

Need something to do Sunday nights?

Idler Pub's reading series is inspiring to audiences

by Zaf Gousopoulos

The Idler Pub is well known for its Sunday Night Reading Series, featuring writers based both in and outside Toronto. Program Director Stan Rogal has been running the Series since March, convinced it serves writers and literary fans alike.

Since there are so few well-organized, established readings series in Toronto, The Idler Pub does good featuring two or three writers every Sunday night — giving writers and their individual audiences opportunities to hear a variety of voices.

Unlike the Harbourfront Reading Series, the Pub's informal, social environment inspires direct communication between writers and audience. This exchange is valuable as feedback, interest, and support can only reinforce one's literary efforts and dedication. Writers emerging into the publishing or literary world are especially grateful for venues where they can showcase their work. Poets especially enjoy this atmosphere since their art form is meant to be heard.

During the afternoon of Oct. 4, Rogal hosted a special event featuring three Toronto based writers: Voula Anastakis, Phillip Quin and Nick Power. Their performances were presented as a collective effort in light of Quin's on-going "Site Specific" project, *Tor onto*. All three poets evoke the unique specificity of the city, as places/spaces captivate and capture them and their experiences in time.

They began reading simultaneously from different spots in the room, moving slowly inward towards the microphone on stage; here they took turns reading from their individual works. The objective was to evoke the chaos and sense of aloneness often experienced in this big city. Silenced voices were suddenly heard simultaneously as monologues.

On paper, Quin's work looks like concrete or visual poetry. He experiments with written language, lineation and conventional spacing. It works even better when it's heard. Immediately contextualized, the reader/listener walks through Tor-

onto, "the Huron/ wordfor/ placeofmeeting" in the speaker's shoes, moving through a fragmented collage of city sites: From Old City Hall to Maple Leaf Gardens to Yonge at Bloor; the Danforth, Queen Street, the Eaton Centre, the CN Tower and Chinatown.

Time is both lingering and missing from these public spaces, as buildings or street names themselves define and evoke the mood, attitude and memory experienced. In fact, Quin plays with the cliched "meaning" of these sites. His poem is his subjective version of a varied, collective experience:

"Fourmillionstoriesandeveryonetruth..."

Voula Anastakis read from *Catherine The Great*, a series of monologues featuring a character

whose desperate desire to connect with strange men plays with the tragic-comedy dynamic often associated with "passionate women." Again, the prose poems are site-specific.

Where Quin is realistic and political, Anastakis is light-hearted and imaginative. She shows how public spaces both create and capture experiences by contextualizing and activating the memories associated with them. Moreover, she (and her character) use poetry to shape and re-create those realities, so Toronto is no more than a product of the poetic imagination.

Nick Power's pieces are the most conventional in form, but no less evocative. "You step down from the streetcar/ into this poem," he begins, not only making poetry spacial, but

the public space we have (and can) easily enter. Poetry, in fact, is that space we (must) enter moving towards "meaning" like we move along a road towards some destination.

"The invisible life of the city slips through us constantly," he later tells us. By interiorizing the city, he shows us how we both are run by and run the city system. How humans function in terms of space and time is heard as "a whole city in the brain/ in a synaptic leap of faith/ we are many places at the same time."

His pun on Idler's Pub tied the evening together:

"Shifting and moving/ along the moving margin/ a venue, now a new road, near the davenport, idling/crossing the bar/ making this the centre of the city."

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