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Queen Ka at the "Transe Atlantique" Festival in Saintes

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The 5th version of the "Transe Atlantique" festival took place in Saintes (Western France) on 20-22 August 2026. Essentially it brings together French and Quebecois artists, on the St Louis site which overlooks the city and offers an exceptional view over its romanesque roof-tiles and monuments steeped in history. There were activities also "outside the walls" in various parts of the city.

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The Martineau Gardens, beside the François Mitterrand médiatheque, is where "Queen Ka" appeared, in this her third visit from Montreal. A poet, she gave a striking performance, mixing poems created by herself or others with slam, singing, music and dance.
The interview took place after her performance on 21 August.

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- Bonjour Queen Ka and thank-you for granting this interview. To start with, how to experience and see the city of Saintes?

– Since it's my third time I'm getting some bearings. It's a magnificent city, with a huge amount of history... a Gallo-roman city existing long before... many of us! Laugh. There is something strong, each time that I come and sense that history is always bigger than we are. I really like arriving in a place and sensing that the walls have more to tell us about... than just last century!

- You like that?

– I adore it. I feel that it places me in a greater context than just my self.

- Canada has a history, of how many years, 300, 400?

– Yes, very young. It's around 380 years, for Montreal at least, Quebec city is a little older. It's a colonised territory, since apart from that it's much older. There were native people on those lands centuries before.

- Are there still native peoples from before...?

– Yes, yes. I think we should say things as they are. There was a form of genocide, a desire for eradication in that [colonising] culture, those cultures, since there are several communities, several nations on the territory of America. But they are still there, and for some years we have thought there is more work to do. But there is an effort made by

the government to give them their place - not really restore it, but at least there is the idea of reconciliation, and reparation, and so the communities are occupying more space now in the social sphere, the economic sphere and the cultural sphere. I am very pleased with this, because I too am of native origin... native of North Africa! My parents are from the south of Tunisia, they are Berbers (Amazigh). And so I am fervent for the peoples, the first peoples of the world. Laugh.

– So your parents migrated to Canada...

– My father arrived two years after the Olympics, in 1974. He was there for five years and then he married my Mom. They immigrated and I was born in Canada. My father came because he wanted a place where French is spoken - someone had mentioned Quebec and he said: "OK I go there". So he arrived in Montreal in 74.

- OK. So you have had Canadian nationality from the start. How do you see the relationships in France with the immigrants, the attitudes towards them?

– We have issues like that in Quebec. The difference is all the colonialist history. It's hard to live together when there is no history of living together, one might say. I often feel that the issues of today are the direct result of the issues of the past. When reparations are not made in a positive way for all parties, it's difficult, normally difficult. And then we are all born into this world, into this life, we don't feel that impact, but we live with its consequences every day. So you and me undergo difficulties linked to something more historic. I feel this a little more in France, perhaps because I view it from outside, in relation to my own reality... Even if I am fervent, believing that human values will win over everything, through empathy, through love for the others - because we need others, always. And then with what is happening at the moment - you've seen it in Saintes, with global warming, there will be other forms of migration, some people will have to leave their lands because of heat, there will be upheavals. That's a huge question you put to me, eh! Laugh.

– *Yes, for sure. (laugh) But the world in general, the current world, how do you see it and its evolution, with the current alignments of force, and wars etc... How are you living that in Canada? Besides, are you worried by the caprices of [President] Trump?*

– Ah mon Dieu, that is a horror ! We are in the hands of someone who is completely incoherent and megalomanic. I feel that he's in a sort of a ...babyish period. We'd forgotten that despotism, megalomania and madness could come to power in our North American lands. It's as if we'd said to each other, yes "that happens only in other countries". And then, well "Ah no, nothing is certain". We forget. But frontiers are only air. When you look at the earth, you don't see any straight lines. The frontiers that the ocean writes, they are true earth frontiers, they are physically present. You have to cross a wide stretch of water to go to a territory. But the other frontiers are a human creation, based on "mutual respect" of space and zones where you say "That's yours, that's mine". But it's different with someone who says "I can defy international law, I can defy all that stuff". And you say "Hey, that guy has the world's biggest army" and if tomorrow he says "I'm coming to your place", then I don't know what to say, because there's not a lot you can do about that. So, everything rests on the fact that people agree on rules drawn up, but when someone decides not to play by those rules, we get chaos. It seems that for a long time we haven't lived in that chaos. I grew up in the 80s, so, well, the Second World War had existed, I heard about it, but...It's as if, suddenly, someone said: "Ah, OK everything can change overnight and we can be invaded by our neighbour..."

- What do you think in particular about the nuclear-weapons threats which some nuclear-armed countries are uttering to others?

– Well, it's as if they were playing at each trying to scare the other. We are afraid, in Canada, without nuclear

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weapons, and that causes anguish. There is bargaining, and that's the currency of exchange. "I have enough nukes so you're going to leave me alone." As if that's what decides the security of a territory. It scares me greatly... I find it rather mean that you tell someone he has no right to have nuclear weapons whereas you have them. There's something crazy in all that. And the risk of escalation... People want to have more, always more, and everyone wants more nuclear weapons. I say to myself: Don't you remember Hiroshima? Or Chernobyl?

This lack of short-term memory, in society, is frightening. With all that is happening, I really can't have confidence in the future. I just hope that this one more year we have with Trump can end in such a way that another party takes power, the democrats, and that the overall pressure reduces. If not, I'd have no faith in the world continuing, honestly. You've led me to a rather cynical space. I don't know how you can live with it.

- Well, I'm in the association we mentioned before, Action des citoyens pour le désarmement nucléaire (ACDN), which has existed for 30 years, since 1996. It campaigns for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons. There are two possible futures; either everyone has nuclear weapons, or nobody does. So the only reasonable solution, given that those weapons make no sense (in our view) is to eliminate them all.

– Yeah.

- Besides, that is prescribed by international law, by Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which requires that the nuclear-armed states renounce their weapons like the others. The others accept to not have them, to not obtain them, but they, since they have nuclear weapons...there is no good reason for them to have them and not the others. So they need to eliminate them.

– How many states have nuclear arms?

- Currently nine. As far as we know.

– But surely there are others who have them and don't say so.

- Well, the matter is well studied. There could be one extra country. But we are saying nine: five which officially have them and are bound by the article I mentioned to negotiate their methodical, progressive and planned elimination etc. You doubtless know these, they are the five permanent members of the Security Council. The other four, in chronological order, are Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Those four are not bound by the treaty, either because they never signed or because they withdrew, as North Korea did. But what is obviously needed is for them all to get round a table and negotiate, and the five bound to do so must set an example and do it.

– But the countries you have just mentioned are the worst, we know that! In what universe will Netanyahu get rid of his nuclear weapons? And Kim Jung Un! A part of me thinks that the five are saying "Hey, we mightn't get rid of them immediately..." Laugh. But at the same time, and this is the ridiculous bit: that the five do have permission to have them. No, you can't have a toy and say "Nobody else will have one!" There's a guy in the playground and you don't want him to get the toy... But he ends up getting it! So I am overjoyed that you are taking the initiative to denounce it, and I think the key thing is that there are still associations like that to do so. But I admit...laugh.

- Yes, yes, but you are very right to raise the issue. It is a known issue, of course. Really the main five need to get round a table and bring in the others. The four will be almost obliged to come. Including Israel, perhaps the most difficult, but even Israel will have to come, because it would have interest in being accepted by the others. That has

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many meanings, and perhaps there might be only one state, an Israeli-Palestinian state. That's a position we support, because the two-state solution is not working now, it's no longer possible... There would need to be a secular state accepting every citizen, irrespective of religion of origin... But that's a political solution. For you working as an artist, do you think it's possible to highlight this problem...?

– The nuclear one? Well my activity is as a poet. I speak about what I know, at the limits of that. I've already created texts denouncing the world situation. There is one I call FDM (Fin Du Monde, the End of the World), and here is a part of it...

FDM [the End of the World]

the end arrives around the corner
so the end of the world appears
it would be good to have enough time
to make a final circuit
before it all
burns
explodes
crumbles
before it all shakes and falls
before the catastrophe throws us all into a big heap
and our magnets forever stop working

on the day when
my bearings become yours
anorexic ozone
for the solar soldier
the ultimate kamikaze
in the galaxy's name
basically
we are so tiny

that day
a great gust of solar wind and
"Bye bye they're gone"
the fat, the tall, the small
the street folk
the penniless loners
the day-and-night dressers
with pockets full and hearts empty
the longers for great change
the hippies the grain-eaters
the inveterate meat-eaters
the virgin girls and boys
with a hand in their pants
and eyes fixed on flat screens

and pointed sex-organs
fetuses and embryos

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with or without rights
mothers pregnant
and transferred
all gone away
all at once
gone away
even the messiah-watchers
tears in their eyes, anger in their bellies
poignant doubt confronting absence
the holy book in an iPad in their hands
it is the end my friends

on that day
only a dry red planet will be left
another Mars perhaps
basically
we are so tiny

OK let's hurry up
before the landslide arrives
or the last ocean wave not from our hands

before the towers crumble not hit by aircraft
for the soil is growing tired of our incessant steps

with fires and tornados to remind us cruelly
that we control nothing

let's go and see the glaciers of the Arctic
before they go voyaging and melt on our cracked coasts
let's climb those mountains
to feel the vertigo of our insignificance

let's breathe the air up too high
that shocks our thoracic cages
and meditate atop those ancestral trees
wise flags

let's contemplate those stars
the fixed ones and the shooting ones
before we fade out and race disappears

because basically we are so tiny
so fabulously
tiny.
â€”

- Bravo ! Superb !

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– There, that's my work.

– Superb. Can you send us a copy?

– Sure. But it is already on YouTube, with music. I've just missed out some little bits because I haven't recited it recently. A text from a few years back. Well, that's how I denounce things. The only way I know to do so artistically. Then I leave the field to you, to work at it...

*- Merci Elkahna**. Thanks again for your work, your commitment and your magnificent performances...*

Interview recorded and transcribed by Jean-Marie Matagne and Jean-Robert Drougard
Translated into English by Peter Low

[https://www.acdn.net/spip/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH250/queen_ka_itv_21_aout_2026-585b7.png]

NOTES

*** Original text:** Queen Ka. FDM. Fin du Monde. January 2017
Direction: Simon Gosselin. Sound engineering : Guillaume Briand. Music : Blaise Borboën, Léonard et Stéphane Leclerc. Text: Queen Ka.

****** Elkahna Talbi. Stage name: Queen Ka.

See also:

1 oct. 2019, Queen Ka interviewed by Antoine Perraud et Faïza Zerouala for the Mediapart online media 28’ 29’’

Regarde-nous 2’ 43’’

Deuxième génération 3’ 01’’

Héros 5’ 41’’

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