

# Artist explains gay experience

By Meg Dedolph  
Emerald Reporter

Basketball players, drag queens, jazz musicians and a great-grandmother, among others, dance through the pages of Essex Hemphill's writing, through which he tries to explain the experience of being a black gay man in America.

Hemphill, the "Artist-in-Residence" for Martin Luther King Jr. week, will be marching in a rally Saturday and appearing at the Hult Center at 7:30 p.m. Monday.

Hemphill's work — which, when dealing with sexuality, is sometimes graphic — is often stereotyped as "X-rated," he said. Hemphill said stereotyping is a risk for any writer from the lesbian, gay or bisexual community, especially when the work is exposed to others outside the group.

"When the work is beginning to be dealt with outside the community," Hemphill said,

"those who are uncomfortable with the community's existence already are going to find strategies to collapse the significance of that work."

Criticism like this does not affect Hemphill, who said he tries not to take it seriously for fear he would not accomplish the work he wanted to do.

"I tend to let commentary like that roll," he said, "because I know what I'm doing and that's what's the most important at the end of the day, that you be clear about what the intents of your work are."

"I think if I wasn't pigeonholed, or if people were not trying to pigeonhole me because of sex or sexuality, it would be because of race," Hemphill said.

If the sexual references were removed from his works, he said, "We'd still have to contend with the other issues - the issues of race, the issues of misogyny, sexism in society and some of the class issues that my

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— Essex Hemphill,  
*poet*

essays are attempting to deal with."

Hemphill said his writings are especially appreciated in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and black communities, but that he is always surprised at the composition of his audiences when he travels.

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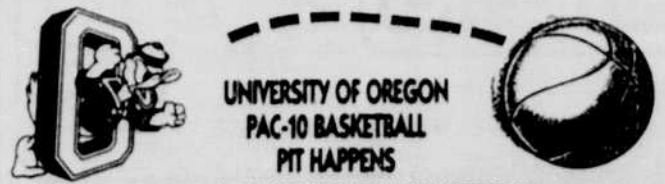
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