

Poetry challenges ideas in 'Challenging Times' at Library



Words can speak truth to power, and challenge prevailing ideas.

They can stand on their own, be spoken to the beat of a good rhythm, and enhanced by song, appealing to everyone regardless of age or background.

The sheer power of poetry and music combined was showcased at the Aurora Public Library (APL) as George Elliott Clarke, Canada's Parliamentary Poet Laureate from 2016-2017, hosted Ontario poets for a special evening in APL's Living Room space.

Hosted by the acclaimed poet, the evening featured fellow poet Giovanna Ricco, vocalist Honey Novic, and, flying the flag for Aurora, were local musicians The Sonical Bees and Vanessa Wang, who found inspiration in the works of George Elliott Clarke.

'Poetry and song speak truth to power in the face of injustice, raising consciousness and importance to hope, to create a better future,' said Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Aurora Public Library, at the start of the evening. 'Artistic expression is a universal political act and tonight's event invites us all to consider and work towards building a better future for everyone.'

Kicking off the evening were The Sonical Bees' Aurora siblings Sofia, Albert, and Veronica who performed their original composition, The Travelling Child, in honour of kids who have had to leave so much of what they know behind due to the war in Ukraine.

Wang followed with a song, The Tragedy of Whylah Falls, which was inspired by George Elliott Clark's narrative poem, Whylah Falls, illustrating the Black experience in Nova Scotia.

'This means a lot to me that you have found so much in that poetry and your presentation also assists us all in being able to move forward with such a solid foundation of music and rhythm and voice, as well to further encourage and inspire and instill a passion for peace and a passion for language, for poetry and for song,' said George Elliott Clark in praise of Wang.

To The Sonical Bees, he said he was 'enthralled and inspired' by their work, which he described as 'a wonderful song in favour of peace and enlightenment.'

'I think your talent will [pave the way] for waves of solidarity in the interests of peace and goodwill that we hope will spread beyond this evening and this place throughout the rest of the year - let's hope worldwide as well.'

"Poetry is absolutely a precise way of understanding political and cultural issues," he continued "I think that Giovanna's mastery and, I believe, wonderful gift for distilling the crises and issues [of] the plastic, the unreal, the artificial, has unleashed upon the planet in terms of pollution, as well as the problem of unhappiness with our own God-given body of images has really been brought to life thanks to that poetry. It does a wonderful job of reminding us, not unlike W.H. Auden, poetry actually does make things happen."

The words of Novic, shared by Ms. Mandelcorn, summed up this sentiment: "My job [as a poet] is to encourage curiosity in people. It is to be creative and value language, rhythm, sound, and to know unequivocally that poetry connects one to one's self, to others, and to a wider community. Poetry is a way of making friends in a fretful world. Poetry is an act of rebellion that keeps hope alive."

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