

Arts

Word on the Streets



shayne avec i grec
wants more spoken
word in town

Victoria
needs a
regular
slamming

As Graham Olds, host of the Vancouver Poetry Slam, jokingly puts it, "Poetry is the lowest paying artistic profession in Canada. Even mimes get paid more, and they've got nothing to say."

Perhaps you need to have attended a slam to fully appreciate the sentiment, as spoken word artists are never at a loss for something to say.

Spoken word is sort of like amplified poetry. Whereas poetry focuses more on the written word, spoken word has a strong emphasis on the performance of poetry. It's not meant to be read, it's meant to be heard.

As local spoken word artist shayne avec i grec (yes, that's how he writes his name) explains, "It's about engaging the audience. Spoken word is like crossing a poetry reading with a one-person theatre show."

Basically, it's not only what you say, but how you say it. And that art form comes into its own whenever there's a poetry slam, the literary equivalent of a night of improv theatre.

Here's how a slam, at least in the case of the upcoming Slam-Off, works.

There are 10 competitors (first come first serve, anyone can sign up). Five judges are selected at random from the audience, and the poets are at their mercy for the rest of the evening.

Each poet has three minutes to do their thing. There are a few elimination rounds until finally a winner is decided, and that person wins buckets of cash and endless glory. Well, at least a couple of bucks and a nice round of applause. There's usually some open mike time as well, and a feature act to get the crowd

going. It's a great place to sit back and drink some coffee while watching some unique performances. And maybe to work up the nerve to get up on stage yourself.

There aren't any authentic slams in Victoria, but that is something shayne is hoping to change, beginning with the one he is organizing for this Friday at Solstice Café.

At this event, you'll get to see some slamming in action, and will also get a chance to check out the Vancouver fusion group The Fugitives, which features several spoken word artists.

And who knows, it could be your ticket to poetic glory. The top four slam scorers from the Slam-Off will form Victoria's first Slam Team, who will compete at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word in Vancouver this fall. The festival will feature teams from Vancouver, Ottawa and Winnipeg, along with readings, workshops, and guest performers. (For more info check out www.wordlympics.com.)

shayne hopes Friday's event will be the first of many slams to come. "I know a lot of people who dabble in spoken word," he says. "That's one of the big reasons I want to get this turned into a regular thing. There are people in Victoria that do it and like it, but might not necessarily have a venue to perform."

Indeed, a regular slam would be a great meeting ground for the poetically inclined, and Victoria would be cooler for it.

—Sarah Gignac

**Slam-Off, featuring
the Fugitives**
6 pm Friday, May 27
Solstice Cafe,
529 Pandora
Tickets \$5
382-POET