

Montréal en todo sentido: los colores, sonidos y sabores de la Belle Ville - Presentation

Written by Ingrid Bejerman

Welcome, one and all,

I am Ingrid Bejerman from Blue Metropolis/Metropolis bleu, the Montreal International Literary Festival, multicultural and multilingual like our city, with this here Canadian by way of Brazil and Argentina in charge of the curation of events in Spanish and Portuguese.

When we first came to Montreal to study in the mid-nineties, my sister and I spoke Spanish to each other if we wanted to prevent other Montrealers —on the bus, in a cafe, in line at the supermarket— from understanding what we said.

We were born in Brazil where the same thing happened. It was the default secret language we learned at home, as our parents are from Buenos Aires. But in our country, the (non-official) second language is English, and much to Ney Matogrosso's chagrin, the music of Latin America —from boleros to the tango— is pretty much unknown in the land of *bossa nova*.

Upon graduation, we returned home. Like most of our colleagues at McGill and Concordia, we were looking for better opportunities outside Quebec: the post-referendum recession was a reality.

A reality that is now another. If someone had told me back in 2001, when I returned to McGill to pursue my doctoral studies, that in 2018 the Assemblée Nationale would approve a *Loi proclamant le Mois du patrimoine hispanique*, I would've never believed it. That vision was, to me, reserved for very cultured

people who'd heard of Nérida Piñón or Sergio Ramírez, like Linda Leith, our founder, the creator of the world's first multilingual literary festival, where Spanish has always been the third official language.

This is the Montreal we present here: the great cosmopolitan city of the 21st century, prosperous and full of hope, with a vibrant community of Hispanic writers: my fellow scribes, who are, above all, my friends; an ode to our adoptive city and the best we have to give — our public spirit, our children, our work, our culture, our words, our voices.

Here, the great Venezuelan journalist and writer Rafael Osio Cabrices gives you a small tour of Rosemont-La Petite Patrie, this “little homeland,” as we'd call it in Spanish, the most densely populated by speakers of our tongue, if one were guided by “those fascinating maps of the languages spoken in Montreal.” Rafa's words are like a walk through the streets of the most Latina zone of Montreal: north of the Plateau-Mont Royal, south of Villeray, teeming with businesses ran by Peruvian, Colombian, Dominican, Venezuelan, Chilean, Salvadoran and Honduran owners; Latino immigrants who've found on this island what we've all been searching for: a better life, for ourselves and our children, far away from the violence, economic crises, hyperinflation or extreme social inequality.

I don't remember when exactly or how it happened, but thanks to these writers —who, as I said before, are also my friends— my default mode is now the Spanish of the Montréal diaspora, with permission to mix in English and/or French or other languages.

This is the experience of many Hispanic Montrealers of my generation, Gen X, as recounted here, in this tour, by Mexican-Canadian writer Ángel Mota in his ode to singer and songwriter Lhasa de Sela (1972-2010), who like his compatriot before him, made the Mile End her adoptive 'hood and creative haven. The

songs that Lhasa performed in French, English and Spanish and her three albums — *La Llorona* (1997), *The Living Road* (2003) and *Lhasa* (2009)— have all met with wide international success.

Listening to Lhasa de Sela, Ángel writes, “is like seeing and feeling my identity on a nebulous border, between one world and another.” This audible sensation transitions to dance in the verses of Argentina singer, composer, poet and writer Flavia García, building a bridge between our city and her native Buenos Aires, full of promises, in full inclusive language, for one and all, our queer tango, open to everyone.

The poet invites us to walk Tiohtiá:ke, to learn to write it, to say it, her tango steps turning into northern lights; for us to hear the heartbreaking, loud cry, *Tiohtiá:ke!*, at the end of spring, *poems like strange fruits falling from the sky* that Flavia feeds us, *swallowing the solstices of Hochelag*, tempo rubato, *so many moons ablaze in rounded bellies, and you still wonder why the anger of the ancestors burns holes on the road.*

I dare to continue translating her verses, *vibrations with shadows to forget*, into English: *incessant territory, before the mud, before the river, it was kahyonhowanen, it was the sun that cut through the water of the rapids, it was the drum the month the ducks take flight the first time.* And Flavia, here, to dance us, ourselves, going round and round.

We are not settlers. We are visitors, and we recognize the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today.

We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community, and we feel welcome.

Thank you very much, Montreal/Tiohtiá:ke, for having us. But thank you, above all, for recognizing and celebrating our worth.

I invite you to discover this beautiful island of many colors and flavors, of various voices, through the words of our authors, in our language, in its infinity of derivations.

Enjoy this beautiful tour!