Bruce Hunter
Frontenac House/House of Blue Skies, 2014
$24.95

Kris Demeanor, Calgary’s inaugural poet laureate and Dymphny Dronyk, “art-entrepreneur” host a great bash, sumptuously “co-catered” by publishers Frontenac House and House of Blue Skies.
Everybody’s here: the youngest is twelve and there are scientists, poets, hip-hop artists, musicians, photographers, painters, playwrights, print makers, a doula, even a professional clown, and some out-of-towners. And in the oldest tradition of the poet speaking from the heart of the bustling village, Mayor Naheed Nenshi shares his own “The Hats We Wear”:

Ours are pretty big too.
But our dreams are bigger.”

That’s my hometown - scrappy, irrepressible, driven, and batty with optimism, as good as Toronto, or Sandburg’s Chicago. When the Chinook’s over and Stampede ends and the next boom or flood subsides, we set to. Afterall, Calgarians live, as Anne Burke notes, “Where Two Rivers Conspire”.

A beautifully produced book, its cover features Dave Casey’s striking painting “Stampede Bar U City” a nod to the historic ranch. Inside, Demeanor begins with a “lifer’s” musings, historian-
laureate Harry Saunders succinctly remembers Calgary’s pioneers and Dronyk’s insightful Afterword is a “newb’s” take on a modern city.

In between, the editors have invited many styles of visual art and poetry. With 75 contributors, this is an inclusive book and a real-time work of art. The exquisite pairings of poetry and visuals range from popular to experimental, from pretty to gritty.

Visual artists are well-represented: Mandi Stobo and her whimsical caricature - Nenshi in a scuba mask. George Webber’s wintry photograph of 16th Avenue evokes

Calgary is a storied city. Kirk Ramdath’s “Naming” elegizes Col. James Macleod and the lost buffalo: “wind cousin of the bull on the macleod family crest.” The legendary golden foothills that shoulder the city are visited by many: Bob Stallworthy in photographs and poetry and Colin Morton’s lyrical “Nose Creek” memorialises North Hill: idyllic, until the bulldozers come.
Calgarians like their food and their haunts: Catherine McLaughlin’s “bison burgers at the Arden Café”, Eugene Stickland’s witty eavesdropping in “At Caffe Beano”, Kirk Miles’ gritty and funny “The Shamrock Hotel” and George Webber captures humour in the Blackfoot Diner’s menu.

Additional guests include musicians Ian Ferrier and Cort Delano, spoken word artists Transit and Wakefield Brewster. Sheri-D Wilson warns, “The River has a Mind of Her Own.”

Some of the luminaries present include Christian Bok, Weyman
Chan, Cecelia Frey, Fred Wah and dynamo Tom Wayman. Richard Harrison muses on hockey’s grace, the Saddledome and the 2013 flood. And you’ll certainly hear more from Micheline Maylor and Juleta Severson-Baker whose fleet “Run Practice” captures the urban wilds of the Weaselhead.

Whatever their hats, as Mayor Nenshi says, there’s a brave new crew coming: Bethan McBreen’s droll read on the urban “passive park”. Rosemary Griebel’s poignant “St. Stephen’s Church, December Evening” has a homeless person rise from the meal to deliver Abraham’s lesson, while another shares her jug of
wine and they celebrate their lot. Amongst Calgary’s enormous wealth, the most vulnerable teach us, if we let them.

But now the future has come for us. There’s much to celebrate, and Dale Lee Kwong gets the last word here. Her “L-berta Rainbow” resonates on so many levels:

“come hell and high water above the prairie river rainbow rises.”

*Alberta Views* April. 2013