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## BOOKS

# Toronto poet laureate A.F. Moritz finds a place to celebrate local writers and hold the book launches they – almost – lost

The Art Bar at Clinton's on Bloor will host a Lost Launches reading series featuring some of the city's top poets.

By **Deborah Dundas** Books Editor

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## READ THE CONVERSATION

Book launches are making a post-pandemic comeback and those writers with books coming out are breathing a sigh of collective relief.

One of the things writers – and readers – have missed most during the pandemic is live events, the ability to connect with each other and to contribute to the expansive arts community in Toronto.

Writers who published books during the past two years also missed out on the chance to promote their work with a book launch that introduces their literary offspring to the rest of the world.

And so, Tuesday, March 29 – just a few days ahead of the beginning of April's National Poetry Month – marks the first of a series of events to give some lift to those books of poetry published during the pandemic, organized by the City of Toronto and the city's Poet Laureate, A.F. (AI) Moritz.

Moritz is a constant presence on the city's art scene, a regular attendee at book events, promoting the work of other writers and, in his role as poet laureate, [putting words to the events we all experience](#).

He's also leading the way to a return to live readings. "As you've probably noticed, passing bars and restaurants, the audience and clientele hasn't sprung back," he said. The Art Bar Reading Series at Clinton's, which happens every Tuesday, has reopened in the last number of weeks. This gave him an idea.

That idea was "Lost Launches," a chance for poets who'd had books published during the pandemic to finally have the launch they and their books never got. So Moritz approached the Art Bar Reading Series at Clinton's on Bloor Street West – they hold a poetry night there every Tuesday – and together they devised a special "Lost Launches" series, to run the last Tuesday of every month from now to June, giving poets whose books didn't get proper launches during the pandemic a chance to celebrate their books.

He enlisted Lesley Fletcher at The League of Canadian Poets, who came up with a list of around 40 books. Because of the long list, they decided to focus on Toronto resident poets who had missed the chance to have a Toronto launch.

The poets represent a diversity of styles and backgrounds and cultures, and include veterans, mid-career writers and debut authors. Each will read a few poems.

The idea was to provide a “moment of togetherness,” to help raise the profile of poetry and these books but also, Moritz says, “to do something to restore the great camaraderie ... of the poetry community, which is one of the hallmarks and, as far as I’m concerned, one of the nicest things about the arts in Toronto.”

We asked some of the poets who will be appearing at the Lost Launch events what their hopes and wishes were for their new books of poetry.

Ray Robertson (“The Old Man in the Mirror Isn’t Me: Last Call Haiku”), replied, “I’m also looking forward to reading and talking about haiku, one of the most democratic and demanding poetic forms. Jack Kerouac called his bastardized version of the form ‘American Haikus’ because, he claimed, the English language didn’t easily adapt itself to the exquisite fluidity of the Japanese language. Which is just another way of saying that, like any other undisciplined, acquisitive North American, he borrowed something from antiquity and slapped a New World coat of paint on it.”

Andrea Thompson (“A Selected History of Soul Speak”), hopes her collection will serve two purposes: “To help audiences gain a deeper understanding of the profound influence (and influencers) of Black history and culture and how they shaped what we now experience as contemporary spoken word. From the slave songs and spirituals of the cotton fields of the Old South, to the smoky coffee houses of the Harlem Renaissance.” She also hopes it inspires individuals “to pick up a pen, open their hearts and share their stories with the world.”

Catherine Graham (“Æther: An Out-of-Body Lyric”), says her new collection is about more than cancer. “It’s about family, the strange windings of truth and how what’s hidden comes to light in powerful, insightful ways. I wish it to resonate with readers looking to heal from anything in life or who are interested in a narrative that floats through memories, dreams, visitations, reflections, grief, healing and love.”

Whereas former Toronto Star city columnist Joe Fiorito (“All I Have Learned Is Where I Have Been”) says, “I hope Wes Anderson buys the film rights to my book and I get filthy rich. Or, I hope just one person reads it and thinks, “Exactly!” And, as if this were a pageant, I hope for world peace and an end to hunger. Otherwise, what’s the point?”

*The Lost Launches will be held at Clinton’s, 693 Bloor St. W., on the last Tuesday of the month until the end of June and will feature poets including Paul Edward Costa, George Elliott Clarke, Jean Eng, Lily Wang, Natasha Ramatour, Kate Marshall Flaherty, Beatriz Hausner, Khashayar Mohammadi, Lisa Richter and many others.*



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