

MIAMI BOOK FAIR INT'L NOVEMBER 13, 2015

Miami Book Fair, a literary cornucopia, kicks off Sunday

HIGHLIGHTS

Fair will feature more than 600 authors

Events kick off Sunday at Miami Dade College

Fair's goal: to highlight Miami's diversity



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BY CONNIE OGLE

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If bigger is better, and Miami Book Fair is big, then Miami Book Fair is the best.

OK, maybe that syllogism is too simple, but it's still a good description of the massive, inclusive, well-organized, widely attended literary behemoth the book fair has become. The 32nd annual fair, which starts Sunday with an appearance by punk poet Patti Smith and runs through Nov. 22 at Miami Dade College in downtown Miami, will host more than 600 authors over eight days, with panels and discussions on every subject imaginable.

Here are the sorts of decisions readers will be forced to make: Lily King and her wonderful novel *Euphoria* or Jon Meacham on George H.W. Bush? Ann Beattie on her latest story collection or crime writer extraordinaire Richard Price? A tribute to the late Oscar Hijuelos or Ted Koppel on surviving a cyber attack? And how many of us have enough stamina to start early (Dave Barry for the kids) and stay late enough to hear actors Paul Giamatti and David Strathairn reading Sophocles — and still make it to Saturday night's book fair party with the Rock Bottom Remainers at the Arsht Center?

When you've got poetry, politics, fiction, memoirs, suspense, actors, biographies, comics and graphic novels, a robust kids' program, live music, food, games, the Moth storytelling competition and more, the road is long and the choices are hard, but the readers are always ready.

"We'll fill up every room at the college," fair co-founder Mitchell Kaplan says simply. "The audiences come."

This year — no surprise — the fair has grown again. It has expanded its partnership with the National Book Foundation: In its first year in 2014, 10 finalists and winners appeared in an "Evenings With..." session. This year, 27 finalists and winners will take the stage Friday in what Kaplan describes as an appetizer sort of event, with all of the writers appearing in smaller groups over the weekend.

The foundation has also imported to Miami its Teen Press Conference, at which local high school students act as journalists, asking questions of the finalists and winners.

"We had such a good experience last year," says Harold Augenbraum, executive director of the National Book Foundation. "The idea was, why not expand it? One of the problems you run into when you're an institution located in one place is the fallacy that the only literary audiences are in New York. We know that literary

audiences are hungry for this stuff and wanted to get our books and authors out there. Miami, among other things, is a model partnership for us. We're hoping to do this with other festivals."

Partnerships have become a key part of the fair's philosophy. This year Reading Queer has merged its literary festival with the fair, hosting such events as a "Paris Is Still Burning" performance/reading with contemporary queer poets of color Wednesday night at the Olympia Theater. Other events continue on the weekend, including "A Queer Quinceñera" with drag performers Juleysi and Karla (expect dancing and glitter and Gloria Estefan songs) on Nov. 22.

"I thought it was a great fit," says executive director Neil De La Flor. "It takes a couple of burdens off of us. . . . We just have to make sure we retain our identity so that the community knows it's not just the book fair it's going to."

Other players on the Miami cultural scene will have their moments. Voices of Our Nation Foundation, which now makes its home at the University of Miami, will lead a panel on "Cultivating the New American Canon." A few sessions will feature simultaneous translation from Spanish to English and English to Spanish. Local cultural groups The New Tropic and O, Miami are hosting events at The Swamp, the Knight Foundation-funded pop-up space devoted to all things Florida. The Swamp — which has had its outdoor space revamped, thanks to a sponsorship by Ikea — has even spawned its own pop-up space with The Porch, sponsored by The Miami Foundation.

"That's the goal moving forward, to create more of those kinds of partnerships," says Lissette Mendez, programs director for the fair. "It's a cliché, but it takes a village. It takes people coming together to contribute to each other's success. I don't like the idea of cultural organizations competing with each other. We compete for grant dollars, but I want to build bridges. The thing that's important isn't getting bigger but how we're serving the community."

"From the beginning the idea was that we would have a very large tent under which the diversity of Miami would be shown," Kaplan says. "I can't think of another event that exhibits this kind of diversity."

The scope of the fair still amazes such longtime fairgoers as Les Standiford, director of the Florida International University Creative Writing Program. He has been coming since the beginning.

“I remember meeting Mitchell when he was getting ready to open Books & Books,” says Standiford, who will talk about his latest history book, *Water to the Angels*, at the fair. “He starts telling me about this concept. ‘We’re going to shut the streets of downtown. Thousands of people will come.’ I’m looking around, this is 1981, there are lots of guys with shirts open to their navels driving fast boats, but I didn’t see a lot of people reading. I wanted to say, ‘Mitchell, come back to earth.’ But he and Eduardo Padrón [president of Miami Dade College] pulled it off. This fair has transformed Miami.

“I like walking the streets before the events. It reminds me I’m living in a place where books and writing and literacy is really important. I’ve been to other book fairs, but I’ve never seen anything like this.”

IF YOU GO

What: Miami Book Fair

When: Sunday-Nov. 22

Where: Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus, 300 NE Second Ave.

Cost: \$15 for “Evenings With...” events

Street fair: Friday-Sunday; \$8 for adults; \$5 13-18 and over 62; 12 and under free

Info: www.miamibookfair.com

MITCHELL KAPLAN’S TIPS

Book fair co-founder Mitchell Kaplan wishes he could attend all of the fair events — but who can? Here are a few events to which he’s looking forward:

6 p.m. Thursday: “An Evening With Gary Snyder,” Chapman Conference Center. “He’s one of the last remaining Beat poets — and he’s never been to the fair before.”

3:30 p.m. Saturday, Room 8503: “Live from the New York Public Library Goes Live from MBF.” Paul Holdengräber, director of the library, interviews British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips about his latest book “Becoming Freud: The Making of a Psychoanalyst.” “When he appears in Britain, he’ll get 3,000 people to show up.”

4 p.m. Sunday, Room 8503: “Tales of New York” with Garth Risk Hallburg (*City on Fire*, set in 1970s New York City), Robert Goolrick (the novel *The Fall of Princes*) and Brad Gooch (the memoir *Smash Cut*). “Robert and Brad lived in New York at the time Garth is writing about in his novel — this should be great.”



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