

Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

After Hours Conversation with Jumoke Verissimo and Lisa Martin: a STARFest event

St. ALBERT—St. Albert Readers’ Festival is excited to present a special After Hours Conversation with author Jumoke Verissimo and Lisa Martin. Verissimo and Martin will discuss Verissimo’s new novel, *A Small Silence*. This special STARFest event is in celebration of Black History Month and takes place at 7:30 pm on Saturday, February 29 in Forsyth Hall at the downtown St. Albert Public Library.

“Jumoke’s novel has received international acclaim and we’re delighted to introduce it to North American audiences,” says Peter Midgley, STARFest Director. “*A Small Silence* is a beautiful portrait of Nigeria’s political history and the legacies of trauma. It speaks to our current loneliness epidemic and the need for human connection.”

In *A Small Silence*, Prof resolves to live the rest of his life alone and in the dark, after being released from prison for his activism. He pushes away friends and family, at least until a young woman called Desire begins to visit him every evening, intruding on his solitude. They sit together in the dark, tentatively forming a bond. However, the darkness of the room that provides such comfort for Prof becomes a steady torment for Desire, and threatens to drive her away for good. With an elegant and profound command of language, Verissimo’s powerful debut is a testament to the transformative power of the dark and silence, as well as our discomfort with them.

A Small Silence is Verissimo’s debut novel. The Guardian says this of *A Small Silence*: “Hypnotic, expertly crafted and full of subtle power, it challenges cultural norms around silence, darkness and solitude, leaving the reader changed in ways that are hard to define.”

Jumoke Verissimo writes poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. She has published two collections of poetry: *I Am Memory* won the Carlos Idzia Ahmad Prize’s First Prize for a first book of Poetry, and the Second Prize for the Anthony Agbo Prize first book of Poetry; and *The Birth of Illusion* was shortlisted for the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Poetry Prize and longlisted for the NLNG Prize. Her poetry has been translated into French, Chinese, Japanese, Macedonian, and Norwegian. Verissimo grew up in Lagos and now lives in Edmonton, where she is doing her Ph.D. in English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta.

Lisa Martin writes for the Edmonton Journal and teaches creative writing at MacEwan University. Her poetry collection *Believing is not the Same as Being Saved* was nominated for the 2018 Robert Kroetsch City of Edmonton Book Prize.

Tickets to the Verissimo-Martin event are \$7 each and are available at St. Albert Public Library's downtown and Jensen Lakes customer service desks, at [Eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca), and at the door. The event will be followed by a reception featuring African foods and a toonie bar. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

St. Albert Public Library is also celebrating Black History Month with a film screening of *We are the Roots: Black Settlers and their Experiences of Discrimination on the Canadian Prairies* on Saturday, Feb. 8 at 1:30 p.m. at the Downtown Library. This award-winning documentary explores the oral history of African American settlers to Western Canada in Alberta and Saskatchewan between 1905 and 1912. The film focuses on the experiences of discrimination these individuals encountered while living in the rural communities and in Edmonton, and is hosted by Dr. Deborah Dobbins. Following the film, audience members are invited to a reception at the Musée Héritage Museum. *We are the Roots* is presented in partnership with the Shiloh Centre for Multicultural Roots.

STARFest runs in October, 2020 – stay tuned for more information in the coming months. STARFest 2020 will continue the traditions of this award-winning festival, presenting numerous events featuring writers ranging from the new and noteworthy to long-time favourites from across Canada. For more information visit www.starfest.ca.

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For more information contact:
Leslie Greentree, Marketing & Communications Specialist
St. Albert Public Library
780-459-1750
lgreentree@sapl.ca

or

Peter Midgley, Festival Director
St. Albert Public Library
T: 780-459-5555 | C: 780-394-2599
pmidgley@sapl.ca