

ARTS

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Michele Tucker of Beam Suntory Canada and Victoria Whisky Festival co-organizer Frank Hudson with a glass of Canadian Club Chronicles whisky at the Strathcona Hotel's Wicket Hall. The Whisky Festival returns after three-year hiatus at the Hotel Grand Pacific.

DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

Canadian spirit shares spotlight at returning Victoria Whisky Festival

PEDRO ARRAIS
Times Colonist

Celebrate all things whisky from 50 distilleries from 11 countries at the Victoria Whisky Festival at the Hotel Grand Pacific today to Sunday.

This is the 17th year of the four-day event, after a three-year hiatus, with whisky lovers eagerly anticipating sampling and savouring the very best whiskies from across the country and around the world. This year Finland and Switzerland will join Scotland, Ireland, England, Canada, United States, Japan, Taiwan, India and France with their country's offerings.

Events at the festival include grand tastings, masterclasses, consumer tasting and a tasting and movie event. An expert tasting panel will confer gold, silver and bronze medals at the Canadian Whisky Awards, with awards presented to the best

whiskies and distilleries.

"The industry has come a long way in the last few years and it's reflected in both the calibre of submissions and the range of expressions," said Davin de Kergommeaux, chairman of the judges. "In addition to their core range of whiskies, distilleries are producing small batches and limited releases, offering an amazing range of regional profiles. The world has noticed and Canadian whisky's global fan base is growing."

One of the highlights at the show is the Canadian Club 45-year-old Chronicles No. 5 (also known as The Icon) — Canada's oldest aged whisky.

"Canada is not generally known for its aged whisky, so this is an extra special treat for whisky lovers," said Michele Tucker, a representative with Beam Suntory Canada. "This single-grain whisky was barrelled in 1977 and is the fifth —

and final — release in the annual Chronicles series."

She said a 750-millilitre bottle of the 100-proof whisky sells for around \$460 locally.

Demand for tickets, which became available last November, has been very strong. "We are seeing more out-of-town attendees than ever before. People have been looking forward to this festival for three years and they are ready to come back."

"It's an opportunity not only to try a variety of whiskies but also to find out more about how it's made and what distinguishes it from other distilleries," said Frank Hudson, festival co-organizer.

"We're extremely excited to be back with one of the best festival lineups ever."

He said news of the Canadian Club 45-year-old showing up at the show was exciting.

"It shows that Canadian

whisky is finally coming into its own on the world stage," he said.

Attendance at the volunteer-run event is capped at 475 tickets, with some masterclasses already sold out. A limited selection of festival packages are available through The Strathcona Hotel's Dram Association. Membership in the club is free and tickets may be purchased online through strathliquor.com/shop/vwf-package-i-smws-shelter-point.

Tickets range from \$45 to \$195. The event runs today to Sunday at the Hotel Grand Pacific, 463 Belleville St. For programs and times, go to victoriawhiskyfestival.com/tickets.php#eventprogram. Net proceeds of the volunteer-run event are donated to charitable organizations.

For more information on the event, go to victoriawhiskyfestival.com. parrais@timescolonist.com

ARTS IN BRIEF

Boris Johnson signs memoir deal

LONDON — Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has signed a deal to write a memoir of his tumultuous time in office, which began with a vow to "get Brexit done" and ended in scandal and resignation.

Publisher HarperCollins said that the as-yet untitled book will be a prime ministerial memoir "like no other."

Johnson became prime minister in July 2019, won a major election victory that December and brought the U.K. out of the European Union the following year. He led Britain through the COVID-19 pandemic — which landed him in intensive care — and the first months of the war in Ukraine but became embroiled in scandals over his finances and ethics.

He was forced to resign in July 2022 after dozens of members of his government quit in protest.

No publication date has been set for the book, which will be published in the U.K. by HarperCollins imprint William Collins. Financial details of the deal were not disclosed.

"I look forward to working with Boris Johnson as he writes his account of his time in office during some of the most momentous events the United Kingdom has seen in recent times," said Arabella Pike, publishing director at William Collins.

Johnson, a former journalist, has written several books, including *The Churchill Factor*, about wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In 2015 he signed a deal for a book on William Shakespeare, initially slated for publication in 2016. It was later delayed indefinitely. — The Associated Press

Follett novel due out Sept. 26

NEW YORK — Ken Follett is ready to wrap up his epic fictional chronicle of Western civilization.

Viking announced Wednesday that the British author's *The Armor of Light* will be published Sept. 26, concluding an eight-volume series that began in 1989 with *The Pillars of the Earth* and spans 1,000 years. The new book is set in the late 18th-early 19th centuries, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and centres on the conflicts between Britain and France.

Follett's historical novels, which also include *World Without End* and *A Column of Fire*, have sold more than 75 million copies worldwide.

"I didn't plan it this way," he said. "I just scoured the past for exciting stories that showed ordinary people coping with the changing tides of history. And then I began to see that the novels stand together as a body of work." — The Associated Press

Jury selection in rapper killing

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida — Jury selection began Wednesday in the trial of the suspects in the killing of rising rapper XXXTentacion, who was gunned down as he left a motorcycle shop five years ago.

Charged with pulling the trigger is Michael Boatwright, 28. Also on trial are his alleged accomplices, Dedrick Williams, 26, and Trayvon Newsome, 24. All could receive life sentences if convicted. — AP

Reynolds, O'Hara among stars at Canadian screen awards



Actor Ryan Reynolds will be honoured with a humanitarian award at the Canadian Screen Awards in April. THE CANADIAN PRESS

The Canadian Press

TORONTO — *Deadpool* actor Ryan Reynolds has RSVP'd for this year's Canadian Screen Awards, assuring the Toronto bash some high-voltage star power.

Reynolds says in a release from gala organizers that he's grateful to learn he's won a humanitarian prize and is "excited to accept the award in person this April."

The A-list star is among special honorees including Marvel's *Shang-Chi* star Simu Liu who is getting the Radius Award for global success, and SCTV and *Schitt's Creek* star Catherine O'Hara, who is getting an icon award for exceptional, ongoing contributions to the industry.

The Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television says former CTV anchor Lisa

LaFlamme will receive the Gordon Sinclair Award for her "exceptional body of work in broadcast journalism," while Pierre Bruneau, longtime news anchor with Quebec network TVA, is getting a lifetime achievement award.

The special awards are a forerunner to the annual weeklong event recognizing the best in homegrown film, television and screen-based media.

Nominees for the Canadian Screen Awards will be announced Feb. 22, with awards set to be handed out April 11 to 16.

Other honours include an acting award for veteran film and TV star Peter MacNeill, a changemaker award for Citytv's *Cityline* host Tracy Moore, and the academy board of directors' tribute for actor-producer Jennifer Podemski and late filmmaker Paul Pope.

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