

TALKING WRITING: LOCAL POETS, PLAYWRIGHTS, ARTISTS, LYRICISTS, PERFORMERS, AND NOVELISTS IN CONVERSATION

PoetrySlabs will be changing gears and charting new territory (we do love a challenge) for the 5 November West Norwood FEAST, which will be themed around writing (all kinds of writing) and running as a kind of literary festival in South London miniature – think Hay-on-Wye in WeNo, or maybe Cheltenham Comes to Cotswold Street. We've pulled together a number of people with a penchant for words of all descriptions across a number of artistic forms. Some will be part of a panel discussion; others will have their work on display. The members of the panel will be sharing their thoughts and their writing with one another and, more importantly, with the audience.

The event will run from 2pm to 4pm at the Book & Record Bar (20 Norwood High Street, corner of Cotswold Street) on Sunday 5 November.

The panelists are:

SUE BLUNDELL: PLAYWRIGHT

Sue's latest play, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, celebrates the relationship between the composer Benjamin Britten and his long-term partner, the legendary tenor Peter Pears. (PoetrySlabs went to see it and, oh, was it ever good.) Her previous play, *The Man from the Sleepy Lagoon*, brilliantly captured, in barely an hour, the life and times of Fitzrovia-based composer Eric Coates, who wrote the theme tunes for *Desert Island Discs* and the movie *The Dambusters*. And the play before that, *189 Pieces*, about the priceless Portman Vase (personified for purposes of the play), was performed to a sold-out audience at the British Museum in 2014. Sue, who is also a lecturer in classical studies, will be talking about the art of drama and how words work within it. (It's perhaps worth bearing in mind here that the original Greek meaning of the word 'drama' is 'action'.)

JOHN HANEY: MEMOIRIST, POET, LYRICIST

John is a West Norwood-based memoirist, poet, and occasional lyricist (for The Monochrome Set). His most recent book, *Fair Shares for All: A Memoir of Family and Food*, was published by Random House USA in 2008. (There's a second 'outing' somewhere in the works, he hopes.) A reviewer for Bloomberg.com said: 'It's a chronicle of a lost way of life. The author manages to convey powerful emotion without slipping into sentimentality. You don't need to be interested in food to enjoy this memoir, any more than you need to like apple juice to appreciate John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*.' John, who is also a co-curator of PoetrySlabs, will be discussing the influence of history (political, military, and familial) on personal perceptions of the world – with particular reference to mythmaking's place in the construction of memoir – and will be reading an extract from *Fair Shares for All*, plus three poems he wrote (one of them a tribute to his grandfather, a veteran of both world wars) for 'The Somme Suite', a Poetry School performance piece that was staged at the Cinema Museum in Kennington in 2016 and directed by another South London poet, Simon Barraclough.

ERROL McGLASHAN: PERFORMANCE POET

A Brixton-based creative powerhouse with a pronounced ability to build material that's both deadly serious in terms of its politics and scathingly funny in terms of its delivery, Errol has been bringing Word on the Kerb to West Norwood FEAST – to great acclaim – for several years. His Black History Month-inspired performance at Portico Gallery as part of the October FEAST brought the house down. Errol will be reading two of his latest 'creations': 'One Drop', about the Stephen Lawrence debacle, and 'The New Me', about, one could say, self-improvement. Errol will also be discussing the relationship between page poetry and performance poetry.

YAIR MESHOULAM

West-Norwood-based artist Yair Meshoulam received a BFA from Oxford University's Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art in 1985, followed by an MA from the Royal College of Art in 1988. He has exhibited throughout Britain and, with considerable frequency, in Berlin. He recently participated in the 'Curious SE27' group show at Roseberys Fine Art Auctioneers and has just begun a series of what can only be described as 'totally retro artistic/poetic interventions' on the streets of West Norwood and Tulse Hill, punching both his own poetry ('Ode to the South Circular') and extracts from Shakespeare (Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, the opening lines of *Richard III*) onto Dymo Tape and sticking them onto walls, as well as onto bits of municipal 'furniture' (sand troughs, etc). Yair will be discussing (in his own inimitably humorous way) how his latest escapades fit within the framework of the highly original art he has now been producing for more than 30 years.

TONY POTTS: FILMMAKER

Walthamstow-based filmmaker Tony Potts has directed a number of videos for The Monochrome Set and other bands, and, since graduating from Chelsea College of Art & Design in the Seventies, has worked as a lecturer and course leader in film and video production and as a tutor in the history of photographic and cinematic technology. He is also a member of the Art Creation Society. His influences include Robert Bresson, Sergei Paradjanov, Miklos Jansco, Wilfred Owen, the Suprematists, and El Lissitzky. Currently working on his first novel, *His Singularity*, Tony will be talking about the process of bringing a filmmaker's way of seeing things into writing: 'The genesis,' he says, 'of *His Singularity* was a collection of vivid but fragmentary memories of life at my grandparents' house in the 1960s. In the past, such fragments might have formed the basis of a short film. However, at the commencement of writing, I quickly realised that what I intended to do was to write my film in the form of a novel, which would allow me to expand the theme without any practical restrictions. I wrote with the concept that I was describing the shots and narrative sequences of my film. In this visual mode of working, I devised scenes, constructed narrative, edited and experimented with various permutations for positioning the text, as if handling pieces of film in an edit. Of course, this may be what everyone else does, I don't know.'

GANESH SESHADRI, aka BID

A Balham-based singer-songwriter and – as many critics have noted – lyricist par excellence, Bid is the founder and guiding light of cult New Wave Pop group The Monochrome Set, established in 1977 and still going strong in the UK, Germany, and Japan –

as well as among discerning audiences in Italy, France, the United States, and the Netherlands. A recent review described the band as ‘the Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka of pop music – but with a quintessential Englishness’ and Bid himself as ‘Benjamin Zephaniah on acid’. (Which is quite some going for a bloke born in India who went to Streatham Grammar School.) Bid will be discussing the art of the lyric, with particular reference to the revelations he had about his own creativity (‘I suddenly began to realise that when I write, I don’t actually understand what I’m doing’) following the stroke he had three years ago.

Two other artists will have their work on display but, due to prior commitments, will not be part of the panel discussion.

MARTIN GROVER: ARTIST

West Norwood-based artist Martin Grover, a former student of the Royal Academy Schools, has been delighting spectators and clients with his ‘Reveries of the Common Place’ series of painting and prints for many years. Working from life, sketches, memories, and photographs, he reconstructs ephemeral scenes from the passing world – childhoods recollections, street incidents, traffic bulletins, news items, poems, the allure of sheds and shelters. His magical ‘bus stops’ – with directions to unlikely destinations and even more improbable states of mind – will be on display throughout the day.

JULIA MCKENZIE: ARTIST

West Norwood-based artist Julia McKenzie trained at Camberwell School of Art and primarily produces drawings ‘base layered’ with paper cuts and collage. Her integration of words (including her own poetry) into what is essentially figurative art is highly original in that it effectively requires the onlooker to be both a viewer and a reader. Her poetry was featured in a Chelsea Fringe ‘poetry tour’ of local volunteer plantings (Open Orchard sites, Norwood Bzz Garage, Tritton Vale Pocket Garden) in 2016. She will be providing us with new work and new poems for appreciation and discussion.

This will not be an ‘up itself’ occasion – Ganesh Seshadri is rather hoping that it will be a ‘bit of a larf’. We very much hope to see you there.

Do bring a favourite poem or piece of prose with you to read to – and discuss with – everyone else.