

## SALMAN RUSHDIE IN CONVERSATION WITH TIMOTHY TAYLOR at the Chan Centre For the Performing Arts

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The last time Salman Rushdie was in Vancouver was a quarter of a century ago. He was working for Air Canada as an ad copyist, and they sent him over to inspire his writing. The trip included a whirlwind tour of the west. Surprisingly enough, Rushdie's claim to fame did not rise from any witty airline slogans. Twenty-five years later, Rushdie again visits Vancouver, this time as a journalist, professor, poet, and, some argue, one of the greatest novelists of our time.

Although Rushdie's impressive credits include eight novels, several works of non-fiction and one children's book, he is best known for *The Satanic Verses*, and the controversy surrounding its publication. Soon after the novel was published in 1988, it was deemed blasphemous towards Islam by Ayatollah Khomeini, who issued a death warrant on Rushdie. The London-based author was forced into hiding and spent most of the following decade underground with the protection of Scotland Yard. In 1998 the Iranian government revoked the Fatwa, but his life was still threatened by Muslim extremist groups. Only recently has Rushdie been able to re-enter society without the fear of being killed, almost 15 years after *The Satanic Verses* was released.

His repeat appearance in BC was part of a tour promoting his most recent publication, *Step Across This Line*. It is a collection of essays, speeches, and articles written over the last decade, which span a vast array of topics, from the pleasures of being a soccer fanatic, to reminiscences on his happy days in London, to *How The Grinch Stole Voteville*, a poem on Bush's recent election (with apologies to Dr. Zeus). Rushdie read a few choice

pieces from the collection, as well as from his latest novel, last year's *Fury*. The novel takes us into the life of Malik Solanka, a middle-aged professor who makes it big by creating a TV doll show that explores the history of philosophy.

The half-hour reading was a perfect overview into Rushdie's talents as a writer. It gave the audience a taste of his broad range of ideas and the forms he uses to portray them. His reading also made his works accessible for those who might be a little intimidated by the writer whose politically-charged works drove him underground for a decade. His stories are funny, current, and thought-provoking. He's not afraid to tackle issues that others shy away from. Yet he does so in a gentle manner, quietly persuading his readers/listeners to face the issues as well.

Considering everything he has been through in the last 25 years, Rushdie seems a very down-to-earth kind of guy. He spent the rest of the evening chatting with Timothy Taylor, a local author. Their conversation meandered over a variety of subjects, from living in New York to soccer, from current reactions to terrorism to their favourite authors. He joked easily with Taylor, and even took the technical difficulties with the microphones in stride.

In a little over an hour, Rushdie managed to make a real connection with the audience. He gave us listeners some things to think about, and more importantly, the desire to think about them. We walked away feeling uplifted and inspired. Feeling that we were a little better off for having heard Salman Rushdie speak.