



**STREET LEVEL 03.09**  
 Ron Melanson

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In March Bernard, Al and I attended a national conference on homelessness and poverty that was held in Ottawa called Street Level. This four-day event was sold out to some four hundred participants that came from all across the country. The purpose of the conference was to develop visibility and credibility with the

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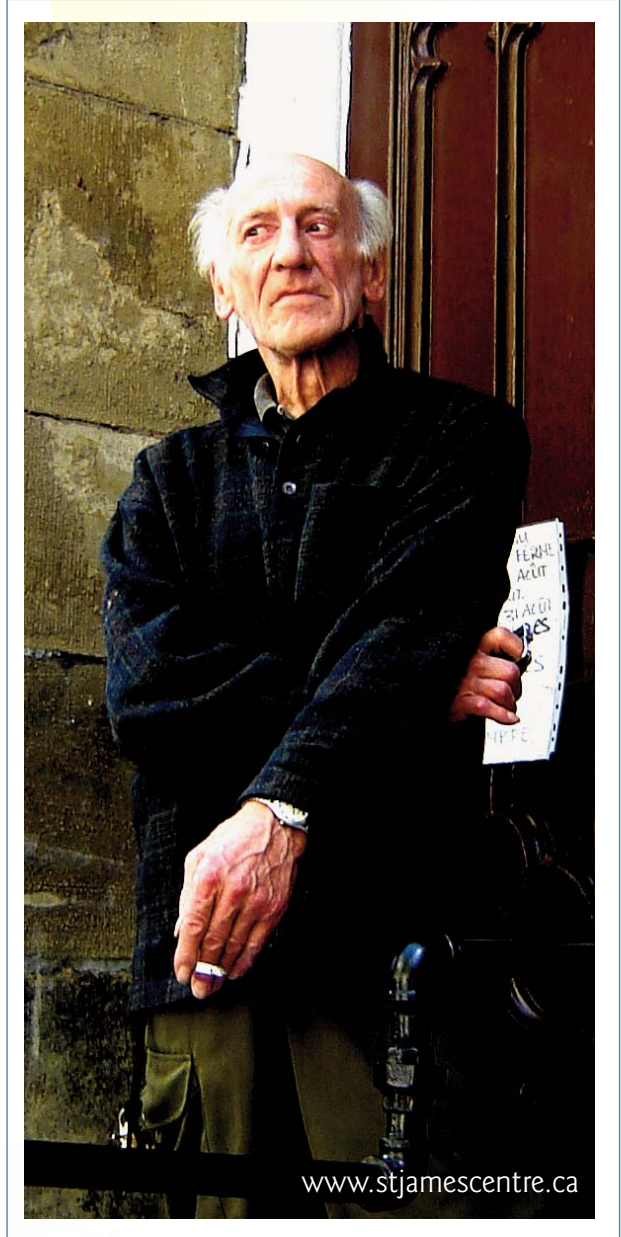
# The Cost of Love

By Alain Spitzer, Executive Director

I have been spending the better part of the last year reflecting on the journey that we have been on in our attempt at building community with some of the poorest people in Montreal. It has been an amazing experience, and although we have had our share of challenges to face in doing this, we are nevertheless more committed than ever in creating a safe place for all people regardless of where they are at in their life journey.

One question that keeps coming back to the forefront when addressing issues of urban poverty is why does it exist on such a large scale, and why are we as a society (generally) so immune to the realities of a poverty which is taking place in our own "backyard". Are we getting over it? Is it becoming normal to us? I truly hope not, because that would open up the floodgates, and drown our communities in a deep pool of despair. But why is this trend becoming increasingly evident? Is it possible that we have convinced ourselves that some people are worth more than others! I don't mean this in some economical or intellectual sense, but on a human level. What audacity allows us to quantify who is worth more than another person based on a series of random variables such as popularity, economic status, etc? We are all equals and are all entitled to be respected, loved, and recognized despite the errors and / or choices that we have made in our lives. It is not for us to judge others, and compartmentalize their worth. Nor is it for us to elevate some to the detriment of others. Their lies the core error of our society. We must choose to discard this fundamental flaw, and embrace the belief that we are all equals, and therefore all entitled to be loved. Do not be fooled, "communal love" has a huge cost, just as it does in our intimate personal relationships with our spouses, children, parents (...). It is however at the core of our being, and central to our humanity (or in many cases lack of!). The fact is that if we were able to love without judgment, places like St-James would not need to exist. Unfortunately for us, we must continue to challenge the social norms that govern us in the hope that all may find a "home" in which they can feel fulfilled.

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## The Staff

Due to the mixed schedules we had to draw a picture of everyone instead of a photo.

## The cost of love *suite from page 1*

We are often led to believe that our society is morally founded, but ask someone sleeping on the street if that is so. Let me tell you, the

world looks profoundly different through the eyes of the homeless. We should all try and see it through their eyes, and maybe then we will realize how close we are to poverty ourselves (through whatever form it manifests itself).

We are challenged to enrich our lives, and open our eyes to the opportunities that are given to us to leave our mark on the world that we live in. Do not let others tell you who's worth more; that would be missing the point. Love and community are in your reach: turn around and grab it; you may just change someone's life.



Helen Lupinsky



Karl Pelton



Mollie Witeroff

THANK YOU



# Hitting the right note

*Catherine Lacasse*

Last autumn, saw the début of weekly music workshops at the Drop-In. Bernard and I observed the musical potential and passion of several members and thought it was time to focus all that energy.

From the very beginning, we realized the importance of this project. For us, music is a way of bringing people together; allowing us to express our emotions and to develop self-esteem. Initially, we didn't really know how to proceed with the workshops. The first 6-months involved a lot of trial and error. We would get together for a weekly jam session. Some sessions were more difficult than others. Some sessions were more crammed than others, with musicians stepping on each others toes in the atelier. Despite these minor obstacles, our perseverance and dedication paid off.

In January, we acquired some new musical instruments (a special thank you to Daniel Charest for the guitar) and selected a repertoire of potential songs that would work for everyone. By February, St-James had its first real band of musicians. The band had grown more comfortable with each other, and more dedicated, each giving their 100% at each session. Our enthusiasm was so contagious, that we were beginning to attract an audience.



Finally, someone suggested that we should play the opening act for the St. James Benefit concert. What a challenge! We had to double our efforts; rehearsing really hard to come together as a group. The night of the concert, you could feel the stress rising among us, but it was too late to turn back. No choice but to go out on stage together and abandon ourselves to the music. It was truly the most beautiful performance we had ever done together.

However great our performance was, greater still was the feeling of pride we felt for having faced and conquered our fears; an emotional and validating life experience.

Our little victory reinforced our sense of commitment to the importance of the music workshops.



Thanks to our volunteers

# It's a Colourful World

Anne-Marie Beaulieu

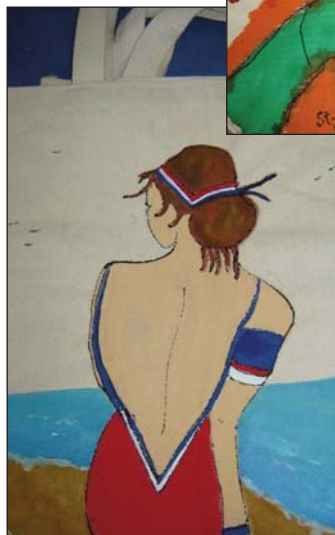
Hello, hello! It is my pleasure to share with you the latest news during these gorgeous spring days, after such a harsh winter.

As the weather grows warmer, the art atelier's attendance tends to go down; this is a pattern I have come to accept after several seasons. Currently, we are a handful of artists producing work on a daily basis. Others artists are splitting their time between the art atelier, and the weekly music and poetry workshops. This brings a broader sense of diversity and creativity that is beneficial to the artist community at large.

Compared to last year's busy exhibition schedule, this year was much quieter. Last December, we exhibited at Centre St-Pierre (1212 rue Panet); loyal supporters for over 3 years. We also established a partnership with the Burritoville restaurant (2055 rue Bishop) and held a well attended exhibit on their second floor gallery space from February to April.

Beginning May 26th, we will be exhibiting fifteen works at the Resto/Gallery Studzio (4147 rue St-Denis).

I am most proud to talk about the 30 + 1 wonderful paintings that we made on doors for L'État d'Urgence last November. This event underlined both the 10th anniversary of ATSA (Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable), as well as the 60th of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man. We have sub-



mitted the same painted doors to the city of Montreal for a Maison de la Culture exhibition. We are waiting to hear back from them.

As coordinator of the art atelier, I am always looking for ways to stimulate and inspire the artists. I regularly organize outings to museums, galleries, and creative spaces; anywhere that we can observe different styles and periods in painting that we have adopted or modeled our own work on. While our in-house library and the internet remain our primary tools; a guided tour is far more compelling and stimulating. This season, we went out to see the "Imagine" exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts as well as a couple of visits to the 30 year retrospective at Espace Création de Loto-Québec.

Inspired by our collaboration painting fabric panels with the Old Brewery Mission (OBM), we have taken up raw cotton tote-bags as our latest project. Not only do we make something unique and beautiful out of plain cotton, but at the same time, we are encouraging our clients to think green.

Once again, the atelier welcomed two student interns from Concordia University's Fine Arts program. Each week, Fotini and Amélie graced us for a 2-hour session, demonstrating new techniques and materials for our artists to adopt into practice. They taught us so much and we adored them both.

It's not news that the centre relies heavily on government subsidies. Thanks to Alain's diligence, our federal funding is renewed!!!

Please don't forget to think of the atelier and its artists next time you need to give a gift.

We have greeting cards, beautifully painted tote bags, paintings, drawings, etc something for all taste. We are open weekdays from 10h00 - 16h30.

A special thanks to Daniel O'Connell from *Galerie d'Art D.M. Béland* for the free frame.

Until we meet again,

# A few words from the Chairman

By Rob Bull

Congratulations to everyone who helped with the first annual St. James Drop-In Center Gospel Concert.



Thanks to the amazing musicians of **the Peoples Gospel Choir of Montreal** under their director **Kim Sherwood**, to the Centre's own musicians who opened for them, to all the Drop-In members, staff and volunteers who helped publicize the event and sell tickets, to Anne-Marie and her team who fed the singers, to participants of the Centre's Bible Study Group who spent time with the singers and told them about life at the Drop-In and to St. James United Church.

A special thanks as well to the Portuguese dancers.

## You didn't know about the dancers?

Before the concert, a small, conservatively dressed European lady of a certain age came up to one of the volunteers at the door and asked for 38 tickets. When he replied that the tickets cost \$20 each she presented him with a brown paper bag filled with 38 \$20 bills.

The lady was the leader of a troupe of young Portuguese dancers visiting Montreal. About a third of the way into the concert, as the singers built up the kind of rhythm and spirit that a good gospel choir can do, 38 dancers ran down from the balcony and danced in front of the choir for the rest of the evening.

A week later they stopped by the church before they flew back to Lisbon to let us know that the concert was the highlight of their week in Canada. It was a highlight for the rest of us too.

## And we raised about \$2,500.

And while we are being thankful, consider Chamber Music Without Borders Affiliated with the Schulich School of Music of McGill University who have given us literally dozens of concerts in the past year with a wonderful variety of music – in the Centre itself and in the church sanctuary.

In April, there was a small celebration of their music in the church hall — catered again by Anne-Marie and her amazing team — and the musicians actually thanked us. Apparently they don't get audiences like us anywhere else.

They'll be back in September and that's a very good thing.

## STREET LEVEL 03.09 *suite*

political world. Members of parliament and the public were therefore invited to attend the opening banquet. All political parties were represented by some twenty MP's .

The "Canadian content only" was a central plan to the organizing committee. Its theme, "A legacy of Justice", recognized and celebrated what has been done in Canada and challenged us not to let up, as there was still much to be done.

Throughout the conference, participants heard the fundamental message that as we respond to the issues of poverty, we are stronger together than we are individually. This idea captures our desire at St James as we network and develop partnerships with other social organizations in this competitive social service system. Collaboration should always be our optimum goal.

Beyond the social systems, there are a lot of folks that see the issues related to poverty, but don't know how to respond. Some see poverty only as an economic problem, when in fact it is so much larger. "What would it look like if we as a society started developing healthy relationships with the folks we serve? There is some incredible work going on but I think we miss the mark when we become so focused on the physical needs and forget about the person behind them.

Some of the speakers at the conference shared stories about the rich relationships they had with those they served and how important and beautiful it is to pursue. Networking with similar minded people is so important in this individualized world that we live in. Meeting people that are doing and willing to share their experiences is so uplifting. As I come back from this event I am grateful to have a network of friends that understand and share the same desires especially, the ones I now see on a weekly basis.

## Thank you

Les fondations Zeller, EJLB, Jackman, Hylcan, Ballard, FK Morrow, Kaufmann, Hockey for the Homeless, Mazon Canada, Le Garde manger pour tous : Gouvernement du Canada : programme IPLI, Régie régionale de la Santé et des Services sociaux : Programme PSOC ; Dianova Canada, St-James United Church, F.O.H.M. Beaver Lodge N6, David Eggert, Danica Straith, Nancy Keays et le CLSC des Faubourgs, Direction Chrétienne, Paula Klein et le Montreal City Mission, la compagnie North West Clothing, Isabelle Leduc et Chambréclerc, Église St-Andrews and St-Paul, Helen, Li Stock, François Hoang, Dawson College: Social Services, Concordia University : Art Education, Hotel Reine Elizabeth, Banque Toronto Dominion, Gerard & Laurel Spitzer, Cegep Du Vieux-Montreal, Vanier College: SCC, Kim Sherwood & the Peoples Gospel Choir of Montreal, Ville de Montreal, Coop la Maison verte, Streetlevel 4: National roundtable on poverty, Bill Jay.

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