



THE ARTS



Linton Kwesi Johnson

JOHN BEST, CHAIR
ARTS GATEWAY MK

Just in time for your diary, Arts Gateway brings nationally successful writers to the city and highlights MK's own wordsmiths. There's usually a lot going on, with book clubs and writers groups; two CMK branches of Waterstones; poetry and performance groups; teams of writers and academics at the Open University; and one of the most written-about, filmed and talked-about places in the country – Bletchley Park. And external events help, like Read a Book Day (6th September), National Poetry Day (28th September), UK National Libraries Week (9th–14th October) and National Novel Writing Month (November).

MK Lit Fest 2017

Many places have Literature Festivals – Edinburgh, Cheltenham and Oxford for example. Tiny Hay-on-Wye, after 30 years, attracts audiences of 250,000. Amptill has had one for several years (though not 2017); Buckingham had its second this July and Stony Stratford has the excellent Stony Words. For MK's 50th Birthday, we thought we should organise an MK Lit Fest, with a diverse menu appealing to many audiences: as well as leading names from children's literature, we have a strand on young adults; writers of fantasy, science fiction and games; and sessions from the front line of writing, translating and digital.

Opening event: Linton Kwesi Johnson

We open with someone who has been at the forefront of multicultural Britain for 40 years. Having moved from Jamaica to South London as a boy, Linton Kwesi Johnson's 1974 poetry collection, *Voices of the Living and the Dead*, was followed by four more and in 2002 he became only the second living poet to have his work, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, published as a Penguin Modern Classic. Since 1978, the father of dub poetry has also been a recording artist, releasing 14 albums over 25 years. As multicultural MK matures, what better artist to open our programme, reading his poetry on Friday.

Writers and Workshops for Children

As a young city, it's vital that we appeal to young readers and writers. Cressida Cowell, known to all young readers for her *How to Train Your Dragon* books and film, delivers two workshops at Walton High and a book signing at Waterstones. Cressida spent much of her childhood holidaying on an uninhabited Scottish island, nourishing her fantastic imagination away from civilisation and – more importantly – from phones and television. A lesson for all inquiring parents.

*How to Train Your Dragon*, ctsy Cressida Cowell

Rachel Barnett specialises in plays for young audiences and performers. She has written over 20 plays, was MK's 2016/17 writer in residence, and opens Saturday with a workshop for 8–11 year-olds, where aspiring writers will create an instant play.

Sunday starts with more children's workshops. Paula Harrison, Bletchley-born writer of several series for young readers, will offer a workshop for 4–8 year olds based on *Tiara Friends*, the story of a princess and a maid who are best friends and solve mysteries together. A second workshop, for 7–12 year olds, is based around Robyn Silver: fantasy adventures about a girl who can see monsters that others cannot. Both workshops include designing and crafting as well as exploring where the ideas came from.



The irrepressible Michael Rosen

MK
Lit Fest
2017Friday 22nd September to
Tuesday 26th September

The best-known writer appearing is Michael Rosen, author of over 140 books, Children's Laureate from 2007 to 2009 and a freelance performer and presenter since 1972. He is best-known for his 1989 book, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, still going strong after 25 years. Professor of Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, he presents two sessions on Tuesday: one for children and one for adults.

Young Adult Fiction

MK Lit Fest will also explore the transition to adulthood, with writer Danielle Jawondo and playwright and poet Peter Kalu. Young adult fiction can be a minefield – first loves, first friendships and questions of self-discovery. Both authors have written for and about this audience and present a session that will interest young readers and those living or working with young people. Danielle was one of six 2016 finalists for *We Need Diverse Books* short story competition. Peter has been widely published and performed, earning a BBC Playwrights Award, among others.



Peter Kalu

Sunday sees psychological thriller authors Teri Terry and Sara Pinborough share a session on how they get into the head of dangerous or mentally-disturbed characters during writing, the research their writing requires, and how they create tension. Sarah is a thriller and fantasy writer, having published over 20 novels and written for the BBC; she is currently working on several television projects. Her best-seller *Behind Her Eyes*, was selected for Radio 4 Book at Bedtime. Teri Terry, translated into 12 languages, is the author of *Mind Games*, *Slated*, *Fractured*, *Shattered*, and *Book of Lies*. Her latest, *Contagion*, was published in May.



Holding Identity

Several sessions will look at how books can reach deep inside us.

Clare Mulley, performing on Saturday evening, has written three highly acclaimed biographies. *The Woman Who Saved the Children* (2009), on Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save The Children; *The Spy Who Loved: The Secrets and Lives of Christine Granville* (2013) has been optioned by Universal Studios. *The Women Who Flew for Hitler* (2017) is a joint biography of two extraordinary women at the heart of the Third Reich. Clare contributes to TV and radio for the BBC, ITV, Channel 5 and The History Channel.

With over 30 books between them, Leslie Tate and Sue Hampton explore how authors can help readers experience people who are 'different'.

Leslie Tate has three published novels: *Purple and Blue*, two parts of a trilogy about contemporary relationships, and *Heaven's Rage*, a memoir

exploring addiction, cross-dressing and the hidden sides of families. Leslie will introduce a preview of Mark Crane's film of *Heaven's Rage*. Sue Hampton is a prolific writer of children, teen and adult fiction, with two short story collections and many novels to her name, and is an Ambassador for Alopecia UK.



Sue Hampton

Irish-Scottish playwright Conor Patrick Carroll discusses the experience of writing a play centred on the highly political and racially sensitive issue of the US's historic and systemic persecution of African Americans, working with historical events and true stories.

Umi Sinha moved from India to Britain when she was 15 and has for many years lectured on creative writing at Sussex and other Universities. *Belonging*, her first novel, follows the intertwined story of three generations from the darkest days of the British Raj to the aftermath of the First World War as they struggle to understand and free themselves from a troubled colonial history. Umi is brought to MK Lit Fest through Brighton-based Writing Our Legacy.



Umi Sinha

Exploring Fantasy

As well as reality, Lit Fest also explores the highly popular worlds of fantasy and horror.

AFE Smith's first novel *Darkhaven* (2012)

was selected from 5000 submissions;

Goldenfire and *Windsinger*

have followed. She will be in conversation with Scott Dorward about how real world stigmas and political upheaval shape the characters of her novels and the young adult audiences who read them. Scott is a writer and editor who specialises in tabletop role-playing games, currently for *Call of Cthulhu*, although he has written for other horror and dark fantasy games.

American fantasy novelist Peter V Brett is also in town for a Waterstones signing. He is the author of the five volume *Demon Cycle* series, from *The Painted Man* (2008) to *The Core* (2017), several others including *Barren* (2017) and the comic book *Red Sonja: Unchained* (2014).

The Art and Science of Writing

Katie Ward's 2011 novel *Girl Reading* earned plaudits on both sides of the Atlantic and its author the Clarissa Luard Award. Yet it remains her only published book and she's still trying follow it up. In a specially commissioned performance lecture, Katie will shine a light on why authors suffer from Second Book Syndrome. "Does it matter if I'm never published again?" Of course it does.

Terence Blacker is further along the writers' journey, having written five novels including *Kill Your Darlings* and *The Twynning*, and award-winning fiction for children. A weekly columnist for the Independent for 14 years, he is a regular Radio 4 broadcaster. As well as presenting a conversation with Tania Kindersley (below), he is performing an evening of satirical songs in the style of Jacques Brel late on Saturday. Tania began writing full time in her early 20s and has written six novels.

Backwards in High Heels, her latest non-fiction written with Sarah Vine, spent three weeks on the Sunday Times bestseller list.

Not all great writing starts its life in English, and translating from one cultural environment to another raises challenges. These are explored in a unique session to which German author Kerstin Hensel brings her classic 1994 novella, making its English language debut this year as *Dance by the Canal* from Peirene Press. The author, translator Jen Calleja and publisher Meike Ziervogel will be joined by OU academic Fiona Doloughan, author of



Scott Dorward

English as a Literature in Translation, to shed light on the translation process and what it means to read in translation.

Joanna Walsh, writer of four story collections and two memoirs, presents her digital novella, *Seed*, a non-linear narrative about a 1980s Ophelia, coming of age in isolated countryside outside a raw new town but nonetheless with

capacity for moments of great joy and love. With lush and sinister illustrations by Charlotte Hicks, *Seed* evokes a landscape, an era, and an adolescence. Joanna will perform *Seed* with a team of local readers and a soundtrack by sound artist Simon Thorne: literature at the cutting-edge.

Finally in this strand, we close MK Lit Fest with Michael Rosen again, this time presenting his adult persona, in line with his popular Radio 4 programme, *Word of Mouth* as he explores the life and work of Emile Zola. It doesn't get better than that.

MK Presents...

On Sunday Roger Kitchen sets the MK scene with stories of MK itself, from filmed interviews with some of the founding fathers. PJ Evans retells the story of Colossus and the codebreakers under the title *Reading Hitler's Mind*, tipping his hat to Captain Jerry Roberts whose account, *Lorenz*, was published posthumously this year.

MK Presents showcases the rich breadth of writing the city has to offer. As well as showcasing the talents of local novelists and book illustrators, there will be an event based in the world of gaming, a welcome from MK Poet Laureate Mark Niel and a special Scribal Gathering to demonstrate our wealth of spoken word talent. Carole Matthews, author of more than 28 hugely successful romantic comedy novels published in more than 31 different countries, will be in conversation with Waterstones' Nikki Bloomer. And a panel of local writers will be on hand in a special Q&A session: what to write, where to submit, how to publish...

In conclusion

MK Lit Fest 2017 is long overdue in a 50-year-old place and made possible with support from MK Council, Arts Council England and others, and from an army of enthusiasts, volunteers and audiences. With over 25 hand-picked literary events and more in what promises to be an amazing programme of literary exploration and celebration, go on-line www.mklitfest.org, download an app, book a ticket. With your help, we can make this an annual event in MK's calendar. ■



NEWS FROM ARTS CENTRAL

Norfolk House remains our home, now with over 50 creatives, as we look for two more spaces. Current programmes are still Culture Challenge (artists into schools), and MK Arts Week from 30th September. Put the date in your diary.

Planned exhibitions include pencil artist Leroy Phipps at Norfolk House, print maker Helen Taylor and photographer Anthony Young at AC@Cornerstone gallery.

To find out more, you can sign up on www.artsgatewaymk.org.uk
email me at john.best@artsgatewaymk.org.uk or call us on 01908 241122



My Friends, by Leroy Phipps