

LITERARY RADICAL ROSEDALE

BY IAN DAFFERN

With an emphasis on queer and countercultural contributions, This Ain't the Rosedale Library bookstore has made a habit of ruffling straight feathers while soothing readers like honey for more than 25 years. And last year they were offered something sweet in return: The store saw its acclaim become international when Britain's Guardian newspaper dubbed it not only the best independent in Canada, but the eighth best bookshop in the world.

Now the Library also welcomes the third season of its workshops, a series of lectures and classes that bring the experience of books to life. The place is also celebrating its 20th anniversary as the wellspring of literature for the gay community, from its location at the corner of Church and Wellesley. And part of the inspiration for the classes, at least for co-owner Charles Huisken, was the neighbourhood itself.

"I was tired of waiting on young people who didn't know about very important cultural contributions of people like Warhol and Dylan, and local contributors like Victor Coleman and Bill Bissett. That just became very tiresome, so I thought, okay, we've got to do our homework here," explained Huisken.

The programs kicked into high gear when poet Sandra Alland joined the staff in 2004. Soon she was lining up a full roster of classes, from the practical, such as author Marnie Woodrow's How To

Give a Kick-ass Reading, to the eclectic, such as poet and musician Paul Dutton's Soundsinging and Sound Poetry.

"We look for instructors who can think outside the box," said Alland, "Someone one like [poet and critic] Camille Martin, who is teaching Poetry as Plagiarism, is saying most creative writing is plagiarism, so we should just embrace that. We aren't taught this in high school, but the idea of authentic and original words is not really possible, or not necessarily desirable either."

This is just the kind of radical thinking that the Library hopes its workshops will inspire. The non-traditional classroom is another part of the program. "It's not a pristine space, but it's cozy, and has a great vibe to it, so people like being there," said Alland.

But with already a number of sold-out lectures, plus the kudos from The Guardian, does that mean success has gone to their heads? Don't bet on it.

"Well we didn't crack out the champagne, you know?" said Huisken. "We just looked at each other and planned the rest of the day. We have done the best we possibly can with the resources we've got. And part of that is learning from the poets and painters. And listening to our clientele as well."

Workshops begin Feb. 8 at This Ain't The Rosedale Library, 483 Church St. For fees and registration info, call 416-929-9912.

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