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Brownstein: City has lost another original with the death of Matthew Cope



Cope had a strong following as an entertainment critic, and later segued to screenwriting and editing, but his passion was photography.

Bill Brownstein • Montreal Gazette
Jan 14, 2021 • 22 hours ago • 3 minute read



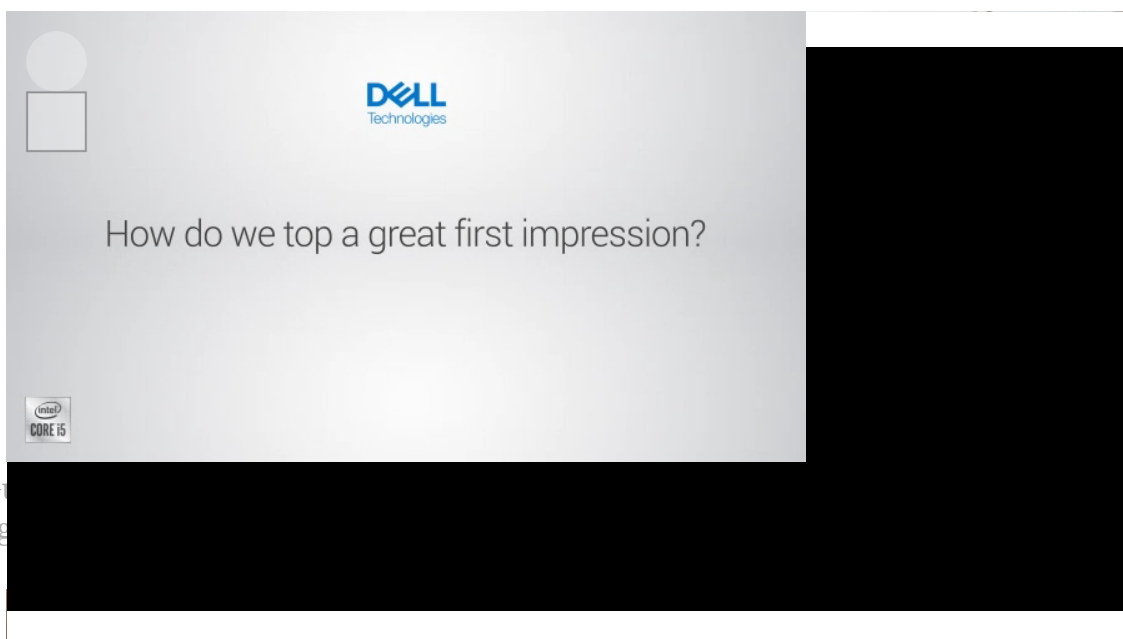
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The city has lost another of its most memorable characters: Matthew Cope died Wednesday after falling into a coma last weekend. He was 74.

Although born in England and endowed with his soft, endearing British accent, Cope spent his formative years in Montreal, involved in all aspects of the cultural scene here.



Cope was the ultimate iconoclast. He was as sharp a skeptic as they come, with opinions on everything. With his wickedly dry and droll wit, he took more of a velvet hammer approach in taking on his targets, but he didn't hold back on being curmudgeonly when need be.

Cope had a strong following as an entertainment critic on radio and TV. He later segued to screenwriting and editing on such hit animated series as Bob and Margaret, Caillou and What's With Andy, and he wrote for the Cirque du Soleil.

But his passion was photography. He spent his spare time over the years combing the streets of Montreal, New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and London in search of the offbeat to capture on camera. Those fortunate enough to catch his solo photography exhibition, Live Human Targets, at the Segal Centre a decade back, were mesmerized by his revealing glimpse into an urban underbelly most take for granted. He had an eye for colourful eccentrics, be they Elvis impersonators competing in Vegas or a magician walking on water here.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Although Cope kept a low profile in recent years, he was an endless source of knowledge and entertainment to his closest friend, Michael Libling. For the last 15 years, they got together for their Saturday Morning Breakfast Club, where Cope would enthral with his world views between bites at various city restaurants. During the pandemic, they kept their meetings going online.

They spoke for the final time last weekend, after Cope had collapsed at home and just prior to him slipping into a coma. "I'm just so devastated," said Libling, a writer and original host of CJAD's Trivia Show. "He had his share of health issues, but they didn't appen so suddenly, although in the last few months he gave 1 oming.

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“Just a couple of weeks back, I said to him: ‘Please, Matthew, don’t drop dead on me, because I don’t know what I would do without you.’ He was just such a character, often grumpy and impatient yet so funny. But my wife and I so loved him for the way he was.”

Dr. Joe Schwarcz was also a close friend and member of the Saturday Morning Breakfast Club.

“Matthew was a real Renaissance Man,” Schwarcz said. “He had opinions on everything from world politics to movies and theatre. He was extremely bright and articulate, one of those rare people capable of speaking about anything and everything. But he always did so in with his classic British wit.

“He begged off having our breakfast last Saturday because he said he wasn’t feeling well, but we had no idea. He had health issues over the years, but nothing that would have seemed to cause his imminent passing. It’s so sad, and there is a real void in the lives of those of us who had been in such regular contact with him.”

Libling noted that it will be quite some time to get over the shock: “We were on the phone constantly. After events in Washington, we were on the phone every five minutes. No matter how bad it was, he never lost his wry take on life.

“I just so want to talk to him now. It’s killing me.”

Cope is survived by his wife Mitsuru. Friends are hoping for a memorial to take place shortly.

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