

August 20, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Update: STARFest adds two exciting voices to 2020 festival lineup**

ST. ALBERT — STARFest (St. Albert Readers Festival) is delighted to announce that two exciting new authors are joining our already spectacular festival lineup for 2020: Terese Mailhot and Zalika Reid-Benta.

Terese Mailhot is the author of *Heart Berries*, a powerful, poetic memoir of a woman's coming of age on the Seabird Island Indian Reservation in British Columbia. Having survived a profoundly dysfunctional upbringing only to find herself hospitalized and facing a dual diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Bipolar II, Terese Mailhot is given a notebook and begins to write her way out of trauma.

*Heart Berries* was a finalist for a 2018 Governor General's literary award, was featured on *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah*, and was selected best book of the year by *Harper's Bazaar*, New York Public Library, *Library Journal* and NPR, among many other accolades.

Mailhot will appear online at STARFest on Tuesday, October 13 at 7:00 p.m., in conversation with award-winning poet Marilyn Dumont.

STARFest is also delighted to add Zalika Reid-Benta to the festivities scheduled for Monday, October 26, where she will join Téa Mutonji at 7:00 p.m. in conversation with Valerie Mason-John.

Reid-Benta is the author of *Frying Plantain*, a rich and unforgettable collection of twelve interconnected stories set in "Little Jamaica," Toronto's Eglinton West neighbourhood. Kara Davis is a girl caught in the middle — of her Canadian nationality and her desire to be a "true" Jamaican, of her mother and grandmother's rages and life lessons, of having to avoid being thought of as too "faas" or too "quiet" or too "bold" or too "soft."

*Frying Plantain* won the Danuta Gleed Literary Award, the Rakuten Kobo Emerging Writer Prize for Literary Fiction, and was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award. It was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and appeared on many must-read lists.

"Zalika Reid-Benta and Téa Mutonji are fresh, exciting literary voices, and we know that pairing them for this event along with host Valerie Mason-John will ensure a lively and wide-ranging

discussion that is sure to deliver exactly what STARFest audiences crave – entertainment, energy and illumination,” says STARFest director Peter Midgley. “The addition of Terese Mailhot to the lineup is another coup. Her memoir is poignant, poetic and deeply personal, and shows her commitment to sharing the truth of her people and to breaking stereotypes.”

STARFest 2020 is online this year from October 6 through 28, featuring 11 unforgettable authors in 10 events. While STARFest events are free for attendees this year, the festival remains committed to paying its artists and interviewers. Donations to STARFest are welcome and can be made online when you reserve your event tickets – find the full 2020 festival lineup at [www.STARFest.ca](http://www.STARFest.ca) and donate as you register for events by clicking on the CanadaHelps link and selecting “STARFest” from the dropdown “fund” menu.

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**Previous Media Release**

June 25, 2020

**STARFest announces star-studded 2020 festival lineup**

ST. ALBERT — The STARFest (St. Albert Readers Festival) tradition of bringing audiences engaging, provocative events continues, even as we move the 2020 festival online. St. Albert Public Library is thrilled to present a star-studded lineup that will connect STARFest audiences with a slate of exciting authors – including Jesse Thistle and Emily St. John Mandel – who are inspiring national conversations.

We kick off the 10<sup>th</sup> STARFest on October 6 with Jesse Thistle and his remarkable memoir, *From the Ashes*, in which Thistle explores a past that includes the foster care system, abuse, addiction, crime and homelessness, and his journey back into the circle of his Indigenous culture and family.

Thistle's book has topped bestseller and "best of" lists across the country and was a finalist for this year's CBC Canada Reads.

The festival continues with Marina Endicott and *The Difference*, a sweeping novel set on board the *Morning Light*, a Nova Scotian merchant ship sailing through the South Pacific in 1912. *The Difference* examines the repercussions of one character's choice to take a small boy from a Micronesian island to raise as her own.

Aislinn Hunter joins us next with *The Certainties*, a vivid novel about the entwined fates of two very different refugees in two distinct moments: a war-torn Spanish border town in the 1940s, and a British island in the 1970s, as a ship full of would-be migrants approaches shore.

Karma Brown will bring us a delightful online literary/cooking experience as she and Jennifer Cockrall-King create dishes from her bestselling *Recipe for a Perfect Wife*, a novel about a woman who decides to become a writer and to build the kind of life her husband dreams of.

Next, we are excited to bring you Emily St. John Mandel with her latest novel: *The Glass Hotel* is a captivating novel of money, beauty, white collar crime, ghosts and moral compromise in which a woman disappears from a container ship off the coast of Mauritania and a massive Ponzi scheme implodes in New York.

Award-winning journalist and radio host Desmond Cole joins us with *The Skin We're In*, an urgent and unsparingly honest chronicle of one year – 2017 – in the struggle against racism that counters all assumptions about Canada as a post-racial nation.

Téa Mutonji joins us with her award-winning first book, the short story collection *Shut Up You're Pretty*: memorable moments in this punchy, sharply observed collection include a woman contemplating her Congolese traditions during a family wedding, a teenage girl looking for happiness inside a pack of cigarettes, and a mother reconnecting with her daughter through their shared interest in fish.

Nazanine Hozar's stunning debut, *Aria*, has been shortlisted for the Amazon First Novel Award; it takes us inside the Iranian revolution through the eyes of an orphan girl, and through the brutal revolution that installed the Ayatollah Khomeini as Iran's supreme leader.

The festival wraps up October 28 with Annabel Lyon and her smart, mysterious novel *Consent*; through the stories of two sets of sisters whose lives are braided together through tragedy, Lyon explores familial duty and the ways love becomes entangled with guilt and resentment.

"All STARFest authors will present online this year, though we will continue to investigate the possibility of incorporating in-library experiences, depending on the situation in the coming months," says Festival Director Peter Midgley. "Either way, STARFest 2020 is going to be a truly exciting festival – the range of voices and stories we're hosting will take audiences from the intimate to the global, often in the same conversation."

This year's STARFest hosts will keep the questions and the conversation flowing, and include some crowd favourites and some new faces: Celina Loyer, Jacqueline Baker, Thomas Trofimuk, Jennifer Cockrall-King, Senator Paula Simons, Jesse Lipscombe, Valerie Mason-John, Marcello Di Cintio, and St. Albert Public Library's current Writer in Residence, Conni Massing.

"We're proud to present world-class authors locally through STARFest. We love the conversations the Festival generates on ideas, issues and writing," says Peter Bailey, CEO of St. Albert Public Library. "Libraries like ours are about people and STARFest does a great job of bringing communities together – even online."

STARFest 2020 online events will be free, and attendees will have the option to donate to STARFest online. While the final shape of the festival will depend on what restrictions are in place in October, all festival decisions are rooted in St. Albert Public Library's commitment to the health and safety of authors, interviewers, attendees, and library staff and volunteers.

Check [www.starfest.ca](http://www.starfest.ca) for the full festival schedule and to register for events today.

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