The idea for the writers' lunch was inspired by a conversation with another friend of the Festival, Sandy Garrosino, and, once the idea was launched, "I grabbed it as best I could," said Dhalwala. About the lunch itself, Dhalwala says, "It was a magic time." What made

it transformational were “The authors of course. And there was no snobby energy. Vikram and I have a good energy. I can relax and be a host when he is in the kitchen and serving. We take turns and each do different things. That’s how we function.”

Dhalwala is a member of a “pretty intense bookclub”, which is currently reading the novel *Middlesex* by author Jeffrey Eugenides.

“We’re working our way up to (Roberto Bolaño’s) *2666*. I had wanted him as an author, but I thought *2666* might be too intimidating, so I was going to propose *The Savage Detective*, but another member suggested *2666*, so I jumped on it.” Dhalwala admits to “trying to squeeze in my personal choices” of books for the book club to read and, now that she has not only broken bread with Elizabeth Strout but made it and served it up, hopes to get her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Olive Kitteridge* on the book club list soon.

“Reading adds a dimension to life. Reading is part of my life. Period. I have to read or I become dysfunctional.”

With a night stand and shelves piled with books, Dhalwala still fantasizes about what books she is going to read next.

“Part of my job involves reading non-fiction, such as books about food and environmental issues, so a lot of what I read is for work and reading for pleasure is squeezed, but sometimes I get started and can’t stop, and at midnight I am still reading.”

Reading with her daughters, now 13 and 10, is another pleasure. “We’re reading the series *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The girls are attentive listeners and this is a ritual for us. It ruins their evening if we can’t read. We’re on the second one (in the series) now, *Catching Fire*. We talk about what we’re reading when we are walking to school. I learn about my children through their reaction to books.”

What Dhalwala enjoys most about the Writers Festival is the “camaraderie and warmth amongst the authors and people attending. What’s there but unspoken is we’re in this together. It’s like a club but not an enclosed club; anyone can get in. There are people of all ages, and they are dressed in all different ways.”

“I’ve been aware of festival for years and years. I can’t remember what came first, the Film Festival, or the Writers Festival, but I’ve been a reader always.”

“I’m not in New York,” Dhalwala points out, although she admits that she has always longed to live there. “My kids are here. The business is here. I’ve just finally accepted that my family isn’t going to move there anytime soon, so I better bite into Vancouver rather than wait for New York and realize that I’m 65 and was stupidly on hold for the past 35 years. The Writers Festival takes me that one step closer to surrounding myself with what I love. It’s right here under our nose ... you just need to tap into it, and take advantage of it.”

“I don’t think younger readers, such as people in their early 20s, realize that the Writers Festival provides so much to chew on. They may think this is something for the well off, for the upper middle class, middle aged or high brow. But it is really varied and surprising. There are so many different books and so many different writers and experiences.”

Dhalwala believes that “food and books go together. They are different forms of creativity.”

“I always wanted to be a writer but didn’t have the confidence or discipline. I’m one of those people who start the novel or play, write first 15 pages that pour out easily and then leave it when the nail biting frustration hits because I’ve got so many other things I want to do that come easier. So after university I went into human rights and development work for 9 years and then met Vikram and whimsically fell in love with the creative side of cooking and running a restaurant.”

“Hmm, is cookbook writing creative?, Dhalwala muses. “Yes, it is, but not as much as the actual cooking itself. Cookbook writing is also a lot of professional writing. Basically, my ultimate career choice was unplanned and just happened.”

Having turned an interest in food into a thriving business, Dhalwala believes that it is possible to combine “creative passion” with the real world. “Can an artist be a business person?” Dhalwala asks, rhetorically. For her the answer is resoundingly yes.

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MaryAnn Cantillon	Surya Govender	Lesley Llewellyn	Ljudmila Petrovic	Donna Topham
Heath Cassack	Charlene Gram	Stephanie Lo	Sandra Pettman	Yvonne Van Amerongen
Anne Casselman	Gordon Gram	Patsi Longmire	Betty Lou Phillips	Kim Van Haren
Kate Cassidy	Blair Hackman	Tricia Lorriman	Sandra Phillips	Eva van Loon
Tina Chao	MaryAnne Hajer	Caroline Low	Alyssa Polinsky	Eva Veres
Catharine Chen	Jennifer Halyk	Barbara Lumer	Haley Polinsky	Lorenz von Fersen
Darryl Chow	Susan Harman	Bridget MacKenzie	Lonnie Propas	Britta Vorbach
Melanie Clark	Sandra Harper	Susan Mair	Agnes Pytko	Gillian Walker
Shirley Cole	Karin Hartner	Pauline Martin	Alyson Quinn	Jacqueline Walters
Beth Coleman	Michael Hayward	Susan Masi	Sheri Radford	Scott Waters
Beth Cole-Morgan	Julia Hilton	Marie Mazurchuk	Laura Rahn	Fiona Wei
Deryn Collier	Ann Hinkle	Heather McColl	Karen Ranalletta	Zoe Welch
Jason Congdon	Leslie Hoffman	Joan McEwen	Katie Redburn	Claire Westlake
Marian Coombs-Bucci	Nicole Holas	Anne-Marie McGinn	Nikki Reimer	Lynne Westlund
Mary Cooney	Gillian Holter	Camille McLellan	Debby Reis	Cora Whiting
Cynthia Crampton	Ann Howe	Linda S. McNab	Sara Reoch	Deborah Wilkins
Clare Crosthwait	Karen Howe	Shannon Meek	David Riehm	Jocelyn Wood
Susan Cuthbert	Marcela Huerta	Helen Meier	May Robertson	Esther Yuen
Judy Daughney	Amanda Hunt	Susan Mellor	Aarame Robillard	
Bridget Daughney	Valerie Hunter	Ann-Marie Metten	Farryn Robins	
Jane Davidson	Sarah-Nelle Jackson	Lindsay Milburn	Audrey Rockingham Gill	