

## Booktown Richmond

Presents Bookbedonnerd III

"The Coole Odyssey"

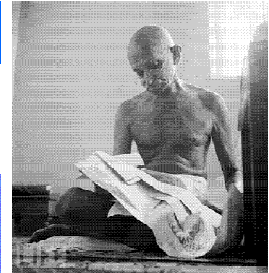
Celebrating 150 years of Indian settlement in South Africa

October 21, 22, & 23, 2010

Richmond Filums

October 20, 21, 22, & 23, 2010

See [www.richmondnc.co.za](http://www.richmondnc.co.za)



"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

### BOOK TOWN RICHMOND JUNE NEWSLETTER

Môre Alle Karoosters

Peter Baker, you beauty!!!

In the week between Christmas and New Year of 2009, while surfing the net, I discovered an item with the words *The Great Karoo*, *Canadian* and *Cowboys*. Naturally, my curiosity was piqued, as my e-mail address is 'cowboys', Peter is a Canadian and Richmond is slap bang in the middle of the Great Karoo.. And there, lo and behold, I discovered a book called *The Great Karoo* by one of Canada's great authors **Fred Stenson**. I phoned Peter straight away, even though it was late and told him : 'I've got to have this guy in Richmond for 2010. I've got enough on my plate. It's left up to you to get your countryman out to the Great Karoo to have the SA launch of this book. But I must have this book at our festival'

What I could not understand was why no South African newspaper had even mentioned the book, nor why the publishers had failed to bring the book to SA, given the books theme: the Anglo-Boer War and the role that several prairie cowboys, who joined the Canadian Mounted Rifles, played in this war. To me, this was a hitherto unknown chapter in the history of the Anglo-Boer War and was something I had to know more about, given the fact that the Anglo-Boer War is undoubtedly one of the founding myths of South African history. Canadian critics likewise also praised the book for 'illuminating a lost chapter of Canadian history. The *Quill and Quire* in Canada describes the book as follows: ' Stenson writes with power, and his descriptions- particularly of the landscape and the trials of the horses – are masterful...' This comment about the horses refers to the many Canadians who answered to the call of the British Empire and traveled to SA with their horses, hoping that these horses would handle the desert terrain of the Karoo as well as the plains of Canada, in their fight against the Boers. Moreover, Ingrid Winterbach who will be in Richmond this year has written extensively on the Anglo-Boer war in many of her novels, and I felt that this could be a wonderful session. Throw in **Sabata**

**Mokae**, who is going to talk about his Sol Plaatje biography and you have the makings of one of the most riveting sessions at this year's festival, I thought to myself.

In the months ahead, in true Peter Baker fashion, he set about penning a fistful of letters to the Canadian Embassy and agencies that would fund the trip to SA. After nearly six months of cajoling, begging and pleading, we are thrilled to announce that Fred Stenson will be joining us in Richmond for the SA launch of *The Great Karoo*. This is a highly acclaimed novel. It was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2009; it was a Governor General's Literary Awards Finalist 2008; it was among the Globe 100 Best Books 2008 and Longlisted for the 2010 Dublin IMPAC Award. Moreover, any book that begins with a map of the Great Karoo with Richmond right in the middle of that map simply has to be a great book!!!

Fred Stenson is truly one of Canada's great literary talents. His novel *Trade* at the beginning of the new millennium won the inaugural Grant McEwan Writer's Award, The City of Edmonton Book Prize and the Writers Guild of Alberta's George Bugnet Novel Award. He has written scripts for almost 150 films and videos, and writes a regular humour column for *Alberta Views Magazine*.

There are only a few other changes to our line –up since our last newsletter. **Professor Rajendra Chetty**, head of research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and the man who first put South African Indian Writing on the map almost a decade ago, joins the Coolie Odyssey. We are proud to announce that Book Town Richmond will be the place where he will launch his book *The Vintage Collection: Indian Writing: 1860-2010*. This book is bound to gain centre stage on the SA literary landscape in the build up to the 150 year celebrations of Indian settlement in SA in November.

On the Afrikaans front, **Wynand Coetzer**, author of the highly acclaimed debut novel *Skerpioen* will also join our illustrious list of speakers for 2010. According to Riana Scheepers, a respected figure in Afrikaans literary circles and a speaker at last year's festival: '*Skerpioen*, die fassinerende en boeiende debut deur Wynand Coetzer, is 'n juweel van 'n roman. Dit skitter met al die fasette wat die bitter aarde van hierdie aarde daaruit wring.' This will be Wynand's second consecutive visit to Book Town Richmond, but this year, this Professor of Engineering from Stellenbosch returns as a speaker. Which I mention only to highlight the fact: scientists too can write!!!

Other good news is that acclaimed Afrikaans novelist **Eben Venter**, no stranger to Book Town Richmond, will be joining the Coolie Odyssey as well. At the launch of Eben Venters novel *Santa Gamka* last year, I said that Eben Venter's novel *Ek stamel, ek sterwe* ranks, in my opinion, amongst the Top 10 Afrikaans novels. Of ALL time!!! This year, he returns to launch his latest book. We look forward to hosting one of the most popular speakers from last year, once more.

The last addition to our programme is **Pieter Scholtz**, retired head of Drama at my university for many years. Pieter has just published his first adult novel (hopefully that means lots of sex!!!) called *The Wind is a Story*. The life changing power of music and dance lies at the centre of this novel, The novel has a strong sense of place, evoking the iconic landscapes of the Karoo and the Kalahari. The book tells the story of an Afrikaner

family who adopt a San child, and how this child's life is changed when a mysterious stranger gives him a *mbira*, one of the seminal instruments of African music. To Pieter, we say welcome, and bring your *mbira* – magic to Book Town Richmond!!!

Sadly, three of our speakers have had to withdraw. Aziz Hassim suffered a mild heart attack and has been advised not to undertake any long journeys. So sadly, that means that Richmond will be a road too far. We wish Aziz a speedy recovery. Joan Hambidge has also informed me that she is going overseas to conduct research. Hopefully, she will visit sometime soon. Steward van Wyk has informed me that due to the subject of his research, he feels that next year will be a more strategic year. You will understand what he means come 2011.

## **Richmond Filums by David & Gail Robbins**

### **A TASTE OF INDIA**

Just to whet your appetite for Richmond Filums here are four 26 minute films that will give a visual experience of Indian culture for the *Coolie Odyssey*.

***Fire walking in South Africa:*** A look at the burning steps of Indian South Africans, who offer their vows to their Gods (Drophi) by walking on burning ashes. This is a mesmerizing ceremony that starts at the river where the chosen ones fall in a trance and pierce their bodies. Then they go for a painful walk on veils to the temple where they face the most difficult challenge: a walk over a bed of burning ashes.

***Kavadi, the piercing ceremony:*** Each year, in February, thousands of Indians from the Tamil community in Durban take part in the Kavadi ceremony. This is one of the most peculiar and captivating ceremonies in the country. Women and men fall in a state of trance and in honour of Lord Muruga, they start piercing their bodies using long needles, without any evidence of blood.

***The Return:*** Preparations are under way for the Hindu festival of Lights – Diwali – when fate deals an unexpected blow. *The Return* is a haunting lyrical story that looks at Indian cultural issues in an evolving society. Amir, a young Hindu man estranged from his family after marrying a Muslim woman, decides to rebuild bridges with his mother.

***The Vow:*** An essay in father/son relations, this haunting short film explores salvation by both natural and supernatural means. A man is about to make a vow during a Hindu ceremony called the Kavadi. He hopes that his pledge will lead to his mute son being able to speak. However, the father is distracted by a noise during the ceremony and so does not fulfil the ritual.

## BOOK NEWS

A new book by **David Robbins** is now available country-wide. You can purchase *Private Excavations – exploring the roots of dogma* online [www.porcupinepress.co.za](http://www.porcupinepress.co.za)

In *Private Excavations*, South African author David Robbins explores the historical roots and contemporary impact of religious fundamentalism – the archetypal one-truth perception of the world. This is essentially a travel book. The author visits those parts of Germany, Sweden and Norway that spawned fundamentalist Christianity in its earliest form (Pietism), as well as the Pietist-inspired circumstances and convictions that brought his Scandinavian forebears as missionaries to the eastern seaboard of South Africa.

The urge to make such explorations first stirred in him during the deep political disturbances that wracked Natal-KwaZulu in the late 1980s. Robbins' investigations are given depth and perspective by his interest in the lives of two prominent Scandinavians (playwright August Strindberg and artist Edvard Munch) But it is the author's pursuit of his own ancestors – his private excavations – that remain the central focus of this work; and it is this personal intent that lends an intimacy and penetration to his insights into an indisputably universal theme. As one reader has remarked: '*Private Excavations* is superb travel writing with a profoundly important purpose.'

Some of the special attractions of the book include

- Visits to Spandau and Halle where Pietism was conceived and first practised.
- The pervasive sense of brutality and division in Berlin as counterpoint to the realities of apartheid South Africa in the violent 1980s.
- Strindberg and Munch's rigid Pietist upbringings juxtaposed with those of the author's Swedish and Norwegian forebears.
- Visits to Stockholm and Oslo
- Excursions into the art history of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe.
- Travelling through the wild landscapes of Norway's West Coast with a well-known Norwegian author.

- The outer journey supported and given substance by the author's inner journey through the rigidities and follies of a simplistic one-truth vision of existence.

## **Book Restoration Workshop by the National Library of SA**

We are thrilled to bits that **Douwe Drijfhout** and his team from Preservation Services at the National Library of SA in Pretoria will once again be making their way to Richmond. Last year, these workshops proved most popular, although the public might have been unaware of their existence because the course was held at the back of Anra's Guesthouse. But we are pleased that Douwe will be supporting our initiatives in Richmond. We have always maintained that Book Town Richmond must be about more than just an annual book festival. We believe that book restoration and document preservation offers a viable future for the unemployed in Richmond. It will take some time before we get a buy-in from the local community. But hey, they were sceptical about the book town idea 4 years ago, and look where we are now. Details of the format of this workshop will be fleshed out in the coming months.

To summarise then, the speakers for this year's festival are:

- |                              |                                      |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Ronnie Govender</b>    | <b>12. Kirby van de Merwe</b>        |
| <b>2. Rajendra Chetty</b>    | <b>13. Wynand Coetzer</b>            |
| <b>3. Eben Venter</b>        | <b>14. Len Raymond</b>               |
| <b>4. Rian Malan</b>         | <b>15. Diana Ferrus</b>              |
| <b>5. Tymon Smith</b>        | <b>16. Stephan Welz</b>              |
| <b>6. Imraan Coovadia</b>    | <b>17. Geoff Klass</b>               |
| <b>7. Ahmed Kathrada</b>     | <b>18. Sabata Mokae</b>              |
| <b>8. Denis Beckett</b>      | <b>19. Roger and Pat de la Harpe</b> |
| <b>9. Johnathan Jansen</b>   | <b>20. Marianne Palmer</b>           |
| <b>10. Loftus Marais</b>     | <b>21. David &amp; Gail Robbins</b>  |
| <b>11. Ingrid Winterbach</b> | <b>22. Rosemary Rudd</b>             |

**23. Gerald Hoberman**

**24. Angela Read Lloyd**

**25. Chris Marais & Julie du  
Toit**

**26. Maureen Isaacson**

**27. Darrel Conolly**

**28. Donal McCracken**

**29. Ike's Bookshop**

**30. Judge Chris Nicholson**

**31. David & Taffy Shearing**

**32. Alf Kumalo**

**33. Pieter Scholtz**

**34. Fred Stenson**

We look forward to seeing you all in Richmond!

Cheers,

Darryl & Peter

