

CULTURE

Sixteen things to see, do, read and hear in Toronto this February

Including a subversive satire, a bittersweet symphony and a modern take on a classic tragedy

BY TORONTO LIFE | FEBRUARY 2, 2023



Photo by the Bloor-Yorkville BIA

An outdoor gallery of breathtaking ice sculptures

1 Every year, the organizers of the Bloor-Yorkville Icefest seem to think that February has the perfect weather for an outdoor event. The theme for 2023 has yet to be revealed, but the thousands of pounds of glistening sculpted ice are always a joy to behold. Put on a warm winter coat and explore the different artistic creations through a self-guided tour. Bonus: the show is guaranteed to beat Icefest's 2022 record of zero ice. *February 18 to 19, Bloor-Yorkville*

A one-of-a-kind pairing of music and art

2 Over the past decade, Long Winter has had its finger firmly on the pulse of Toronto's emerging creative talent, providing stages for Lido Pimienta, Harrison and Alvays well before they made it big. Now in its 11th year, the monthly winter concert and art series returns to Tranzac for a night filled with music and installations. Since moving on from its original home at The Great Hall, Long Winter has lit up venues across the city with its unique community-driven spectacles, and its residency this month will be no different. Warm up among friends and take in captivating sights and sounds. *February 4, Tranzac*

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Photo by Todd Rosenberg Photography

A bittersweet symphony

3 Toronto always gets compared to sister-city Chicago, but every so often, our American counterpart brings its Windy City charm to us. For the finale of its North American tour—and for the first time in more than a century—the critically adored Chicago Symphony Orchestra is coming to Toronto. The two composers getting the CSO's attention are Beethoven and Prokofiev. It's a perfect send-off for conductor Riccardo Muti, the CSO's long-time music director. Cue the mournful oboe. *February 1, Koerner Hall*

A subversive satire

4 Writing partners Amy Lee Lavoie and Omari Newton dive headlong into issues of race, gender, power and privilege in their provocative new satire, *Redbone Coonhound*. The play's title refers to a breed of hunting dog whose controversial name triggers a heated debate between a young interracial couple and their friends. As the argument escalates, Lavoie and Newton veer into the realm of wild fantasy, with a surreal cast of characters ranging from child star Shirley Temple to a rapping Harriet Tubman. A hit when it opened this past fall at Vancouver's BMO Theatre Centre, the show arrives at the Tarragon Theatre as part of a rolling premiere. *February 7 to March 5, Tarragon Theatre*



Photo courtesy of the artist © Stacey Tyrell

A study in self-portraiture

5 In an effort to explore identity, selfhood and representation through photography, curator Mona Filip brings together local artists to pose as their various alter egos and answer the age-old question: *Who am I?* The resulting exhibition, *The Counter/Self*, showcases how politics, personal agency and history combine to create our selves, often disrupting and subverting conventional narratives. Participating creators are 2Fik, Helio Eudoro, Julius Poncelet Manapul, Meryl McMaster, Sasha Shevchenko, Adrian Stimson, Stacey Tyrell, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Jamie Griffiths. *Until April 15, Art Museum at the University of Toronto*

A magical adaptation of a magical book

6 Astronaut Chris Hadfield revealed his childhood conquest of nighttime jitters in his charming 2016 picture book, *The Darkest Dark*. Now, Young People's Theatre is bringing his story to the stage. Director Jim Millan teams up with writer Ian MacIntyre to tell the tale of the nine-year-old whose awe at the historic Apollo 11 moon landing helped him overcome scary shadows. *February 20 to April 2, Young People's Theatre*



Courtesy of Live Nation

Sweaty, synthy Swedish pop for Valentine's Day

7 Swedish alt-pop sensation Tove Lo comes to Toronto this month in support of her latest album, *Dirt Femme*. This is the fifth album from the artist (full name: Ebba Tove Elsa Nilsson), who has worked with the likes of Lorde and Ellie Goulding and knows her way around a catchy melody. Her music has a thrilling electronic sheen that will surely bring the heat to History. Recent singles like the bright and synthy “Grapefruit” and the inquisitive, arpeggio-studded “How Long” confirm that Sweden’s darling has delivered once again. *February 14, History*

A Real Housewife of Salt Lake City lays it all bare

8 Fan favourite Heather Gay was thrust into a crisis of faith after her husband filed for divorce, tearing apart her picture-perfect Mormon life. In *Bad Mormon*, her candid tell-all, she writes about her breakup with the church, navigating single motherhood and growing her beauty business—all with a dose of humour. *Out February 7*



Photo by Mirjam Devriendt

A dazzling play about the end of the world

9 Belgian experimental theatre company Ontroerend Goed is famous for its clever approach to diverse subjects. In its award-winning show *Are we not drawn onward to new era*, Ontroerend takes on nothing less than the possibility of an environmental apocalypse.

Palindromic in both title and structure, the play tackles humanity's devastating impact on the natural world and our potential to reverse course. The production, which dazzled audiences and critics at the 2019 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, comes to Toronto courtesy of Canadian Stage.

February 9 to 11, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

A vital conversation about climate change

10 As environmental disaster looms larger with each passing year, it can be overwhelming to understand the full extent of the climate crisis. Enter *The Climate Book*, Greta Thunberg's timely guide to navigating the urgent challenges we're facing. With contributions from more than 100 of the world's top experts, from oceanographers to Indigenous leaders, Thunberg captures a holistic picture of how climate change is affecting communities, species and the environment on both regional and global scales. Essential reading for anyone looking to take concrete steps to address an ongoing catastrophe. *Out February 14*



Photo by Tim Leyes

A modern take on a classic tragedy

11 Sarah Gadon has gone to some dark places onscreen (see: *Alias Grace* and her films with David Cronenberg), so *Yerma* is a fitting choice for her stage debut. In Simon Stone's contemporary retelling of Federico García Lorca's classic tragedy, Gadon stars as a married journalist whose inability to conceive a child takes her to desperate extremes. It's a psychological role that won British actor Billie Piper an Olivier Award in London. The play's Canadian premiere opens at the Coal Mine Theatre's expanded new east-end venue, at Woodbine and Danforth.

February 5 to 26, Coal Mine Theatre

A feminist story about witches

12 The latest novel from award-winning author Cherie Dimaline is an enthralling witch's tale. *VenCo* follows Métis millennial Lucky St. James, who lives in Toronto with her temperamental but lovable grandmother Stella. One night, Lucky discovers a treasure behind a wall: a spoon that spells Salem. Little does Lucky know that the spoon links her to a network of witches across North America who are waiting for seven spoons to be united in order to usher in a new age. Meanwhile in Salem, Meena Good, who found her own spoon, is looking for Lucky—with a witch hunter hot on her heels. *Out February 7*

A figure skating fun fest

13 Disney on Ice returns to Toronto for one weekend this month, much to the delight of city kids. Characters from *Moana* and *Tangled*, members of the princess posse (Ariel and Belle), and a couple of instantly recognizable mice are set to don skates. Special thanks to the Toronto Maple Leafs for loaning them the rink. *February 3 to 5, Scotiabank Arena*



Photo by Getty Images

A historical tribute to North American Black excellence

14 American jazz bassist and big band leader Christian McBride comes to town for *The Movement Revisited*, a powerful concert that centres on the lives of Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama. Opening the night is Canadian jazz legend Joe Sealy with a reworking of his Juno-winning *Africville Suite*, keeping the vital history of the Black community and settlement in Nova Scotia alive. *February 17, Meridian Hall*

A trade show for speed demons

15 For those who appreciate the growl of a powerful engine, the Canadian International AutoShow is here. This year marks the show's 50th anniversary—a half-century of concept cars, SUVs and motorcycles—as well as its return after a two-year pandemic absence. For the not-so-car-obsessed, the show also features alternatives, like bikes and rickshaws. *February 17 to 26, Metro Toronto Convention Centre*

A book about blood bonds and chosen family

16 Author Catherine Hernandez's new novel, *The Story of Us*, brings readers into the life of Mary Grace Concepcion, a Filipino worker who arrives in Toronto to face the bewildering realities of caregiving. After stepping into her job as a support worker for Liz, an elderly patient with Alzheimer's disease, Mary Grace confronts her own conservative beliefs, and a relationship slowly develops between them. *Out February 28*

Recommended watching and listening



***Stay with Me* by Christina Martin**

Recommended by Jeff Sammut, host of Canada Now, Sirius XM Canada



“One of my favourite artists today is singer-songwriter Christina Martin. I’ve had her 2021 single ‘Stay With Me’ on rotation since its release. You can hear her heart and soul poured into it. It’s raw, layered, relatable and moving—everything I’ve come to expect from Martin.”

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Inside Man

Recommended by Dorothy Ellen Palmer, writer and disability activist



“I love a little dark, wry wit with my thrillers. *Inside Man*, starring Stanley Tucci and David Tennant, delivers both chuckles and chills. Over an expertly written four episodes, two storylines converge: a vicar falls from grace by imprisoning a woman in his cellar, and a wife murderer seeks redemption by preventing another murder.”



That's Messed Up

Recommended by Sophia Salador, director of comedy programming, Live Nation Entertainment



“I can’t believe there’s a podcast that covers three of my favourite things: true crime, comedy and Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. Comedians Liza Treyger and Kara Klenk recap each episode of SVU, discuss the true crime it’s based on and interview a guest from the episode.”

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