differs from English. When I first thought that we are speaking an English dialect that leaves native Singlish, the Singaporean version of English is not English. At least not the Singapore’s national language barrier. Contrary to popular belief, assimilation into my new environment was especially the case when I moved from Singapore to Canada during my junior year of high school. Though I made friends easily and got used to Canadian culture and this way of life, I had to face difficulties in the process of assimilation into my new environment.

Firstly, I experienced a language barrier. Contrary to popular belief, Singapore’s national language is not English. At least not the English that North Americans are used to. Singaporeans speak Singlish, the Singaporean version of English that leaves native English speakers from the West thinking that we are speaking a different language. When I first arrived in Toronto, no one could understand me. My Singaporean pronunciation and accent made the English I was speaking sound completely foreign to my schoolmates. Often, I omitted the H’s and R’s of words and ended up pronouncing “three” as “tree” and “car” as “cah”. I couldn’t believe that even when I said “I want to buy three kilts” to the lady at my school uniform store, she replied “tree kilts? Yes, the kilts are forest green.” It was then that I recognized the need for me to change the way I spoke.

Secondly, I discovered how easy it was to commit cultural faux pas. Though Singapore prides itself on being a multicultural country, Canada is a meeting place for people from all nations and ethnic backgrounds. A Caucasian friend of mine had a Taiwanese boyfriend. I once said casually to her, “how do you like having a Chinese boyfriend?” To my surprise, she replied “tree kilts? Yes, the kilts are forest green.” It was then that I recognized the need for me to change the way I spoke.

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will the Harper government be defeated? 

Government opinion polls suggest that the Conservatives are not on track to win the next election. Despite the recent terminations of budget debates, a majority of Canadians still believe that the Liberals will win the next election, according to the Angus Reid Institute. The same institute has also forecast that the Harper government has a 75% chance of losing a vote of non-confidence. But is this enough of a reason for Liberal MPs to go into opposition? And would they be able to hold the government accountable? 

Disagreements over public policies were cited as the reason for Stéphane Dion’s party calling an election in 2006. For the Conservative Party, however, the Liberals are more of a political challenge than the opposition. The risk is that the party is performing well and seems to be on track to win the next election. And this is where the electoral year becomes crucial: will the Harper government call for an early election? 

Meanwhile, I believe that the long-step Stephen Harper stays in power the harder he will be to dislodge. At this time, polls indicate that an election would only take about 20 months to dislodge. At this time, polls indicate that an election would only bring about another conservative minority government. The Canadian electorate, however, has a ten-year habit of taking a certain kind of leadership. 

The result for the Conservative tories, a minority government is better than the opposition bench.
REVISITING CHINESE NEW YEAR

By Federico Morales

Are you ready for Chinese New Year?

The Chinese New Year, based on the lunar calendar, is coming up on February 7th. In light of its arrival, I’d like to take this chance to look back on some of my more memorable Lunar New Years.

I first tried turtle soup on the first day of Chinese New Year celebrations about three years ago. I had just arrived in Shanghai to meet my wife’s family. It was blistering cold and I was fighting the flu. On top of that I found Shanghai to be a bit overwhelming, with the constant traffic, the smog, and the massive crowds who were all out celebrating the New Year.

After living in Asia for a year I found myself missing home, especially my mother’s cooking, huge burgers, and cheesy, greasy pizza. In the middle of that longing my mother-in-law plopped a bowl of turtle soup in front of me and said, “Cha, cha!” My wife told me that it meant “Eat, eat!” I poked at the shell with a chopstick; it bounced off the side of the bowl then popped back up to the surface.

“I nudged my wife with my elbow and whispered, “You want my turtle?”

“Eat it or my mother will be insulted,” she growled back at me, turtle soup running down her chin.

I took a deep breath, sighed, and dug in. It was delicious.

My friend James Lee has nine fingers. He’s self-conscious about it. Though he’s a good-looking man, with a great sense of humour and a passion for life, when he meets a girl he instinctively moves his right hand to his side, blocking the stub where his pointer finger used to be. When he knows I’ve seen him do this he blushes and shrugs. Of course, he knows it’s not a big deal for me, since I happened to be there the day he blew it off.

It was Chinese New Year. I was fifteen years old. I made my way to James’ house. James was from Taiwan, having arrived in Canada only a few years before. For the Chinese New Year he invited me over to his house to eat with his family. After dinner, feeling ten pounds heavier, we waddled out into the cold to blow off some firecrackers in the park.

The wick on one of the Mighty Mites packs was shorter than it looked. Before James had the chance to throw it far from us it went off, blackening his hand and leaving his fingers ravaged. He hollered in agony and I had to help him get back home.

To this day we still joke about how his parents reacted, how they had made him sit in the bathtub because they hadn’t wanted any blood hitting their carpet, and how his mother still displayed impeccable manners by offering me even more food while we waited for the ambulance to arrive.

I remember the first time I experienced the Chinese New Year, I was five years old and had just arrived in Canada with my family. I spoke no English and I was still bewildered by the cold, the days that turned to night by five p.m., and by the multitude of languages I heard every day on the playground.

Then one day in February we were called for another school assembly. I sat on the freezing gym floor and waited, expecting to see the same ritual of the anthem, some talking, a song by the chorus, and the filing out back to our classrooms. Instead there emerged a loud thump from a large drum that woke me right up, followed by the entering of a dragon that whirled about and spun all around us. I recall feeling a strange exhilaration in my stomach because it was completely new and unimaginable to a Salvadoran child of five.

Though my new years since then have come with blown up fingers and floating turtles, it’s still one of the holidays I look forward to the most. Here’s wishing you and your family a great new year!
Jazz is considered to be the folk music of North America. It is among one of North America's greatest cultural achievements. This achievement has successfully transmitted to the world a powerful voice of human experience. It was created from a multicultural society. Since its creation, jazz has united people across the divides of race, region, and national boundaries, and has always made powerful statements of freedom, creativity and identity. It is a music which gives people a sense of relief and happiness. Jazz is a genre of music, known to many people that we hear and experience everywhere. Jazz has such a powerful musical message, and we need to raise awareness that Vancouver is a city with many venues for its creative jazz subculture.

Walking down the streets of Vancouver, one might see coffee shops, clubs, bars, lounges, and restaurants hosting a local jazz artist or jazz group. Some of my favorites include; The Cellar Restaurant/ Jazz Club, situated on West Broadway, The Libra Room on Commercial Drive, O’Doul’s Restaurant on Robson, and Capone’s Restaurant on Hamilton. The great thing about these four restaurants is you can look forward to hearing a local artist play every night of the week. The ambience within the restaurants is relaxing and enjoyable. You can sit down with your friends, sip a drink, have an appetizer, and enjoy a night of soulful jazz tunes. There are many more fantastic little venues that support our local freelance musicians. Despite the fact Vancouver is home to many fine jazz musicians; it is debatable to whether there has been growth in Vancouver’s jazz culture. A couple of nights ago I went to O’Doul’s to hear Sharon Minemento play jazz piano. Sharon is an instructor at the Vancouver Community College, teaching private lessons, and classes in jazz piano. Sharon comments, “It’s hard to say if there has been growth. There seems to be fewer venues to play in, but at the same time, there seems to be more and more students enrolling in post-secondary jazz departments. Maybe we have more of an educated group of listeners now with fewer places to listen to music.”

I am a music teacher, and I’ve noticed within the public school system, jazz has become a major favorite within the student population in the music programs. Despite, the fact Vancouver is home to many fine jazz musicians; it is debatable to whether there has been growth. There seems to be fewer venues to play in, but at the same time, there seems to be more and more students enrolling in post-secondary jazz departments. Maybe we have more of an educated group of listeners now with fewer places to listen to music.

In addition to our local jazz venues, Vancouver hosts many festivals every year where hundreds upon thousands of people gather around to listen to local artists, and international artists find their groove up on the stage. A big event that shouldn’t be missed is the Vancouver International Jazz Festival, which is held in late June of every year. It is a non-profit service, so you will see a bigger turn-out of people attending each performance. Sharon adds, “Musically speaking, there are many talented musicians here in Vancouver that play everything from Dixieland to straight ahead jazz to improvised and electronic music, so there is a wide spectrum when going out to hear bands. In any major city, people realize that it’s part of going out to hear live music. It’s the same as going to a movie or a sporting event—you don’t necessarily know exactly what you’re going to get, but you might have a general idea about the genre of music you’ll hear.” So get out there and listen! Other worthwhile festivals include Folkfest, CelticFest, and Festival Vancouver.

All in all, we have many fantastic jazz events that we can enjoy in Vancouver. So next time you are at home and you feel the need for something to do, walk over to one of these venues and enjoy a night of powerful, meaningful, and energized music!
Growing Up First-Generation Canadian: One Nationality, Two Realities

By Daniel Dumitrescu

Reminiscing about my life in Vancouver, I inevitably arrive at the multicultural factors surrounding me. Although I was born and raised in Canada, I too faced issues felt by all walks of life in this country. My family is of Eastern European origin and since my parents emigrated from their respective countries, my brother and I were the first to incorporate western culture into the family. Now, by western culture I don't mean tradition, I am speaking more of a way of life.

My youth comprised of two realities; the one at home, and the one outside home. Although this transition was made easier by a childhood split between parents, contemplation of this topic struck me as I walked out the door every morning. My friends were never allowed inside my refrigerator, but I was allowed in theirs'. My friends were never allowed to enter my house without being invited in, but I was able to let myself in to theirs'. While ultimately small issues to keep in mind, their power in numbers routinely became overwhelming in all aspects of my life. In my younger years I was plagued with the troubles any child faces, from bad marks in school to acne. I, however, had a host of other issues to face that seemed even more unfair because I did not witness other children dealing with the same things. I was made to play the piano for instance and loathed it, instead of appreciating it at the time.

Perhaps the area most affected was my social life, given that was the major area requiring acceptance of others and their differences. To say the least, for more than a decade I had no social life. While my peers would meet for sleepovers and movies I would stay at home to practice piano. This situation enabled introspection and escape. Half of my time was spent forgetting the troubles of not fitting in, and the other half spent analyzing the situation. I would say this aided me greatly to piece together my view of the world.

My home life was rich with European tradition, values, and food. At every multi-lingual birthday, multi-lingual caroling at Christmas, and church, there was out-of-this-world food. I have visited Europe and seen one of my countries of origin. All throughout my life, the company my family kept involved a language barrier. Whether in Canada or visiting other countries, I found it difficult to relate to those near me. While I speak English (Germanic) and mediocre French (Latin), nothing replaces knowing the language in question; so I was never able to get to know my grandparents and those relatives still in my countries of origin. In the end, this string of situations creating my childhood has made for a varied ride of sorts. I feel that much can be gained from the realization that teachers are all around us, should we take the time to notice. I feel that every stranger is an acquaintance you haven't met, and I feel that variety is the spice of life, these dual realities that have been my childhood.

Practicing piano instead of playing hockey

VANCOUVER PAN AFRICAN FILM & ARTS FESTIVAL presents Travelling Pan African Film & Arts Festival African/Black History Month 2008 A Canadian Heritage Celebration Through Dialogue & Art February 2, 2008 Shadbolt Centre for the Arts 6450 Deer Lake Avenue, Burnaby Diversity, Kinship

Travelling Pan African Film & Arts Festival (TPAFF): Black History Month 2008 Theme: Celebrating our Cultural Diversity, Embracing our Human Kinship A Canadian Heritage Celebration through Dialogue & Art Burnaby Black History Month 2008 Event Aided by the City of Burnaby, Burnaby Public Library Co-presented by: Shadbolt Centre for the ARTS 6450 Deer Lake Avenue, Burnaby (near City Hall), February 2, 2008

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By M.R. Bradie

The Sisters of No Mercy (Postcards from Ireland)

Cultural Calendar

Vol 9 No 39 - January 15 to February 5, 2008

By Sarah Massah

Asian Studies Day
January 30 – 10:00 am – 4:30 pm
Langara College
664.323.5057
mknaut@langara.bc.ca
The college is hosting a day devoted to the continent of Asia and will include food from Indonesia, Japan and Thailand. There will also be a roundtable for a discussion concerning the crisis in Burma (Myanmar).

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Italian Girls! Opera Speaks Series
January 16 – 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm
Vancouver Public Library – Central Branch
www.vancouveropera.ca
This public forum is hosted by the Vancouver Opera and the Vancouver Public Library and includes discussion and issues from the operas of the season.

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21st Century Flea Market
January 20 – 10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Cultural Calendar
604.980.3159
The Vancouver Opera presents Rossini's opera on a beautifully designed set that is sure to keep audiences laughing and entertained. Mezzo-soprano Allyson McHardy makes her debut alongside lyric tenor, John Tessier.

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World Poetry: Hung Hagat
Fait Choy Gala
January 28 – 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm
Vancouver Public Library – Central Branch
604.331.4044
An interesting mix when Chinese and Scottish traditions are celebrated with a Canadian twist. This tribute to Robbie Burns Day and the Chinese New Year with include poets and performers.

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Discover Dance! Campaign
V’ni Dansi
January 31 – 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Scotia Dance Centre
604.660.6400
www.thedancecentre.ca
Enjoy the noon hour series that features champion jiggy Yvonne Chartrand as she leads Metis dance companies Canadian V’ni Dansi and the Louis Riel Metis Dancers.

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Canada, My India!

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