



Prismatic Arts Fest returns with a wide variety of programs

By Steve Gow

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While the FIN Atlantic Film Festival may be wrapping up on September 23, Halifax won't have much time to rest between arts festivals.

Beginning September 28, the multidisciplinary [Prismatic Arts Festival](#) will be showcasing innovative and boundary-pushing works by Indigenous artists and artists of colour in everything from film to theatre and dance to visual arts and music.

Started in 2008 by executive director Shahin Sayadi, Prismatic has been able to put the spotlight on or introduce more than 900 artists or arts professionals to about 45,000 audience members.

"There were not many opportunities for people of colour to get on to the main stages for any sort of art forms," says artistic director Raeesa Lalani about the festival's origins. She adds Sayadi addressed the need by co-creating his own theatre company — [Onelight Theatre](#).

"But there were so many other artists of colour out there and Indigenous artists that hadn't been afforded these opportunities to perform on main stages so he decided to start a festival."

Following an abbreviated online version of the festival last year because of the pandemic, Prismatic will be presenting a comprehensive line-up of both in-person and virtual programming that includes concerts featuring such award-winning Indigenous music acts as [Twin Flames](#) and [Digging Roots](#).

However, Prismatic will also be spotlighting several local acts and personalities including R&B jazz collective [Ilest Omen](#) and Halifax's former poet laureate, author and speaker [Rebecca Thomas](#).

Thomas has been involved with the festival for many years, but in light of the recent controversy surrounding the discovery of unmarked graves at various sites of former residential schools across Canada, organizers invited her back.

"Rebecca has written and created some incredibly powerful poems in response to her feelings of what was uncovered," says Lalani, adding that the Mi'kmaw poet will be part of a September 29 virtual concert called Prismatic Online. "So we wanted to make sure that the world can hear these poems and hear these words because she does them so eloquently but there's so



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much to learn from them.”

In addition to the various live and virtual performances, Prismatic will also host a selection of [masterclasses](#) that range in topic from poetry and dramatic writing with host [Clyde A. Wray](#) to First Nations fiddler and Mi'kmaq singer [Morgan Toney](#)'s look at modernizing traditional Mi'kmaq songs.

“It's incredible,” says Lalani of Toney's *Mi'kmaq Connections* masterclass. “It's talking about his identity and mixing two worlds — that kind of Nova Scotian Cape Breton fiddling with his own Mi'kmaq language and his own Mi'kmaq instruments and traditions and he's actually created what he likes to call his own genre.”

As well, Prismatic will feature its annual [TALK](#) conference, in which the arts festival has partnered with the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to create a program called Voices We Need to Hear: Women in the Arts.

“We really are just trying to identify and have that conversation with women from the sector around the world,” says Lalani of the September 28 conference featuring speakers as far afield as New Zealand and Australia.

This year's Prismatic Arts Festival also marks the national fest's return to its home of Halifax after the festival was launched in Ottawa in 2019 in partnership with the Great Canadian Theatre Company.

“It was just an opportunity to see what Prismatic would be in a different city and kind of build that model of what Prismatic could look like anywhere and it was really successful,” says Lalani, noting that while it was a success in the Capital City, organizers saw a need to return it to Halifax. “We did it for one year just as a kind of pilot project.”

For more information on the Prismatic Arts Festival, visit their [website](#).

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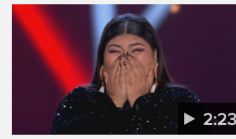
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