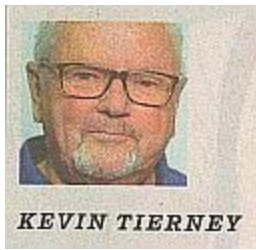


Filmmaker MacLeod makes a long story short in his ode to historic Griffintown



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Since Glenn Gould was given 32 short films by François Girard, then I suppose by some standard or other, Griffintown should

be pleased to get 21 short films made by Montreal filmmaker Scott MacLeod.

The Death and Life of Griffintown: 21 Stories is MacLeod's visualization of the stories written and told by Irish historian Matthew Barlow. They were inspired by historic sites, some of which are no longer, in the southwestern area of the city still known as Griffintown, though now more famous for upscale restaurants and condos than the working class.

Unlike Girard's award-winning 1993 feature film, MacLeod's project is an online, self-guided tour of this historic neighborhood, blending archival photos, MacLeod's own animation and Barlow's stories.

Not a bad present for Montreal's 375th and I would think a very Happy

St. Patrick's Day, too, given that to many, the Griffintown of yore was considered the heart of the Irish community.

My family's roots were in Park Extension, and then in the urban diaspora of the early 1960s, the South Shore. As Irish Catholics, a.k.a. English speakers, we went to Sunday mass in the francophone church basement in St. Roch's in Park Ex and the elementary school basement in an area that would become St. Hubert, neither satisfactory environments for my parents.

Of course, there was St. Patrick's Basilica on what was then Dorchester, but that was for weddings, including my parents', funerals and the odd baptism. For regular Sunday mass, it seemed a little too white lace for blue collars.

When my church-going parents wanted a hit of a real church, to say nothing of being able to say hello to old pals, they drove all the way across the Victoria Bridge to St. Ann's parish on the corner of Wellington and

Mountain, featured in one of the 21 films in MacLeod's tour.

It would be a few more years before I would fully understand why Catholics built elaborate churches and how those hallowed halls were of such comfort to believers. At the time, I confessed to hating every second of being forced to sit smelling burning incense in a place with horrible acoustics.

Among the other stops on the MacLeod's Griffintown tour are the Darling Brothers foundry and the former Dow Brewery. As my father drove a beer truck for Molson's in those years, my siblings and I always enjoyed ribbing him that Dow was wow, way better than Molson's, not that we had ever tasted either.

Filmmaker MacLeod is a fascinating guy: a singer/songwriter, photographer, painter, animator and at heart, a storyteller. He is also that rare combination of entrepreneur and artist.

When he makes his DVDs, often in collaboration with the NFB, they are in both English and French, and they all come with teachers' guides. Just before Christmas 2016, he hooked up with an online sales company to sell tote bags with prints of his paintings of some of the iconic stops on the tour, including Farine Five Roses.

Born in Red Deer, Alta., MacLeod lived in Cape Breton before moving to Montreal. His lanky cowboy demeanor reminds one of Ian Tyson,

just off the range. He is personable, charismatic and perfectly bilingual, which could make him the ideal candidate for the Conservative Party leadership, but I suspect his heart lies elsewhere.



What is inspiring about MacLeod's work is its dedication to preservation and memory.

His art is a celebration of the past without being needlessly nostalgic or politically angry. Which is not to say that he is unengaged. He tries to educate and engage through his art, and Griffintown lovers, historians or just rapidly aging sentimentalists like me are all the better for it.

On a cold winter day, what better way to take a walking tour than from the comfort of your own home on a handy device:

griffintowntour.com.

You don't even have to say I sent you.