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**MIRROR**

## Gathering worldwide

**The annual First Peoples' Festival offers a wide and international variety of events but problems in Canada aren't ignored**



**MOVING TO RES SCHOOL MEMORIES:  
From Lara Kramer's Fragments  
by ROXANE HUDON**

Way before the French met the English and squabbled over tea and baguettes, Montreal was an important trading and meeting place for First Nations people. For 10 days in June, the 19th annual First Peoples' Festival gives them back a piece of the city.

“People say there is no aboriginal presence in Montreal, but Montreal is a trace of aboriginal culture through its origin and through its history,” says festival director André Dudemaine.

From traditional arts and crafts to mind-blowing documentaries, the festival highlights the cultural diversity of First Nations’ people, not only from Canada, but from all over the world, from Brazil to French Polynesia.

“It’s a way to actualize the tradition of the gathering in Montreal. Before, the means of transportation made it regional. But now, sorry Mr. Harper, the question of First Nations is an international one,” quips Dudemaine, referring to the fact that Prime Minister Stephen Harper did not sign the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It’s not the only reason Dudemaine rags on l’il Stevie. This year, the federal government cut \$50,000 from the festival’s budget. “The First Peoples’ Festival is starting to be known abroad and it bothers the Conservatives that Canada’s First Nations are presented on an international market,” says Dudemaine.

The festival begins on a symbolic day. Thursday, June 11 marks the first anniversary of Canada’s “day of apology,” when Parliament apologized for the system of residential schools that meant to assimilate native children.

In honour of this day, Ojibway-Cree choreographer Lara Kramer presents her contemporary dance creation, *Fragments*, at the GESÛ (June 11–13, 1202 Bleury, 8:30 p.m., \$15, \$10 students). The piece is based on her mother’s stories of her experience at a residential school in Manitoba.

“It’s for me a way of creating room for a story, or a part of history to be heard,” says Kramer. “It’s trying to touch on a taboo subject in a way that’s poetic and I think there’s a softness to my work, but also a tone of trying to expose harsher issues around that.”

The festival also presents an impressive selection of over 70 fiction and documentary films, thanks to a strong partnership with the National Film Board.

One of the most hard-hitting documentaries presented is Vincent Carelli’s *Corumbiara: They Shoot Indians Don’t They?*, from Brazil. The film follows Carelli as he tries to find Indigenous people in the Rondônia state of Brazil in order to prove that they were pushed out of their land by major landowners who wished to extinguish them.

Renowned aboriginal filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin premieres her new documentary, *Professeur Norman Cornett: Depuis quand ressent-on l’obligation de répondre correctement au lieu de répondre honnêtement?* about the passion of a McGill teacher.

Other noteworthy films include *L’éveil du pouvoir*, about the political awakening of future Canadian aboriginal leaders like Chief Ghislain Picard, and *El Juicio de Pascual Pichún*, about the dark side of a Chilean justice system that accuses an Indigenous man of being a terrorist for demanding land rights.

No land claims necessary as the festival occupies Park Émilie-Gamelin (Berri Square) from Friday, June 19 to Sunday, June 21 for a series of outdoor activities including concerts, demonstrations of traditional beadwork, flintstone cutting, dances, drums and chants. It all ends on June 21 with a ceremony celebrating National Aboriginal People’s Day at the Botanical Garden.

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