

FOCUS



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Monday: The Capitol Theatre, Moncton. 8 p.m. \$3.50 and \$34.50 (all applicable charges). 536-4379. www.capitol.nb.ca.
Tuesday: The Playhouse, Fredericton. 7:30 p.m. \$10, \$54/members, \$30/under-19. 666-884-5800. www.theplayhouse.ca.
Wednesday: Imperial Theatre, Saint John. 8 p.m. \$40, \$15/seniors, \$10/students. 454-4100. www.imperialtheatre.nb.ca.

...nine and has performed as a soloist more than 100 times with orchestras, with appearances across Europe and in Asia in addition to Canada. Last year, he signed an exclusive recording agreement with Germany's Deutsche Grammophon, home to conductor Claudio Abbado, and will play in concert with the New York Philharmonic in December 2012.

Lisiecki is still logging a first when he performs this week with the national Orchestra - while he has played with many orchestras in the past, he has never toured internationally.

"This is my first time staying in a hotel with an orchestra, touring from city to city," he says. "I'm so looking forward to it," said the 16-year-old young man in Ottawa for several days before the tour began. "Next year, I'll have a couple more (tours) in Europe so I can do it first with an orchestra that I've spent lots of time with before."

Lisiecki has been playing with the national orchestra since he was 11. "I've

Creating the Chiac canon

At Café Archibald in Moncton, France Daigle sits quietly and comfortably by the window. She's unassuming in her short black hair, light green blouse and tasteful scarf. Daigle is the kind of writer you may not notice on the street right away. But you might want to pay better attention next time you're out.

Daigle's books have won her literary accolades in Canada and abroad. She's the recipient of numerous awards, including the Prix Pascal-Poirier, the prestigious Prix France-Acadie, the Prix littéraire Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie and, earlier this month, the 2011 Lieutenant-Governor's Award for High Achievement in French-Language Literary Arts.

What's more, she's done it by staying in New Brunswick.

The fifth child of eight, Daigle was born in Dieppe in 1953. Her father was a journalist and translator, and worked most of his life for L'Évangéline, New Brunswick's long-time French-language newspaper.

"There was always TV, radio and books in the house," Daigle says. "My father felt it was important for us to hear and see and learn."

Nor was Daigle a stranger to the magic of words, even from an early age.

"I remember deciding to read a book for myself, not for school, when I was eight years old - the kind with only drawings at the beginning of each chapter," she says laughing. "When I was a bit older, my sister brought home albums by Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan. I was always fascinated by words, whether in a song or on a page."

Of course, growing up in an Acadian family, French was the language spoken at home. But Daigle wasn't exposed to just Acadian and Quebec culture.

"My brother-in-law was from France," Daigle says. "He would always bring over all kinds of French books and albums. It was very exciting."

Daigle dabbled with writing in high school. Then she enrolled at Université de Moncton where she began her BA. She left after a year to attend Ryerson's film program, but was disappointed with the school's approach.

"It was more about photography than film," Daigle says. "And it focused on the technical side of filmmaking rather than the storytelling."

So she returned to Moncton and completed her BA in literature, taking courses in French and English as well as a creative-writing class that allowed her to experiment with different forms of writing. She also worked part-time for L'Évangéline to help pay for her school bills.

Coincidentally, it was during this period that Acadie was experiencing a cultural revolution of sorts and Daigle often found herself in the same circles as rising literary figures like Guy Arsenault, Herménégilde Chiasson and Gérard LeBlanc. But she didn't follow their lead.

"The whole idea of l'Acadie as underdog; it's not what I wanted to write or how I viewed myself," Daigle says. "I didn't want to be limited by such categories."

Instead, Daigle set a goal for herself. She had begun work on a screenplay and a book of poetry, and decided she would go to Montreal to complete them. For the next three years, Daigle worked as a translator to save enough money for the trip.

Montreal was a turning point for Daigle as a writer. Although she didn't end up publishing either book, it didn't matter - she had fulfilled her promise to herself.

"It was funny," Daigle says. "I had proven to myself I could do it. But after I had completed the two books I thought - what do I do now?"

Daigle spent the next year in Europe, where she wrote what became her first published book, *Sans jamais parler du vent* (1983). Two more books followed soon after her return to Moncton: *Film d'amour et de dépendance* (1984) and *Histoire de la maison qui brûle* (1985).

Daigle quickly realized writing wouldn't pay the bills and supplemented her author royalties by working as a news editor for Radio-Canada in Moncton where she remained for almost 20 years.

Fortunately, it didn't affect her creativity. In fact, since 1985, Daigle has published nine books, mostly recently *Pour sûr*, a 750 page tome that took her 10 years to write and was released in September.

"I always found it strange to fill out forms and include 'writer' as a way of defining myself," Daigle says. "But I feel a

books



France Daigle, author of the new book 'Pour sûr,' is the recipient of the 2011 Lieutenant-Governor's Award for High Achievement in French-Language Literary Arts. PHOTO: MATHIEU LÉGER

little more comfortable with it after this book."

A major element of Daigle's new book is her extensive use of Chiac, which she began to incorporate into her writing more than 10 years ago.

"My father is probably turning over in his grave right now," Daigle jokes. "He would be happy for the book's success, but not the Chiac."

Chiac is a language that combines Acadian French with English words, since made popular by Acadian writers like Daigle as well as Dano LeBlanc, creator of the infamous Acadian superhero, Acadieman. But for Daigle, Chiac is more than just words.

"It's a mentality," Daigle says, "not simply a mixing of two languages. So it's dangerous and somewhat taboo in French-language culture. It's one of those things you can't speak until you are 18," she adds with a chuckle.

Daigle's list of literary accomplishments also includes work as playwright during the late 1990s with the Collectif Moncton Sable, a French-language theatre company that produced two of her plays. She hasn't returned to playwrighting for several years, though.

"Theatre was fun for me," Daigle explains. "It helped me with dialogue and gave me the freedom to play with Chiac. But writing required only me, while theatre usually involves 40 people at a time."

During the late 1990s, Daigle also applied for some provincial cultural funding to enable her to promote her work. When she received the grant, she decided translating one of her works into English would be better than flying to a literary festival.

"The French and English-language publishing sectors are two different worlds," Daigle admits. "It's a much deeper problem than marketing. There's probably a hundred English-speaking New Brunswickers who know who I am."

Daigle enlisted freelancer Sally Ross in Halifax to translate *La vraie vie* (1993). Not long after, Toronto publishing firm House of Anansi (home to Patrick deWitt, winner of this year's Governor General's Literary Award for fiction) made an offer on the book. *Real Life* appeared in 1995 - the first of five translated Daigle titles carried by Anansi.

Daigle's marketing experiment has paid off. Anansi is in the process of translating *Pour sûr*. And her novel *Just Fine* won the Governor General's Literary Award for translation in 2000 and garnered her new respect within the English-language writing community.

These days, Daigle likes to work out of her home in Moncton, often writing in the mornings on her computer for three or four hours. But she has never been one to embrace the idea of disciplined writing.

"I can't force myself to write," Daigle says. "I have always worked by project, so when there's no project in mind, I don't get much writing done."

And now that *Pour sûr* is finally finished, Daigle isn't in a hurry to start her next writing project.

"Distractions are good for creativity," Daigle confesses. "I play solitaire more than I write these days." ☞

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16-year-old piano virtuoso Jan Lisiecki. PHOTO: ANDRAS SCHRAM

grown with the orchestra as a musician and a person."

First tour, yes, but it's not the first time the prodigy has played the East Coast. He's played with Symphony Nova Scotia and Symphony New Brunswick.

"I'm looking forward to going back," he said. "It's such a beautiful and different part of Canada. The people are really friendly."

The personable young man - who hardly seems a teenager at his level of maturity and his six-foot-two stature, at least until he starts shooting elastics around the rehearsal hall - is also looking forward to eating all manner of seafood and inspiring young people he will be teaching along the way.

"My goal is to show them how great classical music is, how fun it is and that it's something that they can do." ☞

Jennifer Campbell is an Ottawa writer who was born and raised in New Brunswick and returns regularly. Reach her at jcps@sympatico.ca.

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