

BLOOMSDAY MONTREAL 2014 EVENT MANAGER REPORT

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I. Bloomsday Overview

This year represented the third incarnation of Bloomsday Montreal. Founded by MCLL members from an initial study group, this year saw attempts to grow the festival to the broader community while still serving the original purposes and ethos of an MCLL event. A major idea this year in growing the festival was to simultaneously maintain the festival as an MCLL event and speak to that base community while situating Bloomsday Montreal amongst other global Bloomsdays as an international festival, and one that moves beyond specialized Joycean scholarship to draw in the broader community by situating as an Irish literary, musical, and cultural festival in Montreal.

Attempts were made to grow both in larger attendance and in external financial support. Management of the festival moved from volunteer coordinators and founders David and Judith Schurman to a paid, external event manager, Kerry McElroy. McElroy held ties to the Concordia Department of Canadian Irish Studies, including managing events for them in the past, and being involved with the Irish Montreal community. She had served as a member of the Bloomsday

committee for two years, and became publicity coordinator in 2012. She worked closely with McGill administrators to coordinate between McGill, the Bloomsday committee, and the various players, vendors, press, and the community at large.

An external sponsorship coordinator, Patmeena Sabit, was also enlisted for the first time. Sabit was charged with a large scale, multi-month, pre-festival project of attempting to gain corporate and philanthropic sponsors in Montreal and Canada-wide in order to begin to offset costs to MCLL, and to make the festival more self-sufficient.

The Bloomsday Montreal committee consisted of fourteen members, some representing MCLL, some representing other facets of the community with an interest in Bloomsday, from Concordia students, the Jewish Public Library, and a representative of the Joyce family living in Montreal. The committee met at MCLL approximately eight times as a full committee, with at least four meetings of sub-committees such as Publicity, between August 2013 and May 2014. These meetings served as brainstorming sessions and deliberations as to the direction of the festival and recommendations for and against specific events and approaches.

Taking into consideration the recommendations and suggestions of the committee at large, the event manager set about undertaking programming in April 2014. Ultimately, the festival expanded to a five day, seventeen event occurrence in multiple locations across Montreal. The programming, in concurrence with the finances and the ethos, underwent an ambitious expansion from previous years. It was a seminal year for changes in the festival as well on this front, as it was the first time admission was charged for some events. For the previous two years, all Bloomsday Montreal events had been free to the public. This was another attempt at minimizing costs to MCLL and making the festival more self-sufficient, while making it larger and giving it a higher profile in the city and amongst international Bloomsday celebrations. People could purchase tickets in advance on the McGill website, including a Super Pass that enabled them access to all events over the five days. An Interac machine was contracted through McGill to allow patrons showing up to pay onsite with debit, credit, or cash.

The event manager also attempted to grow the festival to community members, a younger demographic, and forge new vital relationships with the Irish pubs of Montreal by creating a Bloomsday pub-a-day. This allowed for new or existing relationships with five pubs and cross-promotions. It gave both Bloomsday Montreal and the participating pubs increased visibility, and ideally gave Bloomsday Montreal attendees a community feeling, fostering a home base between events and thus hopefully encouraging more conviviality and attendance. In addition and separate from the hard work of the fundraising coordinator, we managed to create new, exciting, and revenue-generating partnerships this year with Paragraphe Bookstore and the Word Bookstore.

The event manager also attempted to circumvent difficulties with reliance on MCLL volunteers alone by creating a student volunteer program that drew heavily from the Concordia Department of Canadian Irish Studies. This cemented a natural relationship, brought in a young and enthusiastic demographic, and provided a wealth of young and speedy volunteers to help out at each event.

We were fortunate this year to, at the last moment, be offered an international, museum quality exhibition of panels on Joyce's life on loan from the Irish embassy in Ottawa. While the embassy did not provide funds this year, this display was impressive, and generously housed through the month of June by our partners, the Westmount Library. It drew in thousands of people to what Bloomsday Montreal is, solidified our excellent relationship with Westmount Library and the city of Westmount in its display, and made the explicit connection between Bloomsday Montreal and the Irish embassy as a major and serious Bloomsday.

Lastly, Bloomsday Montreal benefited from the good fortune of a new connection with Christopher Joyce, a descendant of James Joyce and Irish citizen who happened to be living in Montreal this year. Joyce was enthusiastic about participating, introducing a film, headlining a storytelling event, attending the keynote and gala as honoured guest, and attending committee meetings. Local interest in a Joyce living in Montreal drew many people to his storytelling event, and brought media attention to the festival that has eluded it in year's past. Joyce was interviewed on four radio programs, as well as for a video clip at McGill. The spate of interviews he did around the festival certainly drew local interest, increased our numbers, and gave legitimacy to our festival as a Bloomsday second only to Dublin. We were certainly fortunate to have a "Joyce descendant in Montreal" angle to draw press and community members into the festival.

II. Duties of and Tasks Accomplished by Event Manager

The organization and implementation of this Bloomsday Montreal 2014 festival was a formidable task, most particularly due to the massive scale of festival to be organized and enacted in a very short turn-around time. Due to delays in approving the position of paid event manager within MCLL committee deliberations, McElroy was not hired until March 28, 2014. This meant that most of the programme had to be researched, sought out, compiled and implemented within a ten week period, all while establishing the budget, logistics, participants, and volunteers of the event, as well as organizing the media and publicity campaign. The limitations of this timeframe will be discussed later in the challenges section.

In establishing relationships with various members of MCLL, vendors, venue managers, artists and performers, Bloomsday committee members and volunteers, and McGill administrative support, the event manager held a massive amount of in-person meetings (80-100), as well as phone meetings, video conferences, and a near constant stream of email exchanges with hundreds of people. The event manager estimates in the ten week period that she sent 1300 emails and received a similar amount- also manning correspondence on both personal email and the Bloomsday Gmail account.

Essentially, this event manager position amounted to six distinct roles or positions: -

- programming, which entailed researching creative content and performers to fill slots in the schedule, approaching content providers for availability, and scheduling events,
- budget coordinator, working with McGill administration to craft a festival budget and maintain throughout and after events,
- leadership/executive management, calling and chairing committee meetings, serving as contact point between McGill administration and Bloomsday Montreal, delegating tasks to committee members, sending thank yous post-festival, securing team of volunteers,
- publicity, maintaining the work of the previous year in addition to many more primary responsibilities, creating press releases, working with the McGill Media Relations Office, maintaining database of contacts and contacting them, pushing media coverage and interviews,
- social media, delegating student volunteers to maintain social media networks, while personally maintaining others, monitoring analytics, growing social media presence
- event management, responsible for logistics and vendor contracts in advance, and being present and the contact person to assist with the event and troubleshoot any issues, supervise volunteers, at all seventeen events over five days.

It is a testament to the support of the many volunteers who believe in the mission of Bloomsday Montreal and were available for a great deal of assistance, and to the paid workers at the festival's partner organizations and at McGill who served as contact team members for the event manager, that these tasks were able to be completed successfully.

III. Overview of This Year's Events

As mentioned previously, this year's incarnation of Bloomsday worked under a new model and had a far more ambitious approach than previous years. The festival expanded to five days from four, and charged for eleven or seventeen events (two of which were revenues for external partners, the Jewish Public Library and EVOO restaurant). Following each event will be detailed and evaluated:

Bloomsday Cabaret, Atwater Library

Expected Attendance: 60

Actual Attendance: 70

Recommendation: maintain

This was the third year in a row for this event, and also the opening event of the festival for three years running. The relationship with Lynn Verge, library director is strong and should be maintained- Atwater was instrumental this year in helping us to get musicians and other performers paid in a timely fashion. The musicians put on an amazing performance and the room was full.

"The Derry Walls" with Introduction by Chris Joyce, McCord Museum

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 35

Recommendation: maintain similar slot as part of film program, with new film next year

The film program has been a basic leg of Bloomsday programming for the previous two years, and we have been fortunate to show all films at the Bombardier Theatre of the McCord Museum at minimal cost. Previously films were free, and this year cost either \$5.00 or \$10.00. The admission did not seem to be a large deterrent. This slot was well-used by introducing Bloomsday festival-goers to Chris Joyce. We have a good partnership in the McCord, and films should be shown there going forward. An interesting aspect of organizing is finding films that fit the Joycean or Irish cultural motif and can draw in the public.

“The Joycean Society” with Introduction by Chantal Pontbriand

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 25

Recommendation: maintain similar slot as part of film program, with new film next year

This was a prestigious, art level film with introduction by an internationally-known curator. We acquired this film through a very promising new connection with the Fonderie Darling, and this new partnership may prove fruitful in future events. This film charged \$10.00 instead of \$5.00 which may have limited its audience. Next year showing a more mass audience crowd-pleaser in its place may be advisable. However, the lower attendance this year on this particular film was probably offset by the good new relationships with international artists and curators who are Joyceans, and the Fonderie as a potential venue or partner in future years.

Keynote Lecture by Marilyn Reizbaum at the Jewish Public Library

Expected Attendance: 200

Actual Attendance: 180

Recommendation: maintain connection through non-keynote event next year

This event was unique in that it was the first time the keynote was held at an outside location, outside of downtown Montreal, sponsored by an external group, and given by a scholar flown into Montreal rather than Dr. Michael Kenneally of Concordia. On one hand, there was little risk to Bloomsday Montreal as the Jewish Public Library paid Dr. Reizbaum’s expenses, collected their own fees, and conducted their own publicity. They utilized their own network of the Jewish community in Montreal to draw in a sizable crowd. This demonstrated that off-site events in other cultural milieus in Montreal can be a success, and that this partnership with the JPL should be maintained. It also showed that people are willing to pay to attend the keynote lecture. As the keynote’s focus cannot really remain Joyce and Judaism year in and year out at the risk of being repetitive, it is recommended that we maintain this valuable new partnership, perhaps holding an event at the JPL next year, while returning the keynote itself to downtown Montreal, providing our own speaker, and charging for the event as part of our own revenue.

Bloomsday Cabaret, Beaconsfield Library

Expected Attendance: 30

Actual Attendance: 15

Recommendation: maintain, perhaps with a shift in event or time

We have a strong relationship with our partners at Beaconsfield library and this event, three years running, represents our only presence on the West Island. The Friends of the Beaconsfield Library became larger donors this year and are enthusiastic about keeping us. Years past have shown strong attendance, and the performances have been reviewed as excellent. Unfortunately this year, attendance was low, likely due to bad weather that afternoon. It is the recommendation here that this low attendance was a one-off, and that we should retain an event at Beaconsfield. Perhaps attendance could be increased, even outside of weather problems, by brainstorming with the partners to create a new and fresh event, perhaps at a different time of day.

Concordia Academic Panels

Expected Attendance: 35

Actual Attendance: 55

Recommendation: maintain

One of Bloomsday Montreal's strongest partnerships and patrons is the School of Canadian Irish Studies at Concordia University. Dr. Michael Kenneally as chair of the department has donated sizable amounts to us, participated in a promotional video, provided our keynote in 2012 and 2013, and been an enthusiastic and vocal proponent of our success and promoter. Three other professors from the department have given excellent talks for us. They also provide this panel time for lectures from academics from Universite de Montreal and UQAM, including our premier francophone event two years running. This event is free, well-attended, and allows Canadian Irish Studies to provide a reception and showcase its department. It is strongly recommended that this connection be maintained and that this popular event continue with interesting new academic speakers doing work on a variety of Joycean and Irish themes.

Song Cycle to Joyce's "Chamber Music", McCord Museum

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 40

Recommendation: hold different event in this time slot

This event was a part of a new push for musical events that brought in the larger community with entertainment and spectacle over specialized Joyce studies, with the partnership of musical director and local professional musician Kris Epps. The chamber music and the gala were presented as marquee events, with higher admissions and far higher production costs, than anything on our previous models. On the upside, this was a highly polished and sophisticated event with professional musicianship and accompanying audio-visuals. It showed that we can get patrons to attend a musical or cultural entertainment event on a Friday evening. In the end, it seems its material was perhaps too specialized and highbrow, the admission price was off-putting or competed with the gala, or both. This event did not deliver on numbers and lost money due to its high production values. It is recommended that a lower cost (to us in production, and perhaps to the public in admission, but perhaps not) event be put into a similar slot at the McCord- perhaps a storytelling event, an author Q and A, a much simpler musical event, or another film.

One large high-cost musical event, especially one with the phenomenal success of the gala, is probably enough for the festival.

Bloomsday Irish Breakfast, EVOO Restaurant

Expected Attendance: 60

Actual Attendance: 90

Recommendation: maintain relationship

This is the second year of our cross-promotional collaboration with EVOO restaurant. Though we have seen no revenue from the restaurant, we have created a friendly partnership with EVOO and a showcase for an Irish breakfast by a native-born Irish chef in Montreal. This event allows us to be more visible in the community, highlights Irish Montreal in the spirit of the festival as Irish cultural festival, and gives our patrons the freedom to make a reservation at any time over Bloomsday weekend. It may be possible in future years to formalize EVOO into a more profitable sponsor, but even without, it has still been a successful partnership.

McGill Interdisciplinary Dialogue, McCord Museum

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 45

Recommendation: maintain

This is an event repeated for a second year, and a very key part of the festival due to its non-charging academic status. Like the Concordia panel afternoon, it is important that we maintain several purely academic events at no cost to stay within the parameters of how Bloomsday Montreal began. Further, an interdisciplinary collaboration between two professors from vastly different fields is exactly the kind of Joycean ethos that should fit perfectly into a Bloomsday bloc of events. We should be able to maintain this fascinating event in similar format, with different academics from different fields each year, in order to draw the community. We have been fortunate thus far to have very dynamic speakers who make complex ideas accessible to everyone, and thus the event has been fascinating and creative with a great deal of audience discussion.

“The Irish Pub” with Introduction by Adam Lawrence

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 30

Recommendation: maintain with similar film, perhaps in different slot

This film was excellently received. It’s light-hearted look at Irish culture and warm documentary status was very enjoyable to those who screened it, and it is probably the type of film we should seek more of in drawing the general public and the non-academic specialist crowds. Attendance was somewhat light, but this was likely more attributable to the Saturday afternoon time slot on a beautiful summer day than to any shortcoming of the film.

Musical Gala, Victoria Hall

Expected Attendance: 150

Actual Attendance: 200+

Recommendation: maintain similar event at space and time slot

This event represented the largest shift in the model of our festival. It was a \$20.00 a ticket, Saturday night, multi-genre variety show in Westmount. We were thrilled that it was a huge success. The crowds exceeded our expectations, and the quality of the performance was professional. The buzz and crowd reaction was excited and enthusiastic. It was a major coup for us to be able to hold such a high profile event for minimal rental costs, as Victoria Hall considered us a community fundraiser. We were also able to further bring in revenue by selling sandwiches, wine by the glass, and bottled water. This partnership with Victoria Hall has been really fortuitous and should be maintained. Westmount seems to hold a large base of people enthusiastic about Bloomsday, and this large and successful event definitely raised our profile in the city. There was media coverage from local newspapers at the event and it very much had the feel of an exciting premiere. With more time to prepare, the musical directors and producers could create even more successful show next year in the vein of a play or different gala musical evening.

Walking Tour of Pointe Saint-Charles with Ruth Rigby

Expected Attendance: 25

Actual Attendance: 45

Recommendation: maintain in new neighbourhood next year

This has proved to be one of our most successful events two years running. Last year Rigby held the walk in Griffintown and it was free. This year it was in a new neighbourhood, and it was ten dollars, and yet people paid without complaint and came out in droves. We provided Rigby with a megaphone which was vital and it was a good weather day. This event represents excellently some of the types of events we undertake that highlight the Irish culture of Montreal. It was a good small-scale revenue source, and should definitely continue, in a new place next year.

“Votes for Women” with Introduction by Seaghan Mac an tSionnaigh

Expected Attendance: 50

Actual Attendance: 25

Recommendation: maintain film, but less specialized and perhaps at different time slot

This was an interesting film with a very strong and thoughtful introduction by Mac an tSionnaigh. It was a unique event to have an Irish language scholar relate the film to the Irish language, and give the audience something of a very informative tutorial. It was also the second film we screened this year that was partially in Irish with English subtitles. This may present an interesting gimmick for one film, but we should probably look more for crowd-pleasing entertainment such as “The Irish Pub”, or only have one specialized Irish film. Also, we lose attendance with dark indoor events on summer afternoons, no matter the quality of film, so perhaps we should be reconfiguring programming to reflect more outdoors event on Saturday and Sunday day, and films at night.

Dramatic Reading with Kathleen Fee, Irish Embassy Pub

Expected Attendance: 35
Actual Attendance: 75
Recommendation: maintain

This is now, like the Westmount readings, the Concordia and McGill academic panels, and the walking tour, quickly becoming part of the Bloomsday Montreal official tradition in its third year. The event is extremely popular and people come early to claim seats and order food and drinks. We have a wonderful and accommodating partnership with the Irish Embassy pub that we should maintain, as well as with Kathleen Fee, whose performance is always lauded. This is one of our strongest events attendance-wise, and also is a fun Sunday night tradition. It should definitely be maintained as it becomes more popular each year and this year's \$10.00 charge was no deterrent.

Pub Quiz hosted by Larissa Andrusyshyn, Irish Embassy Pub
Expected Attendance: 35
Actual Attendance: 40
Recommendation: maintain

Working in tandem with Kathleen Fee's reading, this is a successful and fun event in its second year. Andrusyshyn is a noted local author and quizmaster who is excellent with the crowd and her questions. Irish Embassy and our new partner Paragraphe Bookstore provided very generous prize packages totalling hundreds of dollars for free. It brings a younger demographic, is a successful and fun pub quiz, and it should continue as part of the Bloomsday Montreal programme.

Bloomsday Dramatic Readings, Westmount Library
Expected Attendance: 25
Actual Attendance: 60
Recommendation: Maintain

This is yet another event that is growing and becoming a tradition. The relationship with Westmount Library is excellent. They are incredibly accommodating as evidenced by their taking on the embassy panel exhibition with fifteen hours' notice. Having Westmount Library as a home base for Bloomsday Montreal brings visibility to thousands. The readings have been excellently organized and creative for the last three years, with innovation in languages, performances, and partnerships. It was heartening to see this year teenage students from Westmount schools coming in to the readings and playing "Bloomsday Bingo", clearly sanctioned as a project by their teachers. This kind of all-ages community growth and involvement is, of course, what we are striving for. This is an event and a relationship that should definitely be maintained.

Storytelling Event with Chris Joyce and other Montreal Storytellers, Paragraphe Bookstore
Expected Attendance: 40
Actual Attendance: 80
Recommendation: Maintain this event or similar

This was a unique event that we had never attempted before and became a very nice capstone to five days of the festival. Chris Joyce's unexpected involvement, willingness to talk about life as a Joyce, newfound Montreal celebrity status, and press coverage, really made the event balloon into a happening. Joyce promoted it on the radio show "Daybreak" that morning which surely brought in many community members who had not previously been involved with Bloomsday Montreal at all. The three storytellers were excellent and people seemed very pleased with the event. We were fortunate to have developed a mutually beneficial new relationship with Paragraphe bookstore as our official bookstore, which makes sense for us to be more tapped into literary networks in the Montreal cultural scene. As a result they kept the event free and sponsored a reception for us. This provided a lovely, final event atmosphere. We do not know if Joyce will be with us next year, but we should definitely maintain a storytelling event of some sort at Paragraphe, with storytellers who are available. It makes for a nice closing event.

IV. Challenges

There are several unique challenges that need to be addressed moving forward with this festival. The first fall under the realm of challenges to any new festival- how to grow and become more visible in the community while remaining fiscally responsible. In choosing to move from a four day, free event geared solely to the MCLL community, to a five day multimedia and platform charged event, with some high production values, we do take risks. Some of our risks this year, such as with the gala, paid off in terms of huge attendance, publicity, and buzz. Others need to be revisited so that we can work on the model of lowest expenditure for biggest revenue. If we can create events that are lower cost to produce but draw good attendance who pays admission, and then we have one large higher cost, marquee event, this may be a workable model where we can decrease dependence on MCLL funds and become self-sustaining.

Still, in year three of a festival, we are firmly in the "it takes money to make money" debate. We have to produce high caliber events and we have to spend money on publicity and employees in order to become a legitimate, international festival that will not need support from MCLL. There needs to be recognition of this transition period and patience from all sides.

There are also unique challenges on the sponsorship front, laid out very well by the sponsorship coordinator, Patmeena Sabit, in her report. Sponsorship needs to be seen as a twelve month process. Our Bloomsday Montreal calendar is not the calendar of the foundations, corporations, and local politicians that we are approaching. This position needs to be implemented as permanent and year-round, at least on a part time basis, if we are to move into the major leagues of festival fundraising. If we allow any gains and visibility we have made to die because we will not support a sponsorship position, then we lose valuable ground and ironically land directly back in the position of dependence upon MCLL- a scenario that everyone is hoping to end. There is the concurrent sponsorship problem of recruiting groups who would naturally be reluctant to donate to a seemingly wealthy festival if they perceive it as underwritten by a wealthy university like McGill. These and other challenges are well-delineated by Sabit in her report and need to be addressed going forward.

Along these same lines, the sponsorship coordinator, musical director, and event manager all found their jobs immeasurably more difficult due to a compressed timeline. It is our opinion that all of our colleagues pulled together to do a really excellent job, but we can wonder how we could have done even better and with much less rush and stress had our positions been approved and created by MCLL and McGill substantially sooner. The workload for such a festival is not impossible and should not be unpleasant and hectic. It only becomes so when compressed into three months. This would allow all opportunities to be pursued and the highest quality work done

as possible. On this front, we need to know that we have the support and backing of MCLL and the decision makers going forward as soon as possible, so we can move forward. Resistance only to let us finally get moving at half measures and in a frantic game of catch-up is counter productive. If people in MCLL or in McGill administration are not supportive of Bloomsday Montreal, it should be frankly addressed as to their concerns early so we know where we stand. If we are hamstrung by institutional culture and time constraints, we cannot do our best work and draw our biggest attendances- ironically proving the doubts of those who do not believe in the festival in the first place. Above all else, we need some infrastructure and for next year's events to move forward in a much more clear and timely fashion.

Lastly, along the lines of Bloomsday Montreal remaining an MCLL event, we need MCLL volunteers who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about Bloomsday Montreal and want to participate, not some who do so half-heartedly, reluctantly, indifferently, unreliably, or with complaint. This intractability this year was partially solved by bringing in student volunteers, who were enthusiastic and eager throughout.

The biggest challenge, then, is situating Bloomsday Montreal within MCLL and McGill, while growing it to the broader community and attracting external support. The concurrent and related challenge then is how to create a permanent infrastructure that makes the festival work and grow, by creating permanent positions or longer contracts, while still keeping to the charge of keeping costs down. There should also be a frank discussion of who supports Bloomsday Montreal, who has concerns about it, and what those are, so that they may be addressed and the planning can move forward.

V. Recommendations

After a year that has been successful on many fronts, but mindful of the challenges listed in the last sections, we can make recommendations for the festival moving forward.

- The numbers when broken down by each event tell us that we are growing, gaining credibility as an international Bloomsday and visibility on the Montreal festival scene. We should capitalize on this success by running leaner next year to maximize profit- building around a model of low cost events that generate high attendance and revenue, with one higher cost, marquee event.

-There are many creative events that would classify as low cost that could be researched and pursued if the manager/programmer has ample time to do so. Some include local author literary events that might pair with existing literary festivals in Montreal, events that could increase Bloomsday Montreal's profile outside of the month of June, and bringing the works of Irish artists to the city. More storytelling events by high profile storytellers and films introduced by their filmmakers could fit the model of low cost and high attendance, for giving exposure to up and coming artists and filmmakers.

-Sabit's recommendations for sponsorship changes are excellent and concise and should be closely visited and discussed.

-The positions of sponsorship coordinator and event manager should be much longer contracts, as close to year round as possible, to create a sustainable and real festival in the city. This is not only to accommodate the financial calendars of outside entities, but to build an infrastructure, not lose momentum, and maximize excellence and minimize stress on the Bloomsday Montreal team. What we pulled off last year in such a short time was nearly impossible. That level of tense deadline is unnecessary, if we can get open discussion on our plans and mandate, and early votes to move forward and plan the year. Whether Sabit and McElroy stay in these positions or new people are brought in, it is imperative that they are paid accurately for their time and the immense workload, and that such workload is spread out over longer than two-four months.

VI. Appendices (Budget)