

Community stories

Celebrating its 20th birthday, Montreal's Black History Month reclaims the past



MAKING NOISE AT THE ATWATER LIBRARY: Imani Choir

by **ROXANE HUDON**
“When we paint the portrait of the historical identity of Quebec, we don't really fit into the picture. You don't learn about our story at school, you don't see it in the movies, you don't see it on the news, you only hear about the street gangs,” says musician Jenny Salgado (aka J. Kyll from French hip hop group Muzion), one of the spokespersons for the 20th edition of Black History Month. “But since the beginning of Quebec and Canada's history, black people have constantly been implicated in what is constructive and positive for the country.”

Running all month, this year's Black History Month celebrates the theme “Reclaim Our History, Reclaim Our Values,” with activities taking place all over the city, sharing the stories, past and present, of Montreal's black community. Here's a run-down of what to look for.

EXHIBITS

At Maison de l'Afrique (6256 Henri-Julien), from Feb. 1–21, catch a colourful display of **costumes from Africa**, exploring the continent through its traditional garments. Info at maison2lafrique.com.



COLOURS OF LOVE: Noah's Act: *Jumping the Broom*, at MASSIMADI

Over at la TOHU (2345 Jarry E.), photographers Edwine Seymour and Gregory Jean-Baptiste commemorate the one-year anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti with an **exhibit of photos taken around Port-au-Prince**. Runs until Feb. 12. Info at tohu.ca.

Artist Kenya Laurent celebrates **Haitians in Montreal** with a series of photographs highlighting their positive contributions to the city at Maison de la culture Rivière-des-Prairies (8000 Gouin E.) until Feb. 27. Info at accesculture.com.

FILMS

MASSIMADI is an **Afro-Caribbean LGBT film and documentary festival** organized by Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique. All screenings take place at the NFB Cinérobotothèque (1564 St-Denis) from Feb. 9–12. Info at arcencielfdafrique.org.

Former MusiquePlus VJ Malik Shaheed presents his documentary called **Black People in Canada Have No Power** on Feb. 24 from 1–9 p.m. at 372 St-Catherine W. #121. I wonder what that's about! Info at malikshaheed.com.

Meanwhile, the kids from **Tyndale St-Georges Community**

Centre (870 Richmond Square) offer their own perspective on oppression and racial issues in a documentary being screened at the centre on Feb. 24 from 6–8 p.m. Info at tyndalestgeorges.com.

LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS

The **earthquake in Haiti** weighed heavy on last year's BHM and its impact is still being felt. On Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. at la TOHU (2345 Jarry E.), economist Fred Doura, sociologist Vernet Larose and political expert Frantz Voltaire debate the reconstruction process and take a critical look at the work done by NGOs. Info at tohu.ca

On Feb. 12, a conference called **Black Histories, Black Futures** looks at the black community's impact on urban development in Montreal. It takes place at McGill's Bronfman Building (1001 Sherbrooke W.) from 8 a.m.–7:30 p.m. Info at (514) 398-2039.

Haitian-born novelist and journalist **Dany Laferrière** meets with the Jewish community to discuss the history and culture of his people on Feb. 15 at the CJA Federation (5151 Côte-Sainte-Catherine) from 6–8 p.m.

PERFORMANCE

From music to theatre, BHM also offers a wide range of performance art. Danny Blanco-Hall, the other spokesperson for BHM, co-stars in **Joe Louis: An American Romance**, a play about the life of the black boxer. It runs until Feb. 20 at Bain St-Michel (5300 St-Dominique), \$20. Info at infinithetre.com.

Spice up your lunchtime with some **gospel music** at the Atwater Library (1200 Atwater) on Feb. 11 as Marcia Bailey's Imani Choir offers a show, as well as a discussion on the evolution of gospel, from 12:30–1:30 p.m. Info at atwaterlibrary.ca.

Finally, the co-founder of Cash Money Records, **Slim Williams**, delivers some soul and some funk at Piano Rouge (22 St-Paul E.) on Feb. 19 from 8 p.m.–midnight. Warm up and get down with it. Info at slimwilliams.com.

Of course, there are countless other activities of interest going on during the month. A full schedule will be up on Feb. 1 at montreal-blackhistorymonth.com. ■



CONTINENTAL DRESS: African costumes at Maison de l'Afrique

Afro proud

This year's Young, Gifted and Black concerts salute the Black Is Beautiful movement of the 60s and 70s



BEYOND WEAVES: Fly Estate

by **ROXANE HUDON**

From Martin Luther King and Muhammad Ali to James Brown singing “I'm Black and I'm Proud” and Aretha Franklin asking for some “Respect,” the '60s and '70s were an important time of empowerment and change for black people around the world.

The seventh edition of the Young, Gifted and Black talent showcase is honouring this era with each performance exploring the Black Is Beautiful movement as its theme.

Black Is Beautiful was a cultural movement that began in the '60s and encouraged black people to embrace their natural features—hence the popularity of the iconic '70s afro. “Pre-Civil Rights movement, the black people in America were imitating the white mainstream culture, and with Black Is Beautiful, there was a sense of ‘Okay, this is who I am and I am beautiful just the way I am,’” explains organizer Kevin George.

The showcase's performances include music, dance and more featuring performers like spoken word artists Miss D-Na and Aliyah “Truth” Thomas, comedian Eddy King, hip hop acts Black Glovez, Fly Estate and Xlim Scandalous, as well as gospel music courtesy of the Imani Children of light choir, just to name a few.

“Some of them will do skits and you're definitely going to see some afros and some throwback outfits,” says George, adding that there will also be some references to what was happening in Montreal at the time, politely referring to that “computer centre incident at Concordia.”

For George, it's important to look back at that era and compare it to what's happening today.

“There is a lot of contrast between what was happening then and what's happening now. There's a shift in the community now; it's a lot of weaves and perms. If you look at people like Beyoncé and the image she projects... in the mainstream media, there's a convergence to one model of what beauty is and even if you have black skin, you're trying to fit into that model. So, there is a need for us to go back and ground ourselves again.”

The show takes place at the Oscar Peterson Hall (7141 Sherbrooke W.) on Saturday, Feb. 5, 8 p.m., \$25. For more info, call (514) 918-3352. ■



Aliyah “Truth” Thomas