

A Night of Poetry and Film

By Nathan Mader

An all-ages audience of about twenty gathered inside the Neutral Ground arts centre for A Night of Poetry and Film 8, on July 18, 2013. The event was originally scheduled in June at the Saskatchewan Filmpool, its usual location a couple of doors down, but an unexpected rainstorm and the water damage it left in its wake caused ANPF 8 to be rescheduled and temporarily relocated. This was my fourth time attending the event and I was looking forward to the eclectic mix of short film screenings and poetry readings I had come to expect, perhaps even more so because a special feature of ANPF 8 was that all of the films would involve puppets. Puppets! I was also a little nervous because, for the first time, I was going to be one of the poets reading at the front of the room. I would be in good company, though. A Night of Poetry and Film 8 featured poet Matt Hall, as well as filmmakers Angela Edmunds, Jessica Riess, Gerald Saul, Chrystene Ells, Red Smarteez and Kelly-Anne Riess, who, as creator and host of the event, casually greeted people at the door and checked the time as she waited for any latecomers to arrive.

In many ways, the birth of A Night of Poetry and Film reflects Kelly-Anne's diversity of interests. She has three published books (including *To End The Conversation*, a collection of poems) while simultaneously being an active member of Saskatchewan's film community. While Kelly-Anne is generally drawn to making documentaries, at ANPF 8 she was screening her puppet film, *Scotty*, a dinosaur love story she initially produced for the Eastend T-Rex Discovery Centre.



A full house at Poetry and Film.

ANPF started in the spring of 2009 when Warren Dean Fulton, a writer from Vancouver, was on a cross-Canada book tour and contacted Kelly-Anne wondering if she could set up a reading in Regina. Having been a Filmpool member since 2008, Kelly asked the collective whether they would be willing to host Fulton. To her surprise, the Filmpool was very responsive to the idea—something she says isn't always the case when an organization is approached about hosting a literary reading.

Based on the Filmpool's positive response, Kelly-Anne saw an opportunity to bridge two burgeoning artistic communities while creating a platform for those artists to engage with the public. She hoped that people who might "be intimidated by a poetry reading would be drawn into the more familiar atmosphere of a film screening," while poetry fans could be exposed to independent films and filmmakers. The formula has been a success. While Poetry and Film started out small, it has now grown into a biannual event so well attended that Kelly-Anne has occasionally had to turn people away at the door. Despite the event's growing popularity, however, she has even more ambitious ideas for A Night of Poetry and Film and hopes it may one day expand to other cities in the province.

A few days before A Night of Poetry and Film 8, I was asked to be part of a radio interview on CJTR radio's *SOHL Connections*. I was joined by Regina filmmaker Gerald Saul, whose short puppet film *It's About Time* was going to be screened at ANPF 8. We soon found that we had a lot to talk about. During our on-air conversation, Gerald noted how he felt that the creative process behind short films and poems was similar, and we went on to discuss how they even rely on some of the same formal techniques, like compression and metaphor. When asked about ANPF 8, Gerald emphasized how "we are both working in arts that aren't entirely mainstream" and suggested that ANPF is an important way of "expanding the community" through bringing together a diversity of artists. Gerald's comments led me to think of the last ANPF I was at in which we heard Regina poets Cassidy McFadzean and Courtney Bates reading poems, some of which were inspired by Old English riddles and fairy tales, followed by Steve Suderman's *Over Land*, a near-feature length documentary on the increasing challenges faced by a family of potato farmers. The evening was a wide-ranging exchange of ideas and aesthetic concerns, and it was hard to imagine that I would have gotten a chance to see Suderman's film otherwise.

At A Night of Poetry and Film, the readings usually take place before the screenings and at the eighth edition I was the first one up. One of the poems I read, "*Daniel Day Lewis On Why He Left the Stage*," was inspired by the story that Day Lewis abruptly left part way through a performance of *Hamlet* after



First Seizure by Red Smarteez.

seeing the ghost of his own, and not Hamlet's, father on the battlements. He has restricted himself to acting for the screen since. The poem made its way into an anthology of cinema-inspired poems called *I Found It At the Movies* (Guernica 2014), and the concept behind the anthology seems to underscore the potential for dialogue between the two mediums that A Night of Poetry and Film provides a live outlet for.

Following my reading was poet Matt Hall's. During her introduction of Matt, Kelly-Anne emphasized her enthusiasm for Matt's reading voice and as he began to read you could see why—the rising and falling inflections of his voice sounded like a bowstring being gently drawn over a saw blade of language. Some of the poems Matt read contained a kind of roaming consciousness coming into contact with evocative inner and outer landscapes, and his voice suited the subject matter. Matt has published three fairly recent collections of poems: *Royal Jelly* (Black Rider Press 2011), *Distant Songs* (Sea Pressed Meta, 2012), and *Hyaline* (BRP, 2013) and, as is customary for poets with published books, they were all available for purchase at the event.

You can find a more detailed account of the puppet films featured at ANPF 8 elsewhere in this magazine. What I will say, however, is that we encountered a variety of stories, styles, and puppetry techniques. We saw Gerald Saul's Beckettesque meditation on existence in the prairies in *It's About Time*, the whimsical encounter between Aunty Fox and Ms. Chicken in Angela Edmonds' *A Place For You*, the pathos and humor of a man coming to terms with his wife's illness in Red Smarteez's *First Seizure*, Christene Ells' haunting portrait of a prairie woman in tougher, or maybe just simpler, times based on the

fragments of a found diary in *Kathleen's Diary*, Jessica Riess's folkloric, love beyond death tale *Love in Any Colour*, and Kelly Anne's dino-romance, *Scotty*.

After the readings and screenings, there is a brief question period in which Kelly-Anne gives the audience the opportunity to ask the artists any questions they might have. Then the crowd mingles, samples refreshments, checks out any books or DVDs on display, and talks about the films and poems they've seen and experienced. It may be the way in which A Night of Poetry and Film gets these conversations started that proves to be the true measure of its success.



Kelly-Anne Riess poses with her shadow puppet Scotty the T-Rex.