
The year of the storyteller

By Isabel Serval

There's a financial crisis, hallucinating fungi are illegal, De Wallen is being tidied up and clubs and pubs smell of BO and flatulence because nobody's smoking. What a relief, there's good news too: storytelling is on the increase. Early night life goes cosy: snuggle up, lean back and enter the wondrous world of stories.

'Stories make your mind expand,' says Shayne McCreadie, with a broad smile and glistening eyes. She reads her spoken columns every two weeks on Friday evening at the Van Gogh Museum.

McCreadie, a Media and Culture student at UvA, also tells her stories at Mind the Gap. This monthly open mic night at Studio K has been a success since starting last June. 'I like that it's open to all forms of literary expression, especially since it's not easy to make yourself heard if you haven't published an actual paper yet,' she says.

Mind the Gap initiator Effie Baert says this is exactly the idea: an open, cosy and inspiring monthly evening. 'It doesn't matter whether people are listening to local celebrity Blackstarr, or a first-timer. Everybody's treated with the same amount of respect.' Now Baert is looking to expand the event.

McCreadie also incorporates new media with old story traditions: she writes live blogs at Mind the Gap, typing her impression of the evening speedily on location and sharing it with the listeners directly, with the story immediately published on her blog.

Another rising storyteller at Mind the Gap is Thijs de Boer. He started writing only two years ago, and his first omnibus bundle will be published before next summer. He's even read at the Crossing Border festival in Den Haag and twice in De Avonden on Radio 1. For De Boer and McCreadie, reading their stories to listeners is a good way of promoting their work while receiving direct feedback.

'Sometimes the crowd laughs when I didn't intend to be funny. It's thrilling to see how your story comes across,' says McCreadie. On the public side, De Boer says listening to a storyteller is a more inspiring way to spend your evening than in front of the TV. 'It opens up your mind to someone else's world and encourages you to use your own imagination,' says De Boer. 'Besides that, stories are the only things that really last. Everything in the world comes and goes. We all die, and everything we carry with us eventually is little more than a burden. The only thing that's left in the end is stories: they're lighter to carry with you.'