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Creativity on the Rise in the Sixth Season of the Berkshire Festival of Women Writers

Great Barrington – The month of March in the Berkshires may be best known for maple syrup, as the sap starts flowing in our beautiful forests. But there have been other kinds of creative juices rising in these hills every March since 2010. The Berkshires is also known for celebrating Women's History month with an outpouring of women's creative voices and visions, thanks to the Berkshire Festival of Women Writers, now in its sixth year.

In 2016, BFWW presents a new conference-style Festival, offering 33 events from March 12 to 20. For nine full days more than 60 nationally renowned and local women writers will present workshops, discussions, readings, performances, and talks. Many events are free and some require pre-registration and tickets.

Among this year's featured presenters are the young adult authors Jane Yolen and Heidi Stemple, a mother-daughter team, as well as the celebrated food writer and restaurant critic, Ruth Reichl, who will give a brunch talk on March 19 at Hotel on North. Popular Berkshire writers include Laura Didyk, Lara Tupper, Sonia Pilcer, Alison Larkin, and many others.

The opening weekend will take place at Eastover Retreat Center in Lenox on March 12 & 13; the Festival will close at Hotel on North in Pittsfield March 19 & 20. Each weekend will offer half and full day event options, including several workshops, readings, performances, and meals. Weekday events, most of them free, will take place at various locations throughout the county.

Acclaimed authors Cheryl Clarke and Breena Clarke (sister founders of the Hobart Book Village Festival of Women Writers), memoirist Mary Johnson (founder of the A Room of One's Own Foundation for women writers) and Esther Cohen (founder of the Unseen America Project) will present together in two sessions, "An Unquenchable Thirst for Writing" and "Women Writers: Building Sisterhood," both on March 12 at Eastover.

Writer, activist, and founding editor of Ms. Magazine Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and prolific author Veronica Chambers will be interviewed by Anastasia Stanmeyer, editor of Berkshire Magazine, on March 19 at Hotel on North. On the same day, author Sonia Pilcer hosts her popular "Women Writers of a Certain Age" reading, featuring award-winning authors Helen Epstein, Barbara Slate, and Karen Schoemer.

Young women are well represented in this year's Festival, including a reading by Monument Mountain High School girls and a writing and spoken word workshop, "Ophelia Rising," by slam poet Grace Rossman, both on March 18.

Festival performances include a new one-woman show by Rachel Siegel, "Special," directed by Jayne Atkinson and produced by Kristen van Ginhoven of WAM Theatre at the Unicorn Theater on March 19; and a March 12 concert by singer-songwriter Kate Campbell, inspired by southern women writers like Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor.

The Festival finale on March 20 will begin with a brunch talk at Hotel on North by journalist Sheila Weller, author of the bestselling biographies *Girls Like Us* (on Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon) and *The News Sorority* (on Christiane Amanpour, Katie Couric and Diane Sawyer); it will close with local author and performer Alison Larkin offering a "Festive British Tea Party with the English American."

For the complete schedule of events and registration information, visit Berkshirewomenwriters.org.

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