

Arab Voices to rise in 'unique cultural festival'?



By Brock Weir

The conversation between cultures is something crucial for the betterment of human relationships, according to writer and poet Abdulrahman Matar, and there is no better way to start a conversation than speaking up.

This is exactly what

Mr. Matar, a native of Syria, hopes will take place next Saturday, April 6, at the Aurora Public Library (APL) when they and Mr. Matar's Syrian Mediterranean Cultural Forum, join forces for a bilingual (English and Arabic) afternoon of poetry, music and arts from the Arab world.

The conversation

between cultures is something crucial for the betterment of human relationships, and we should always be open to experience other cultures, says Mr. Matar, speaking to The Auroran in an interview conducted over email. We live in a unique society that is diverse and has many cultures within it, so this is a very important opportunity to be introduced to a different culture. We welcome everyone, we can listen to each, talk, and work together and collaborate. Humanity brings us together.

Mr. Matar came to

Canada in 2015 via the United States. He requested asylum in Canada for political reasons and eventually gained his permanent residency. Now working on attaining his Canadian citizenship, he says he is proud to be here, enjoy freedom, and work for a living with no threats or dangers due to writing freely, or due to the freedom of self-expression.

A member of PEN

Canada and the Writer's Union of Canada, he says he was born between books.

He was raised in a

family that boasted a big and diverse library and an unabashed love of reading

and culture that existed prior to the advent of television and the internet.

“I used to read every book I saw passionately, then I began going to the public library before I wrote my first poem at the age of 12,” he recalls. “Then, I was allowed in an earlier age to listen and become acquainted with writers, novelists and poets that made me drown in a sea of writing, going from poetry to stories and journalism, and then to novels.

“Writing had brought me courage and joy, but also pain and the arrest that followed my writing.”

In his writing, he finds inspiration in the lives of the average person – their stories, their sadness, their happiness. Those who are arrested, those who are victims. In people’s eyes, their footsteps, their dreams and thoughts.

“They create life,” he says, noting he feels quite a difference when writing poetry compared to prose and journalism. “It feels to me as I’m flying above the clouds, drifting away in a dream, faraway. I feel the letters of the words as if they were pieces of my soul, or as if it was the melody of the soul. Poetry is the greatest method for me to express my emotions and it is a beautiful melody.”

This melody will be heard wildly through Aram Voices.

This is the aim of the program, bringing together poets, novelists, short story writers, as well as creators specializing in everything from drawing, to painting, to film.

“I’ve noticed throughout the past years that the Canadian society, including writers and novelists, do not know the Arab culture well, and that includes Arab writers that have been here for years,” he says. “This is also related to the absence of events and activities that makes the Arab culture known better in Canada. By that I mean the poetry, novels, stories and art.”

Mr. Matar founded the Syrian Mediterranean Cultural Forum in Turkey in 2013. It bills itself as a cultural forum, a non-profit NGO, now based out of Toronto, that is interested in “expressing the cultural aspect in its different creative sides in both arts and literature” through public activities like hosting lectures and screening films.

“The forum aims to open up to different cultures and to share ideas and activities,” he says. “It sees the important diversity behind that and aims to be a stage of cultural fertilization and debates, and it is also a forum of support for the Syrian refugees who are merging with the new societies receiving them.”

Aram Voices is just one prong of this approach and the Aurora event will be the second held locally.

?It is a source of pride and joy for us,? he says of the relationship between the group and APL. ?Presenting Arab poets to society and reading poems in both Arabic and English is an entirely different cultural experience. Nothing like that has ever happened here, or at least in Aurora and the area. The audience will get to know Arab literature through these poets and writers, and it is a chance for cultural exchange.?

Arab Voices will take place in the living room of the Aurora Public Library next Saturday, April 6 at 2 p.m. Participants include poets Rula Kahil (Lebanon) and Sozan Sami Jamil (Iraq), poet and artist Naeem Hilany (Syria), artist Mwafaq Katt (Syria), poet Younis Attari (Palestine), musician Esmaeel Abou Fakher (Syria), and Mr. Matar.