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BALTHERNET’S XI SUMMER SCHOOL – MY ESTONIAN ROOTS

BaltHerNet’s summer school titled “Diaspora Estonian Cultural Heritage Abroad. XI. My Estonian Roots” took place in Setomaa at Värskä from June 26-29th. Since Setomaa is known for its knowledge of traditions and unique, strong identity, we chose this year’s summer school theme, identity and roots, accordingly. Topics such as researching family genealogy and names, ways to preserve your family history, mapping of tombstones, and family as well as regional heritage was discussed and explored. We introduced collections related to the theme from both Estonian and diaspora archives.

Setomaa is also unique and different because it’s a border zone. The shuffling of borders and life in a border zone has created a lasting impact on the people that reside there. We invited Estonians living abroad, Estonians that have returned to their homeland, setos, and identity researchers to participate in discussions regarding the multi-identities of people living in various cultures.

Summer school participants met in Tartu on June 26th and visited Noora, after which the charter bus departed for Setomaa. June 27-28 featured presentations, discussions, and documentary film screenings. NGO BaltHerNet’s annual general meeting also took place on June 27. On June 29th, we embarked on a road trip to Setomaa and visited Värskä Agricultural Museum, Saatse and Obinitsa. Participants were taken back to Tartu by nightfall.

BaltHerNet summer schools are focused on Estonians living abroad and for employees of Estonian memory institutions who are involved with collecting, maintaining, researching and distributing information about Estonian cultural heritage. They feature lectures, courses, hands-on learning, discussions and dialogue. Experts from various Estonian memory institutes share their thoughts and knowledge about archives, libraries, museums and other topics.

You can read a more comprehensive overview of the summer school in the next newsletter. In June 2024, we will meet in Vilnius at the BaltHerNet conference. But for now, have a lovely summer, everyone!

LET US CELEBRATE CULTURAL DIVERSITY TOGETHER!

The Estonian Ministry of Culture has declared 2024 the Year of Cultural Diversity. The thematic year will celebrate how this value enriches our lives. We are calling upon you to join in the celebrations – discover and share, value and create, preserve and enrich the cultural traditions of our communities and the whole nation through everything that unites us: from experiences and myths to creative processes and planning the future.

SHARE IDEAS

Just as cultural diversity starts with every one of us, the year dedicated to this value starts from our ideas. Come and join the team of the Year of Cultural Diversity: please share your ideas on celebrating Estonia's cultural diversity next year. Initiatives that have already been implemented or have even become a tradition and initiatives that are still planned or inspired by the next thematic year are welcome.

The deadline for open calls is the end of June 2023. Please share your ideas via the form below or by regular mail (Integration Foundation, Rävåla pst 5, 10145 Tallinn, keyword "2024"). We will review all ideas in July and give feedback by August at the latest.

More information about the thematic year and open call will be provided at the meeting with the Year of Cultural Diversity team, which will be held online on 13 June. To participate, please register by noon of 12 June: meeting in Estonian on 13 June at 15-16, in Russian at 16.30-17.30, and in English at 18.00-19.00.

CONTACT US

The Integration Foundation coordinates the thematic year. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact the team of the Year of Cultural Diversity at 2024@integratsioon.ee.

We are all part of cultural diversity, and the next year belongs to all of us!

How can we celebrate cultural diversity? Share your idea here: <https://integratsioon.ee/en/2024>



COLLECTION CAMPAIGN "STORIES OF WAR"

Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, various forms of media have broadcast the events in Ukraine and the quality and state of life of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia. A lesser degree of focus has been put on how the war has affected Estonians and what role Estonians have played overall in the war. Another question that needs to be posed is how this war has affected diaspora Estonians and their respective communities. There's no doubt that the war in Ukraine has revived personal and familial memories for many Estonians from the era of the Second World War, the fears related to it, and the trauma of leaving their homeland. With the upcoming collection campaign titled "Stories of War" from the Association of Estonian Life Stories and the Estonian Cultural History Archives (Estonian Literary Museum), we wish to collect stories related to the Ukrainian war from individuals from various generations. VEMU/Estonian Museum Canada in Toronto is a partner for the collection campaign.

When documenting your story, the following questions can be considered:

- What do you remember from the beginning of the war?
- How did the knowledge of the outbreak of the war affect your everyday life?
- Do you discuss the war in your family? If so, what themes related to the war have become conversation topics?

- Have you or a family member had personal connections to the war in Ukraine? If so, then what have these connections/experiences been?
- Have you come into contact with Ukrainian refugees? If so, how?
- What emotions have the war in Ukraine brought forth in you? Have they changed throughout the war?
- Does the war currently affect your everyday life? If so, how?

Stories can be written in both Estonian and English.

Please send your story to one of the following email addresses: elulood@kirmus.ee or piret.noorhani@vemu.ca
Deadline: December 31, 2023.

IN SUPPORT OF THE ESTONIAN EXPATRIATE LITERATURE CENTRE

Sad news has arrived from Estonia. Cultural workers and individuals associated with the arts are gathering at Toompea to demand social guarantees and proper salaries. The lack of resources within local governments is forcing the closure of many town and village libraries. But cutbacks are also taking place in other libraries. The Estonian Literary Museum's archival library had to cease research pertaining to the national bibliography because the specialist was dismissed. Now, shocking news has arrived: the Academic Library of Tallinn University is dismissing the last remaining employees of the Estonian Expatriate Literature Centre (EELC) who were involved with the collection. This is taking place due to budget cuts, during which a third of the



library's workers will lose their jobs. The EELC's unique collection will remain, but as can be read from library director Andres Kollist's interview with ERR's Novaator, the centre's doors will be shut as opposed to open and of course, the further development of the collection can't take place without proper staffing. The interview can be seen here: <https://tinyurl.com/5n872btz>

Why should anyone be shocked by this news? Someone you meet by happenstance could easily ask that, but if the importance of the EELC hasn't been realised by its trustees, there's a much bigger problem at large. Here's a reminder as to what's at stake.

In February 2008, the long-time director and soul of EELC, Anne Valmas, wrote the following in the Canadian-Estonian paper *Estonian Life*: "As of February 2008, the Estonian Expatriate Literature Centre will replace the Academic Library of Tallinn University's expatriate

literature department. The centre has systematically collected expatriate literature for the past twenty years. The unique collection began in 1974 when a special archival department was developed as part of the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences Library. The collection featured literature banned at the time for Estonians living in the homeland, including works written and published by Estonians living abroad."

The collection, which wasn't accessible by most during Soviet times, opened to the public in the latter part of 1988. The (at the time) department of expatriate literature aimed to collect and comprise an as complete as possible collection of literature of diaspora Estonians. Rare publications with a small print run, ephemera, pamphlets of various organizations and more were also collected. Hugo Salasoo's collection of special outtakes written by Estonian academics, which was gathered for the Estonian Archives in Australia, was also

given to the department's collection. Lists of publications that were missing from the library were printed in diaspora Estonian newspapers, and responses poured in from members of these Estonian communities. This was how unique small publications, such as publications from refugee camps with a small print run, were collected.

By 2000, it had become the most complete collection of expatriate literature in Estonia, the development of which was aided by diaspora Estonians. They would even bring print materials to Estonia in the bottoms of suitcases or send them in via mail. As of 2019, the collection featured 38,297 informative materials, 25,291 books and 9,607 annually published newspapers and magazines, serial publications, cards, sheet music, academic special outtakes, and much more.

The collection has been actively used by compilers of academic works, especially biographical lexicons, employees of museums, other libraries and publishers, historians, literary scholars, and university students. They have all been assisted by the centre's employees, who have helped them orientate in the unique collections and databases. The centre's employees have created the following important databases: VEPER, the biographical database of diaspora Estonians; VEART, the database of Estonian expatriate periodicals, from which you can find articles published in leading diaspora Estonian newspapers; VEILU, which contains information about fictional works by diaspora Estonians that have either been written in another language or have been translated. In 2005, the collection "The Complete Index Of "Eesti Kirik" 1950-2000" of the magazine "Eesti Kirik" was published, which is available in the database KIRIK. EELC has also been the main digitiser of diaspora Estonian newspapers, available here: <https://dear.digar.ee> Work progressed thanks to competent workers and grants from the Compatriots Program of the Republic of Estonia's Ministry of Education and Research, which allowed for the use of contracted additional employees to create databases and digitise newspapers.

This was at the height of the EELC. In addition to Anne Valmas, four individuals worked at EELC in 2008: head bibliographer Aita Kraut, senior bibliographer Eve Siirman, senior bibliographer Kristina Rāni, and senior librarian Juta Laasma. The numbers started to dwindle after that, and, as is evident in Andres Kollisti's interview, only two individuals are tied to EELC's collections presently; one has a 70% workload and the other 60%. Both are being dismissed from their positions. One of the former employees of the centre is currently employed in the service department but has other duties.

EELC's collections and the academic work that has been accomplished there, along with the creation of digital resources, has been a self-evident source of information for not only professionals who work with diaspora Estonian topics but also the general circle of heritage enthusiasts both in the homeland and especially in communities across the world. I've proudly explained to diaspora Estonians the importance of and fantastic work done at Estonian historical memory institutions to preserve and circulate the heritage of Estonians abroad. Anne Valmas was the epitome of perseverance and dedication for the younger generation. It's unfortunate and painful to watch her, and her colleagues' creation fall into the cruel hands of fate. It seems that even a historical memory institute can fall prey to complete memory loss. EELC's collections were created but were guarded by the repressive Soviet institutions not to provide the public access to an essential piece of our shared memory. In a free Estonia, will the collection now, once again, be under lock and key? How can we look those volunteers in the eyes that have collected their heritage in diaspora communities and sent it for safekeeping in Estonia, knowing that there are safe places and professionals who stand for the fate of the collections?

Everyone involved with historical memory institutions in Estonia and abroad knows and realises how difficult it is to work towards goals in the wake of a lack of funding. The humanitarian field is under attack in the West as

well. A few years ago, VEMU/Estonian Museum Canada saved boxes worth of Estonian literature, which the Toronto Public Library was discarding, along with several other foreign language collections. The status of the book is changing, as well as libraries and the duties that they are faced with. There is never enough funding for culture and academics anywhere, but we must stand for our national culture and heritage. A crisis doesn't appear over the course of one day. The state of the EELC hasn't been anything to boast about for a while. But the centre closure is too drastic; it's impossible not to react, especially now that the Estonian government has realised how crucial it is to be in contact with Estonians abroad to keep us united as one. The diaspora Estonian heritage, created in large part thanks to voluntary work, deserves to be regarded with respect.

A break in continuity in the work and research of historical memory institutions is dangerous. That gap could become permanent if the baton of knowledge isn't passed on. It is devastating to see the disappointment and hopelessness in the eyes of those to whom their job isn't just a job but a mission; I know that sparkle in the eyes of my colleagues in Estonia. If the Academic Library of Tallinn University wants to maintain its academic status, it should examine the choices made. Engaging and dealing with diaspora Estonian topics on the highest academic level should be a priority to strive for and work towards. In a time when Estonia's eastern neighbour is attempting to establish its historical discourse with all its might, both on the battle- and information fronts, we should be especially determined and diligent with our own historical memory work.

**On behalf of the NGO Baltic Heritage Network,
Piret Noorhani
28.03.2023**

FIRST LITHUANIAN FOOTPRINTS ON CANADIAN SOIL

Curiosity about the first recorded Lithuanians to reach Canadian shores led the Lithuanian Museum Archives of Canada to the War of 1812 in North

America. Based on research conducted by Dr Kostas Jurgėla in 1964, Peg Perry, a volunteer at LMAC, curated "European Traces in the War of 1812". It tells the story of 99 men born in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania before the 1795 partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. These men fought for the French in the Napoleonic Wars, deserted or were captured and then were contracted to fight for the British in the war with the United States of 1812-1814.

Researching the exhibition was enhanced by the vast amount of information now available through internet resources. It allowed for discovering specific details about each soldier and their fate. Many did not return to Lithuania, having died in battle in Canada. The research process also exposed the issue of the identification of "Lithuanian" soldiers. Recorded documentation was completed by Swiss and British record keepers in German, French and English. Names and birthplaces were changed according to each record keeper's personal interpretation. It did not help that ongoing political development changed boundaries and place names. Using the same criteria as Dr Jurgėla, we focused on birthplace as the best indicator of nationality.

This exhibition has benefited from the unusual circumstances of the Covid period. Lockdown reduces available resources to those available online but also provides quiet time to perform intensive research. A small version was first presented as a drive-through exhibition during the lockdown phase. As restrictions opened up, the full exhibition was on display at Old Fort Erie Museum – the actual location where one of the battles took place. The exhibition is currently on display at LMAC and has been selected to be added to the Digital Museums Canada website.

To view the exhibition, please go to:
<https://www.lithuanianheritage.ca/war-of-1812-introduction/>

**Danguolė Juozapavičius-Breen
Director, LMAC**

A DIARY OF A YOUNG ARTIST

A Diary 1944-1952 by Vytautas Osvaldas Virkau; compiled by Dalia Kuiziniienė. Vilnius: Versus, 2023.



The book presents the experiences of many Lithuanians, who had to leave their home and spend the rest of their lives abroad.

Vytautas Osvaldas Virkau (1930-2017) was an American-Lithuanian graphic artist, painter, and public figure whose life was marked by emigration, first to Western Europe and later to the United States. This spring, a diary written by Virkau in his late teens and as a young man, was published in Lithuania.

Virkau's diary covers the period 1944-1952. It consistently and in detail records the author's departure from Lithuania, his life in Germany, his emigration to the US and several years of his life in the new country.

The diary records the most important experiences of a young man (a teenager and later a college student) living in a foreign environment. The book presents the experiences of many Lithuanians, displaced persons, who lived far from home, the feelings of loss of homeland, the unknown, and the hopes of establishing themselves as an artist in a foreign country.

The compiler of the book, Professor Dalia Kuiziniienė, says that the diary provided her with an opportunity to get to know the artist in his youth after he had just left Lithuania—full of enthusiasm, contemplating, curiously exploring the alien surroundings of Austrian, later German, Chicago art, literature, theatre, fascinated by the breathtaking views of the Alps, which he recorded in his early drawings and literary impressions. The book provides a broad picture of cultural realities, moments of the Virkau family's emigration odyssey, nostalgia and the

hope that the family would soon return to Lithuania, and then the difficult adjustment to the new way of life abroad.

JUOZAS VAICKUS: THE SPIRITUS MOVENS OF LITHUANIAN THEATRE AND CINEMA

On May 12, the National Library of Lithuania invited to a presentation of the book Juozas Vaičkus: Spiritus Movens of Lithuanian Theatre and Cinema by Aušra Martišiūtė-Linartienė (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2022).

Juozas Vaičkus (1885-1935), one of the founders of professional Lithuanian theatre, was eager to share his ambitious goals publicly. Unfortunately, society was not yet ready for Vaičkus' ideas at that time. Nevertheless, he made what seemed unimaginable and impossible a reality in Lithuania and the United States of America: he established a permanent troupe of actors, the first acting school, and later a professional theatre, and staged performances in Lithuania and the US. And finally, although after his death, there was a change in the belief that Lithuanians could not only import cinema from abroad but also create it themselves.

According to the book's author, Vaičkus's artistic career was consistent. From the first play in Mažeikiai (Lithuania) in 1905, his main goal was to promote Lithuanian culture. After his unexpected death on April 7, 1935, a week before his fiftieth birthday, Vaičkus' life began to be compared to a dramatic tragedy, and he was seen as the tragedy's protagonist. Until his tragic death, Vaičkus was a hero of many genres: from heroic drama and comedy to tragedy. The public reception of his work covered a wide range of styles: from admiration and exaltation to irony and sarcastic bullying, from critical articles in the press to satirical newspapers, to word-of-mouth jokes.

Martišiūtė-Linartienė wrote the book during the COVID-19 pandemic when traveling was restricted. She regrets that her work in the US archives had to be postponed until the future. Despite unfavorable conditions, for the first time, the readers can get



The new book dwells on the artistic career of Juozas Vaičkus both in Lithuania and the US.

acquainted with the recordings of songs, monologues, and dialogues recorded by Vaičkus and released by Victor Talking Machine Company in the USA.

The book's author noted that in writing this book, she wanted to focus as much as possible on memoirs, letters and articles in the press and reveal an extraordinary personality in terms of concrete works and unrealized ideas. I wanted "to tell the story of a cultural hero, who could not be stopped even by the greatest obstacles."

WINGATE UNIVERSITY DEDICATES BALTIC READING ROOM

Want to learn about the "Estonian character" by exploring the novels of A.H. Tammsaare? Are you interested in the Latvian Name Day tradition? Or are you simply looking to brush up on your Baltic history? The Ethel K. Smith Library has the place for you.

On Friday, the University dedicated the Baltic Reading Room in the EKS Library. The former group study room now holds more than 1,400 volumes of works by Baltic authors and about the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Over time, the collection is expected to grow to 4,000 volumes.

"Initially, we weren't sure if we would even get 1,000 books," says Keith Lassiter, director of the EKS Library. "It's going to be a good-sized collection."

Dr. Joseph Ellis, a political science professor focusing his research on Estonia, brought the idea of creating the room to Lassiter, who had previously expressed a desire to get more off-campus traffic to the library. "Keith, without flinching, said, 'Sure. Let's do it,'" Ellis says.

Ellis began contacting Baltic studies colleagues he's gotten to know over the years, and pretty soon, the collection started growing. He spent an hour or so on Zoom with Liisi Esse, a librarian at Stanford University, which, he found out, had extra copies of several volumes. "Before you know it, 26 boxes of books from the Stanford library are at the back door of the Ethel K. Smith Library," Ellis says.

While speaking at an Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies conference, he mentioned his quest for books, and Ramunė Kubilius, a librarian at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University, answered the call, sending boxes and boxes of Lithuania-related books.

The library has received reference books, history tomes, children's books, guidebooks and novels. Ellis and Lassiter expect the donations to continue coming in.

"According to the University of Washington, if we had 4,000 volumes, we would be the fourth-largest collection in the country," Ellis says. "That's what we're aiming for."

Cataloguing all of these items have fallen on Kory Paulus, the collection-management librarian. She has employed several students to help her with the project, which is far from straightforward. She says books with an ISBN are "super easy to catalogue," but many do not. Slotting those books into the correct category is time-consuming, with Paulus forced to do translations

to determine who the author is and to pick out all the relevant information. She decided to take care of all the low-hanging fruit first.

"It's a challenge," Paulus says. "That's an understatement. At one point, I asked my students to pull all the books that are easy for me to catalogue, so the ones left are harder."

It's been a good learning experience for the students, who have not only affixed stickers to books and shelved them but have run translations for Paulus, who says she can now catalogue in five languages and has done associated research projects.

"I didn't put a single sticker on these books. I just catalogue them and have taught them how to do the rest of it," she says. "I'm more like the project manager and am the one putting it in order and into perspective."

That includes creating displays of items she's found tucked away in donated books. In one book donated by Kubilius, Paulus found a letter from Kubilius's father, who at the time lived in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany, discussing his future since there was real danger of returning to Lithuania during the Soviet occupation. Copies of the letters are on display in the library (Paulus sent the originals back to Kubilius by certified mail).

After finding several Name Day cards in some Latvian volumes – presumably used as bookmarks – Paulus assigned a student to write a research paper about the history and significance of Name

Day. The cards make up one of several special displays that sit alongside the books in the collection.

"It's been so much fun," Paulus says. "It really has. When I find something really cool, I email Dr Ellis and tell him, 'Guess what I found!'"

With the largest collections of Baltic books located on the Northeast and the West Coast, Ellis is hoping to provide a worthy nearby collection where scholars in the Southeast can do research. It also provides the University with a distinctive resource to offer. Friday's dedication, and a Baltic studies workshop that accompanied it, drew scholars from around the country. One attendee even flew in from Sweden.

"As a side benefit, it sort of gives Wingate a little recognition," Lassiter says. "Our focus is on health sciences, but here we are with a very unique and what's going to end up being a very sizable historical collection."

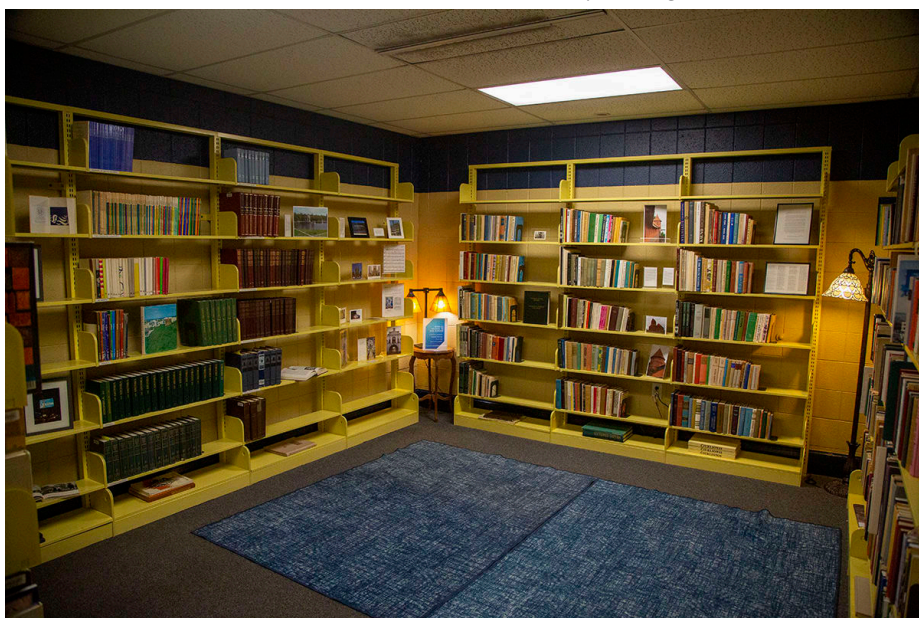
First published: <https://tinyurl.com/5chyd8r>

Chuck Gordon

OVER 150 PARTICIPANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD DISCUSSED BALTIC STUDIES WORLDWIDE

This spring, Kaunas Magnus University hosted over 150 participants—lecturers, researchers and students from Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Hungary, India, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the United States of America, Georgia, Switzerland, Ukraine—to a discussion on Baltic studies in the contemporary world, the challenges it is facing and the prospects for its future.

In the conference, organised by VMU together with its partners Vilnius University and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Dr Dalia Cidzikaitė, a researcher from the National Library of Lithuania, presented a paper "BALSSI: A Twenty-Five-Year Long Baltic Summer in North America." The Baltic Studies Summer Institute (BALSSI), founded in 1994 in the United States, differs in many ways from the Baltic Studies centres currently operating worldwide.





The conference focused on the challenges and future of Baltic Studies around the world.

BALSSI, which travels to a different institution of higher education in the US every two-four years, offers intensive courses in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian to students ranging in age from junior high school to the nineties. During the intensive eight-week course, students complete two academic semesters. In addition to learning one of the three languages, the students learn about the culture and history of the three Baltic States.

BALSSI is a collaborative project between the Baltic Language Consortium and the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), focusing on studying the three Baltic countries in North America. Over twenty-five years, BALSSI has been hosted by a number of American colleges, such as the University of Washington, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the University of Iowa. Over 200 students took BALSSI courses in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian.

TELLING YOUR STORY THROUGH ART AT VEMU: REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF ESTONIAN-CANADIAN IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

My maternal grandmother, Helen Rammo (née Elena Haljaste (Grünberg)), was a storyteller, whether she knew it or not.

Her father, Johann Bernhard Haljaste, was an Estonian military colonel and the engineering service head in the 22nd Estonian Territorial Corps. On June 14th, 1941, during the infamous June

deportations, he was seized by the Red Army due to his outspoken political opposition to the Stalinist regime and notoriety as an Estonian nationalist; he died the following year as a political prisoner in Norillag, Norilsk Corrective Labour Camp. My great-grandfather's capture, and the subsequent occupation of Estonia by the Soviets, made refugees of the family he was forced to leave behind. Familial records tell me that my grandmother, her brother, and their mother immigrated to Canada in 1949 after eight years in displaced persons camps around Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. The rest is history. My grandparents fell in love and birthed a daughter, who eventually birthed another daughter. That's me.

I know all this not only through photographs, historical documents, and obscure profiles on Ancestry websites made by estranged family members; oral histories were a large part of my growing up, of how I came to understand the mechanics through which my family came to be situated on this land. I was raised on old Estonian, German, and Russian songs – and though I remember their words to this day, as a non-Estonian speaker, their meaning is lost on me. I grew up with tales of fortune-telling nomads that predicted my grandmother's emigration and folkloric myths of gnomes, faeries, and other mythical beings. I used to write plays for my grandmother and me to perform together, infusing Eastern European

mythologies with contemporary themes. From a very young age, I learned to express myself through songs and stories and to use art as a vessel of self-understanding and realisation. My grandmother passed away when I was sixteen years old in August of 2013, and, for a while, the stories stopped.

Fast forward ten years. I am now a professional artist, playwright, and educator living and working in downtown Toronto. In the early weeks of 2023, I was approached by Piret Noorhanni about hosting a workshop for VEMU, intended to engage the Estonian-Canadian community in a series of exercises around "Turning Your Story Into Art." Though I was enthusiastic at this prospect, I had my hesitations: Was I Estonian "enough" to host a workshop like this? As an early career artist and researcher, how could I leverage my experience towards community building in a community that I often find myself on the margins of?

On Sunday, March 5th, 2023, this workshop took place at Tartu College. Inviting local Estonian-Canadians across generations to participate, this workshop aimed for participants to gain comfort working with and sharing their own personal stories and archival materials. No matter where these participants were situated in the Estonian-Canadian diaspora, the aim was to reflect on their own sense of belonging or 'relationship' to Estonia



differently. Participants were asked to bring in personal artefacts of pieces of ephemera (for example, photographs, travel documents, pieces of traditional Eesti clothing or memorabilia, letters, etcetera) that they felt connected them to their Estonian heritage and were taken through a series of solo and group creative tasks to consider the relationship(s) between memory and story, archives and ephemera, historical fact and personal narrative. Where do our memories come from? How have we arrived at where (and who) we are now? How can we connect physical, emotional, and generational boundaries to achieve a greater sense of the Estonian-Canadian community?

In the early moments of the workshop, I was surprised at how many connections existed between the participants in the room. Many had been to the same mass cultural events, knew the same people, or were connected through different social and familial circles. The degree of openness towards, and hunger for, a sense of community was pervasively felt. For the first time, I also got to engage members of my own family (namely, my mother, Marina and my auntie Gail) in my work, bringing me closer to understanding their intimate journeys in navigating this delicate terrain. Once participants began to open up about their chosen objects (especially in relation to objects that others had brought), the personal memories and stories lurking in these artefacts exploded into full-blown creative exploration. Participants made maps and collages, wrote personal essays and poems, and made plans to reunite with other participants outside of the workshop setting for future conversation and community building.

The biggest thing I took from this workshop was our urgent need for community-engaged spaces and activities, especially in bridging historical and social gaps between older and newer generations of Estonian-Canadians. Whereas we tend to think of “art” as a product-oriented, professional practice, my aim as an educator and workshop facilitator is to reconceptualise storytelling as a community-driven vessel for reflection

and connection, where the focus is on the process as opposed to the product. I hope to bring events like this to our community in the future, to foster a greater sense of community in and beyond Toronto amongst Estonian-Canadian-identifying persons of all ages and walks of life.

As a child, my Estonian grandmother showed me that stories are often our greatest teachers. Preserving cultural heritage isn't just about historical facts, documentation, or record; it's also about the feelings, sensations, and experiences that can only be passed down through more creative forms of expression. I would like to thank VEMU, Piret, and my wonderful workshop participants for being so open and enthusiastic about this venture. I hope this is the beginning of a long and fulfilling conversation between us all.

First published in Eesti Elu/Estonian Life

Camille Intson

DOCUMENTARY “OUR TARTU. 50 YEARS OF TARTU COLLEGE”

On Tuesday, May 30, and Thursday, June 1, the documentary film “Our Tartu. 50 years of Tartu College”, made by Kaisa Pitsi and VEMU, was screened on ETV2. The film is about keeping Estonian culture far from the homeland. It is a cross-section of the history of Tartu College and the growth of the Estonian community in Toronto - with a view to the future. The film is also restreamed at: <https://etv2.err.ee/meie-tartu-tartu-college-i-50-aastat>

The film was made in cooperation with VEMU - Estonian Museum Canada, Tartu College, and with the support of the Estonian Foundation of Canada.

Director: Kaisa Pitsi

Producer: Piret Noorhani

Editors: Rasmus Rattas, Piret Noorhani

In Estonian, with English subtitles.



SCINTILLATING CULTURAL DAYS IN NEW YORK

A long, dreary Toronto spring took a turn in the middle of April: we started to get 30-degree weather. We were greeted with the same pleasant weather when we arrived in The Big Apple with filmmaker Kaisa Pitsi for the 51st Estonian Cultural Days in New York, from April 14-16. Parks were full of greenery, cherries and magnolias were in full bloom, and people were enjoying outdoor cafés and patios. Yet, Estonians flocked to the Estonian House like bees to a beehive.

This established, long-standing festival shows no signs of disappearing anytime soon. How could it, with a fantastic cultural torchbearer such as Merike Barborak, chairwoman of the Foundation for Arts and Letters along with her energetic team, an audience that hungers for culture and a good get-together, and no shortage of cultural matter created by Estonians?

My first and only visit to the Estonian Cultural Days, up until now, was in 1993. Unfortunately, my memories regarding it are a little hazy, but newspapers from the time helped to refresh them. Back then, I saw, for example, the theatre piece “Valguse põik,” written by Paul-Eerik Rummo and translated by Mardi Valgemäe, performed in a freshened way by the Northern Ohio University theatre group in the Broadway area of NY. I also remember the restaurant of the Estonian House filled to the brim with Estonians that I didn't recognise for the most part, New York felt a little daunting in its massive size.

Now, thirty years later, I've gotten used to the scope of North America, and know the local Estonian communities and, in general, diaspora Estonians better. During those years, a lot more has changed. The older generation that was the driving force behind the cultural days at the time, such as Mardi Valgemäe, who left us three years ago, is disappearing or has already disappeared. But new active individuals have appeared, many of whom have recently come from Estonia. The relationship between Estonia and the diaspora has

also changed - both parties have learned to understand one another better. If in the early years of re-independence, much of the aid moved from the diaspora communities to Estonia, now it's the opposite: the Estonian government supports diaspora Estonian events and initiatives, such as this year's cultural days.

Life in diaspora communities has become increasingly bilingual because younger generations don't have the same knowledge of the language that their parents and grandparents have. But it was nice to see that there is a continuing, strong interest in the Estonian culture - a lot of the younger generation attended, as well as individuals with a creative and artistic background. One of the greatest discoveries was young American-Estonian artist Riivo Kruuk and his exhibit, where the displayed street art pieces clearly had Estonian ethnographic elements peeking through. There was a wide variety of exhibits: we saw 25 of Estonia's most beautiful books, Eduard Wiiralt's works, and the bold digital art of Estookin, who had flown in to be at the cultural days. Over the course of the festival, we could also watch classic Estonian animated films.

But let's go back to the beginning. A seminar focused on Estonian startup companies and investors occurred on the first festival morning. The undersigned didn't really have a

reason to be there, but tying business and culture together is a smart move, VEMU/Estonian Museum Canada has seen and experienced the benefits firsthand - the two support each other very well. The opening night gave us a taste of what was to come: there were short performances by Estonian musicians Stefan and Õed, we also saw the highly praised Riivo Kruuk who improvised on the theme "Mu isamaa on minu arm" along with musician Jonas Tarm. Riivo painted a beautiful portrait that was inspired by the live piano accompaniment. Very moving! There were artist tours of exhibits and the evening was drawn to a close by 2022 Estonian pop artist of the year and Eurovision participant Stefan's acoustic concert. The charming performer with Armenian roots but Viljandi-born also told fun tales of his life and adventures.

Saturday had a busy start for the VEMU team. We screened the documentary film "Our Tartu. 50 Years of Tartu College" followed by a discussion on Estonians and their culture abroad. We secretly hoped with director Kaisa Pitsi that our story might inspire New Yorkers to collect their memories about their Estonian House.

Next, we laughed and giggled during Margus Tabor's monodrama "Mamma lood." We were hoping to see these Hiiumaa stories here in Toronto in 2020 as well, but the pandemic quickly pulled the brakes on that plan. We could now renew those plans to bring

"Mamma" to Canada finally. In our Toronto Estonian community, there are plenty of people from Hiiumaa as well as their descendants, so we might not even have to translate the "Hiiu dialect" into standard Estonian completely. During the afternoon, a tasting session of Estonian craft gins took place, but the VEMU team was busy meeting with documentarian Helga Merits to discuss work matters.

Those who didn't wish to attend the ball could catch the screening of the comedy "Suvitajad" - the newer version of the film "Siin me oleme" from 1978, which has now achieved cult status in Estonia, based on Juhan Smuul's "Muhu monoloogid."

Saturday evening was spent at the Bohemian National Hall for the Solstice Night Ball. Stepping out from the hotel, an ESTO-type feeling was already in the air: there was a sea of cabs waiting for dolled and dressed up Estonians, who had come together from all over the USA and Canada. The organiser of the ball was Karin Ashford. Providing musical entertainment was Kalevipogues, who had made a fiery comeback at last fall's Lääst Blääst in Toronto. The venerable musicians had a contagious youthful energy about them and drew out a large crowd of dancers to the floor. A bit of everything was heard, from "Viljandi paadimees" to classic rock in English. It didn't take long for the more zealous women to shed their high heels and show off their dance moves



barefoot. There was also a competition to determine who was the best couple out on the dancefloor. The night went on with even more performances by Estonian guest musicians Stefan and the female duo Õed, comprised of Kristel Aaslaid and Tuuli Rand. Those who still had energy left migrated to the secret bar at the Estonian House, where the party had apparently gone well into the early morning hours.

The third day started with a brunch at the Estonian House, where we were introduced to the culinary heroes from Ungru restaurant in Hiiumaa, who brought the best and tastiest food to attendees during the festival. The Ungru team talked about their culinary philosophy, and the diners thanked them with a huge round of applause. Helga Merits offered food for the soul with her presentation about her latest film project, which tells the story of the largest producer of vegetables in the 1950s, Seabrook Farm. This was a place where many European war-time immigrants, including Estonians, who came to the States found a job and shelter; along with interned Japanese-Americans, they formed the two largest cultural groups in Seabrook's multicultural community.

Following that was a secondary screening of the film "Suvitajad." Now that I've seen both the original and remake, I have to respect current filmmakers for their daringness to approach and take on classic films. The product was modernistic, but still fun as well. Whether it'll turn out to be funnier with every rewatch, as is the case with the original, only time will tell.

In the afternoon, a workshop took place during which VEMU shared its experiences and teachings with a group of interested individuals who plan on preserving the history of the New York Estonian House. We also presented an example by doing an on-the-spot interview. When the newfound local team heartily starts working towards its goal, VEMU will support them and provide guidance.

For the evening, performers and organisers of the cultural days were invited to the home of the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United

Nations, Rein Tammsaar. Picturesque views of the Manhattan skyline at sundown, delicious appetisers and the opportunity to mingle with interesting people - what more could you wish for as a perfect ending to the vivacious cultural days?

Just as the festival program wound and cooled down, so did the weather. When we embarked on our journey back to Toronto, the weather had become cooler, and droplets of rain fell from the sky. But my mind and soul were kept warm by emotions and memories - they still are. We are very thankful to the generous and welcoming organisers of the cultural days for being great hosts and for the memories. We wish Estonians in the US continuous ardour and strength in their endeavours and in bringing Estonians together.

Piret Noorhani

THE ANNUAL EVENT FOR DIASPORA RESEARCHERS AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF LITHUANIA

On May 12, the Lithuanian Studies Unit of the National Library of Lithuania organised the 8th annual seminar for scholars and researchers in diaspora studies. Some of the participants were returnees, while others were first-time participants.

At the beginning of the seminar, Dr Dalia Cidzikaitė recalled that the idea of organising interdisciplinary seminars for Lithuanian diaspora researchers, where participants would share their thoughts on ongoing research and help each other to find the sources they need, came about when a decade or so ago the National Library of Lithuania hosted an international



The participants gathered for the eighth time at the seminar for diaspora researchers.

Photo: National Library of Lithuania / Vygaudas Juozaitis



The common denominator of these seminars is the Lithuanian diaspora.

Photo: National Library of Lithuania / Vygaudas Juozaitis

seminar of the Baltic Heritage Network. Dr Jolanta Budriūnienė, Director of the Documentary Heritage Research Department of the National Library of Lithuania, stressed that the common denominator of such seminars is the Lithuanian diaspora, and that these events provide an opportunity to learn the news about the ongoing research across the field.

The first part of the seminar was dominated by topics related to arts and culture. Musicologist Dr Aušra Strazdaitė-Ziberkienė discussed the issues of researching the exhibits of Mikas Petrauskas, a composer who also lived in the USA and the author of the first Lithuanian opera *Birutė*, which are kept in the M. and K. Petrauskas unit of Kaunas City Museum. Musicologist Dr Darius Kučinskas shared his experiences from his trips to the USA and talked about the specifics of working in Lithuanian archives there. Literary scholar Dr Akvilė Šimėnienė, who keeps returning to the seminar, examined the intellectual friendship between diplomat, and translator Povilas Gaučys and Spanish literary scholar *Birutė Ciplijauskaitė*, both American-Lithuanian emigrants. She also shared her thoughts about working in archives in the USA. Dr Giedrė Milerytė-Japertienė, a historian of the National Museum of Lithuania, gave a lively account of the major exhibition on the history of migration that is being prepared, focusing on her recent expedition to South America.

After a break, historian Dr Viktor Bilotas discussed the latest research on Lithuanians in Siberia. Writer and researcher Sandra Bernotaitė shared her vision for disseminating

Lithuanian literature in the diaspora and translations into foreign languages. Political scientist Ieva Padolskytė, the youngest participant of the seminar, discussed the return migration of the second generation of South American Lithuanians to Soviet Lithuania and the problem of national identification in their life stories. Historian Dr Ina Ėmužienė gave a brief presentation on Soviet Lithuania's public communication to the Lithuanian diaspora in North America. Juozapas Blažiūnas, the head of the Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art, presented the material received from abroad by the Archives in 2022 and the work planned for 2023. At the very end of the seminar, Cidzikaitė told a somewhat detective story about Magdelana Raškevičiūtė-Eggleston, a Canadian-Lithuanian writer, and her first literary work, an autobiographical novel *Mountain Shadows*, published in 1955.

The presentation of the book about theatre and cinema director and actor Juozas Vaičkus, who left an imprint on Lithuanian as well as American theatre and cinema stage, written by Aušra Martišiūtė-Linartienė (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2022) concluded the seminar.

ESTOCAST GROWS!

VEMU/Estonian Museum Canada, its biggest program, Estonian Music Week and *Eesti Elu* (Estonian Life) newspaper have had growing success with their joint venture EstoCast, a biweekly podcast. If you've ever wanted the latest Estonian books, music, art, history, science, and other key news and cultural topics but in a convenient

on-the-go format, EstoCast is perfect for you. EstoCast is also ideal for those who are simply curious about any of the above topics and are searching for something fresh, exciting, inspiring, and educational to listen to. EstoCast alternates between English and Estonian every other episode so that there's something for everyone; those wanting to learn or practice either language have the perfect chance for that as well!

EstoCast has officially turned one year old as of April! We've come a long way and made considerable, continual strides within the podcast world. We continue to gain listeners and have developed a true follower base that, without fail, tunes in every time we release a new episode. We've expanded our horizons, both in terms of the topics we cover and our audience base, finding and furthering developing our very own niche. To date, EstoCast has 28 episodes up in both languages, spanning topics from literature to music and the latest cultural news and hottest happenings. The previous year's episodes focused on libraries and literature as a result of last year being announced as the year of the library by the Estonian Ministry of Culture, this year being the year of movement and sports. Newer episodes also touch upon topics such as politics, technology, exercise, sports, and the stories of people in our diaspora Estonian communities in Canada and worldwide. We've had some great, fun guests visit our studio in the last few months, such as famed Estonian musician Vaiko Eplik, goalkeeper for Toronto Football Club Andreas Vaikla, and photographer/bike enthusiast Kerly Ilves...and many more! With Estonian Music Week 2023, the

festival's 5th anniversary, about to kick off, we also focused on interviewing artists that are performing at the 5-day event. There's never a dull moment with EstoCast; tune in and check us out!

A good portion of our listener base remains located in Canada, with the United States, Estonia, Brazil, and Sweden rounding out the top 5 in the list of countries. We've gained a significant amount of listeners in all corners of the earth, such as Germany, Nigeria, and Singapore! Topping the charts as the current most popular episode is still Chef Paul Lillakas' *Path to Becoming a TV Chef*, followed by "An Interview with a Bookworm - a discussion with VEMU/Estonian Museum Canada chief archivist Piret Noorhani," "Returning to Musical Authenticity – a Feature Episode with Vaiko Eplik and "Notes on the Opera Life with Kristina Maria Agur." We're surely and steadily gaining ground in the vast sea of podcasts and have come a very long way in the past year!

Season 2 of EstoCast, which premiered in January, is well underway; with a slew of thrilling new guests visiting our studio, with many more to come, and captivating topics to capture the attention of all listeners; big and small, young and old... so stay tuned, you won't want to miss what's in store in the future! As a sneak peek, the next Estonian language episode will feature renowned athlete Aleksa Gold and the following English one will include Estonian jazz starlet Kirke Karja. Hosts Vincent Teetsov and Kati Kiilaspea, along with occasional guest hosts, will continue to take you through the exciting world of Estonian culture at large. You can find EstoCast here on major streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, as well as at our website: <https://estocast.buzzsprout.com/> Happy listening!

2023 WAS A LEAP FORWARD FOR ESTONIAN MUSIC WEEK

With any long-term festival, there is always the question of how to differentiate each iteration from year to year. In 2023, the Estonian Music Week team pushed into new territory with its artistic curation, event design, and socialization.





Five years on from the very first EMW, there were hints of what it has always been, but otherwise, signs that it had evolved. Take, for instance, the presence of networking events. On Wednesday, May 24th, artists and music industry professionals gathered at The Annex Hotel in Toronto for the first of two Nordic Connect Conference sessions. This time, artists offered information on the Estonian music market and the genesis of Estonia's booming folk scene.



Festivalgoers flocked to familiar locations, like Tartu College, where the Launch Party took place right after the first conference. While drinks and bites floated around, pianist Kirke Karja, early music expert Ansambel Triskele, and singer-songwriter Mari Kalkun serenaded the room. The audience befriended the artists. The party was jubilant, with spontaneous singing at times.

Thursday, May 25th, exemplified differences in space utilization. At St. Anne's Anglican Church and Parish Hall in the west end of Toronto, incendiary jazz, heart-wrenching folk, and fierce electronic compositions soared high to the ceilings. Particularly at the jazz stage in the church, a Byzantine Revival building from 1908 with decorations from members of the Group of Seven. Kirke Karja Trio crafted daring improvised music, shattering the notion that valid artistic expression comes only in a form we are comfortable with. Audiences couldn't have predicted what was going to happen next.

Audiences were spoiled for choice. How

many events allow one to sample such an eclectic mixture of innovative music in a matter of hours? For the duration of the night, one could float freely. One moment could be at the church, followed by hearing L CON's alternative pop retelling of the Heidi story at the Wavelength Stage. After this, Nastasia Y appeared below the starry "sky" of the BLOK Stage. Here, she amplified Ukrainian stories with her piercing battle cry and the shredding of her modern funk rhythm section. There was a sense of being cultured and enriched by the end of the night.

An often-commented highlight of the festival was the ethereal sets of Mari Kalkun and Kara-Lis Coverdale, which took place throughout the week. Coverdale's performance on Thursday night was visceral in the way she sent frequencies right through our bones. Kalkun was a grounding force. She sang songs from her upcoming album *The Stories of Stonia*, shepherding us back to our souls with a channelled ancestral voice.

That wasn't the ending, though. On Friday, the 26th, we reconnected with some of these artists in different live formats. Liis Ring brought natural soundscapes and sincere meditations through guitar, voice, and a table full of electronics. DJs kept the place bopping—highlights here were DJ McHi's beat-making over Estonian choral classics and the tactile mastery of turntablist Erik Laar, who even brought out a violin to complement his sonic palette. All the while, one could enjoy the sometimes neglected crossroads of visual art, installations, wearable art, and music. The Parish Hall was a playful sensory beehive during the *Kunstipidu* (Art Party).

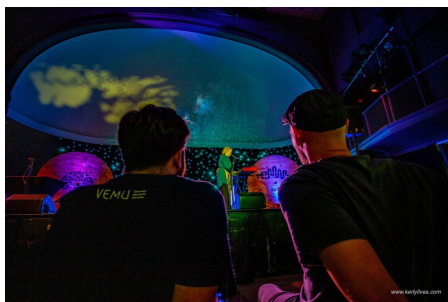
It's never a guarantee that people will be open to interactive events, but when it catches on as it did on the 26th, people



pour themselves into it. The blank tapestry set out by EKKT (the Society of Estonian Artists in Toronto) was packed with dozens of collages and paintings representing artists' identities.

Then, you could rinse and repeat, so to speak, in the wood-burning barrel sauna or the light and sound bath of Constellation Creative's "Recycled Landscapes" installation. Indeed, the inclusion of art had a calming effect. One could peruse the ceramics, screen-printed clothing, and jewellery of the night market. One could sit and learn traditional ribbon weaving from Veinika Västriik while watching the historic rhythms and harmonies of Ansambel Triskele (which new audiences were exceptionally receptive to). The backdrop for this was Riivo Kruuk's contemporary, stylish visions of Estonians and their silhouettes. This was illustrated on fabric and through a live drawing of Arvo Pärt on the wall.

In line with tradition, the city of Hamilton brought its own interpretations and flavours to the festival when Estonian Music Week took over Collective Arts Brewing on Saturday, May 27th. With busloads of musicians coming in, the show carried on in two phases. First off, the second session of the Nordic Connect Conference honed in on export development, Estonian diaspora artists, and the reworking of folk music. With the onset of evening, audiences were treated to perceptive, stimulating folk from both Camie and



her band and the duo Tragedy Ann.

Once again, Mari Kalkun evoked Estonian history with her songs—inspired by regilaul (runic songs)—which united with Zoon’s powerful, musical tidal wave, pointing to the genre they created called “moccasin gaze”.

There was a great deal of anticipation for the Canadian premieres of three compositions. Ansambel Triskele was joined by the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, performing “Symphonic Triskele”, a commissioned arrangement from Ardo Ran Varres. Kara-Lis Coverdale performed solo piano for “A Series of Actions in a Sphere of Forever”. She also played with the HPO, presenting “Composite Matter”, a piece commissioned by Alan Teder in memory of Velda and Ingvar Kattemaa. Finally, Kirke Karja premiered “Piano Concerto”. Each day of the festival brought something distinct.

The energy of the festival became more peaceful on Sunday, May 28th, the last day, with Ansambel Triskele adding to a service at St. Peter’s Estonian Lutheran Church. It was a fitting conclusion, with the final notes coming from something so spiritual, elemental, and foundational to Estonian music—regilaul and hymns.

EMW’s fifth-anniversary festival was a thorough cross-section of art and music. Creativity, spontaneity, and improvisation were all celebrated throughout the week. By the time the EMW wrap party arrived on Sunday afternoon, the resounding question became, “What’s next?” Now that this edition of EMW is over, we’ll just have to wait and see how its reputation and connections continue to spread out from southern Ontario.

EMW would like to extend a huge thank you to all those who made the festival possible. www.emw2023.ca/thanks

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Vincent Teetsov

VEMU EVENTS — SPRING 2023

As the dreary and dark winter made way for a bright and cheery spring, VEMU became an increasingly bustling centre of activity and energy. We offered culturally enriching experiences, including everything from a youthful Zumba class to film nights and a riveting photography exhibit. Many of the events featured a focus on sports and movement, as the Republic of Estonia’s Ministry announced in January that 2023 would be the year of movement. So what was VEMU up to this spring?

Starting off March was a fun-filled evening Zumba class with instructor Julia DeSotto. Together we celebrated the year of movement and participants seemed to really enjoy themselves. While the class focused on individuals aged 55+, it was definitely not a limiting factor to participants.

Following right after was a captivating workshop titled “Turning Your Story Into Art”, which was run by young Esto-Canadian artist and educator Camille Intson. The goal of the workshop was for participants of all ages to reflect on their relationship to Estonian identity and culture through creative writing and oral storytelling exercises. All involved left feeling uplifted and culturally enriched.

To celebrate “emakeelepäev” or Mother Tongue Day on March 15th, we held a film screening of “Language Rebel. Mati Hint.” Annika Koppel’s documentary film told the story of the life and creative path of Estonian linguist, essayist and educator Mati Hint, who also played an important role in the political landscape during Estonia’s reindpendence in 1991.

Kicking off April was the opening of the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory’s photographic exhibit “A story about Siberia. Photographer Vello Hindreus 1930-2020”. The exhibit was a collection of photos the Hindreus took during his time as a deportee in Siberia, in the Sonskoje area. This is one of the very few photographic collections documenting Siberian refugees that has been preserved. Ülle Kraft from the Institute of Historical Memory presented an interesting lecture on the topic.

The series of events focused on the year of movement was continued by a delightful, interactive Laughter Yoga Class led by instructor Lynn Himmelman. We experienced laughter on a whole new level, with it being the actual exercise! The class offered many tips and tricks on living a healthier life by including laughter in everyday life.

The end of the month brought with it VEMU’s annual fundraising event, and this time, in light of the year of movement, we invited renowned Estonian sumo wrestler Baruto aka Kaido Höövelson, to be the honorary guest and main speaker at the dinner on April 29th. The evening’s focus was on Japanese culture as well as the year of movement and featured Japanese traditional music by Toronto duo “tan tan,” delicious Japanese cuisine courtesy of Toronto’s EDO restaurant as well as sake served by local Estonian Ken Valvur, owner of the Ontario Spring Water Sake Company. Baruto also presented a lecture in Japanese at the Japanese Foundation, met with a judo club at the Japanese Canadian Culture Community Centre and much more. His visit was a great example of how to utilize the connections forged thanks to the Bloor Street Culture Corridor.

Moving on into the month of May, KESKUS and VEMU co-presented “Meet the Filmmakers!,” an opportunity to meet with the creators and teams of a record-breaking four Estonian films that were included in this year’s HotDocs film festival. Included among the renowned discussion panels was Anna Hints, director of “Smoke Sauna Sisterhood”, winner of the Sundance 2023 Directing Award; the film had its Canadian premiere at HotDocs.

After a long while, we were again treated to not one but two nights of Estonian theatre performances at Tartu College. Kalev Kudu’s Nullteater from Tartu presented two pieces, the first being “Ma tahaksin olla kui lill” on May 5th, which told the story of Estonian poet Juhan Liiv’s imaginary trip on a Tartu-Valga train to a Buddhist cloister. Talented young actor Karl Edgar Tammi played Juhan Liiv. The second piece on May 6th was “Endspiel. Luuletaja H.



Jane's Walk in York Cemetery

Photo: Piret Noorhani

Visnapuu viimased päevad New Yorgis.” The premise was a rainy afternoon in New York in 1951, and Estonian poet Hendrik Visnapuu (played by Kalev Kudu) reminisces about his youthful years, remembering his first love, lost home and homeland, time in Siuru, and his beloved wife Ing.

But May featured yet another instalment in the series of events related to the year of movement and that was a competition “Count Your Steps With VEMU!” In connection with museum night taking place in Estonia, the theme of which is “There are steps at night”, invited everyone to get moving from May 16 to 21 to enjoy the fresh air of spring and count their steps. Participants input their step count every night of the race week on the website prepared for the occasion. The competition winners were (in order from 1st to 3rd place): Katrin Sõmermaa, Merli Tamtik, and Teele Marzelas, with runners-up Kerly Ilves and Kivimoor.

But we have more to offer before we take a summer break! On Saturday, June 3rd, we have our next event dedicated to the year of movement, which is a Jane’s Walk through Toronto’s York Cemetery! Since its opening in 1948, York has become a resting place for many Estonians and Latvians. On the tour, we will be visiting some of their graves as well as learning many other interesting tidbits. Mart Salumäe and Andris Kesteris lead the walk.

Following that, on June 7th, we will be opening the Estonian National Museum’s photography exhibit about fathers at Tartu College for Father’s Day in June. ENM’s exhibit was formed using photographic material that was gathered from Estonians during a collection campaign. VEMU organized

a similar collection campaign, and now both Estonian and Canadian-Estonian fathers can be seen at the exhibit until September 17.

Finally, a delegation from Creative Destruction Lab Estonia will be visiting Toronto in June, and they look forward to meeting the local Estonian community and everyone else interested in innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration. We invite everyone to come to meet with them, Estonian entrepreneurs,

investors- plus research and innovation experts- at the networking event that will take place on the evening of June 12th at Tartu College. The event will feature a “fireside chat” and plenty of opportunities for connecting with people. Our partners for the event are Creative Destruction Lab, the Estonian Central Council in Canada, the Estonian Embassy in Ottawa, KESKUS, Tehnopol, and Latitude 44. Lots to come and see during June; join us for these events!



EESTI RAHVA MUUSEUMI
JA VÄLISEESTI MUUSEUMI NÄITUS

MEIE EESTI ISAD
OUR ESTONIAN FATHERS

EXHIBITION BY
THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
AND VEMU ESTONIAN MUSEUM CANADA

Avatud / Open: 7.06.-17.09.2023

VEMU Estonian
Museum
Canada

EESTI RAHVA
MUUSEUM



Baruto and Prof. Andres Kasekamp at VEMU fundraiser.

Photo: Peeter Põldre

VEMU'S 11TH FUNDRAISING EVENING: JAPAN IS CLOSE, AND THE MUSEUM IS CLOSER

The arrival of springtime has many markers depending on where you reside. In Japan, people await the sakura blossoms of cherry trees. They are an ethereal symbol of the passing of time, representing birth, death, and renewal.

More common in Canada are tulips and daffodils. At the same time, we have human markers, and that includes the VEMU Tuluõhtu (Fundraising Evening).

As VEMU Estonian Museum Canada strides towards constructing its destined home—a new museum building—these fundraising evenings are all the more essential. The proceeds of the fundraising go to the construction of the museum.

And what ticket holders received in return was a reminder of all VEMU has worked hard for. Namely, facilitating the connection between Estonian-Canadians and their heritage. All that is traditional, but also the most noteworthy Estonian creations and figures of the present.

Thus, VEMU invited Kaido Höövelson—the only Estonian to have ever become a professional rikishi (sumo wrestler)—as the guest speaker on Saturday, April 29th.

Cultivating the ambience for

Höövelson's arrival were two local makers of Japanese culinary specialties: EDO and Ken Valvur of the Ontario Spring Water Sake Company. There is, of course, a connection to the Estonian community through Valvur, but the quality of the sake and Japanese dishes served added to the sense of authenticity.

From the hors d'oeuvres to the main course and dessert, the array of food prepared by EDO was delectable and vibrant. Maki, sushi, and nigiri. Miso-infused black cod that was perfectly tender. The chocolate avocado mousse was extra thick, with tangy fresh berries contrasting the rich chocolate flavour. The yuzu sake, which might be compared in taste to limoncello, was smooth but had a citrusy freshness to it.

Between conversation and dining, speeches and live music warmed the hearts of participants. Jaan Meri, soon to retire as Chair of the Tartu College Board of Directors, recalled his introduction to the career of Kaido Höövelson (known in the sumo wrestling world as Baruto Kaito). Noriko Yamamoto, Executive Director at The Japan Foundation, Toronto, spoke fondly of the foundation's relationship with VEMU through the Bloor Street Culture Corridor. Piret Noorhani, Chief Archivist at VEMU, provided an overview of the museum's accomplishments in the last 12 months, plus many thank yous.

From there, Baruto gave a whistle-stop tour through his mythical career, from the invitation to Japan by Hidetoshi Tanaka to achieving the second-highest ranking in sumo wrestling. Although his story has been a topic of interest to many (including a previous article in *Eesti Elu*), there were fresh and intriguing details. It was moving, for example, to learn that his wife-to-be was disapproved of by his heya ("stable", where rikishi train). It was only after many unsuccessful arranged dates that the marriage was permitted to happen.

All the while, Professor Andres Kasekamp interpreted from Estonian to English. The oratory and linguistic interplay between the two of them were hilarious, as though they had been doing this together for quite some time.

Before Baruto said goodbye, Aki Takahashi and Kiyoshi Nagata from the music group Ten Ten performed folk songs with a shamisen (a traditional three-stringed instrument), bells, a shime daiko drum and a taiko drum. No previous fundraising evening has been quite like this.

The title of the evening, „Jaapan on Kaugel...“ was derived from a haiku by Juhan Viiding:

Japan is far

Estonia is further

the winds whisper

Yet, the events of the fundraising evening demonstrate how times have changed and how, with a museum in the works, VEMU Estonian Museum Canada will continue to bridge the gaps between Estonia and its friends all over.

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Vincent Teetsov

PHOTO EXHIBITION BY MARIA KAPAJEVA AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN TARTU, ESTONIA

On 18 May, artist Maria Kapajeva opened her exhibition "Loose photos, odds and ends" at the National Archives in Tartu by introducing the exhibit in English.

Eight years ago, Maria Kapajeva came across a few old photographs online

for sale. “This was quite a random purchase for me. An American dealer who runs an online shop selling old images from around the world agreed to put together “a collection” of photographs that he thought might be from Estonia. So, this is how this 105-piece collection of “loose photos, odds and ends” (according to the collector’s description) ended up in my hands. In his message, he added, “I am so glad these photos are “going home,” so to speak. I did not know how the images ended up in the US. At the end of 2021, when I started to prepare for this exhibition, I tried to contact the collector again, but I learned that he had unexpectedly died a week before. It was sad to realise that I had had those eight years to ask him questions, but I had not, and now I could not. So, I hope with the help of visitors to the exhibition, I can get answers to some of my questions.”

The National Archives of Estonia also has in its collections many photographs where it hasn’t been possible to identify the person(s) in the picture. We can rely on the new technologies that identify people for us and, like Kapajeva, on archive users who will send clarifications. The artist undertook substantial research putting together this exhibition using archives’ face recognition software and archival records.

This exhibition is an artistic experiment:

presenting a research process as an installation. Kapajeva experiments with different ways of opening up the potential of everyday photography’s often undervalued, under-researched and marginalised heritage. With this in mind, the artist introduces stories of people, photographers and their assistants who are often invisible or considered unimportant to mention. In the age of automated face recognition software – partly developed by archives, but even more so by state and military institutions and international corporations – her project demonstrates the benefits of “slow recognition”.

Gradual identification of the photographers and the people they portray reveals new perspectives on Estonian (micro-)history. By focusing on the faces of the photographed people, their stories and some other forgotten facts which she learned from these images, Kapajeva shows her appreciation for each person and every individual story in our history.

Maria Kapajeva invites all visitors to contribute to the installation as a continuous research process. While visiting the exhibit, please look at the photos closely, and if you recognise anyone or have any comments you would like to add, please use the yellow paper you will find on the table to write down what you know or would like to share, and attach the paper to the wall with

tape. You may write in any language you wish.

Estonian Art Museum Kumu commissioned the exhibition for a project space at the permanent exhibition “Landscapes of Identity: Estonian Art 1700-1945”, curated by Linda Kaljundi and Kadi Polli. At the National Archives in Tartu (Noorus 3), the exhibition is open from 18 May until 25 August, from Monday to Friday from 9-19, then from 26 June from 9-17. Visiting the exhibit is free of charge; everyone is warmly welcome!

Exhibition designer: Karolin Kull

Exhibition design concept: Laura Linsi / LLRLLRR

Exhibition coordinator: Lüsi Pabstel

Exhibition technicians: Ojari Lüüs and Peeter Reppo

Concept of the exhibition graphic design: Maria Muuk

Exhibition poster: Einike Leppik

Artist’s research assistant: Ketlin Käpp

With contributions in kind by Linda Kaljundi, Annika Toots, Karmen-Elise Küdron, Mirja Ots

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