

'All girl' poetry

The seven-member poetry troupe Oratrix brings its show to Sam Bond's Garage this weekend

By **Natasha Chilingierian**
Pulse Reporter

Oratrix, an all-female queer slam poetry troupe from Seattle, will hit Eugene on Saturday as the last stop on their "All Girl. All Words." tour.

The seven members — Katinka Kraft, Brenda Brown, Alexandria Red, Tara Hardy, Amy Mahoney, Gigi Grinstead and Kristin Aurora — are taking their poems on their first tour after a one-year performance period

in Seattle. Oratrix left for Oregon and California last Saturday and has already appeared in Portland, San Francisco, Davis, Calif., Sacramento, Calif., and San Jose, Calif. They perform fast-paced individual and group slam poems on topics including politics and sex.

"Our mission is to write and to tell, and to encourage others to write and to tell, especially queers," Hardy said.

Three years ago, Hardy said she was one of two queer poets in Seattle that she knew of, so she decided to open a writing institute for queer writers so she could meet others like herself.

"I was lonely, and I wanted other queer poets to join me," she said.

While teaching at her school, The

Bent Institute, Hardy met the future members of Oratrix and they worked on pieces together for two years before taking the stage.

"We were the core group from the writing class," Mahoney said. "We went far and beyond what the class did for us by starting the troupe."

Oratrix, which means "she who speaks" in Latin, did their first show in September 2002 at a poetry house in Seattle. Shortly after, they performed at several universities in Washington and Oregon. Kraft said their biggest success so far was working at Bumbershoot, a four-day arts festival in Seattle. At Bumbershoot, Oratrix performed and taught a workshop on writing group poetry.

"We are unique because we write many of our poems together," Kraft said.

Hardy described the show as "dazzling, shocking, high-energy, intense and fun" and said the poets speak about thought-provoking topics such as social class, break-ups, gender, race, graphic sexuality and their opposition to President Bush.

"Art is a powerful social change tool, and we're all about it," she said.

Mahoney said the members come from diverse backgrounds, which allows them to cover many different issues in their poems.

"The beauty of our troupe is that we show how differences can complement each other so well," she said.

Besides scoring a tour and perform-

ing at Bumbershoot, Mahoney said Oratrix has succeeded at building a community of queer poets.

"At The Bent Institute, we were able to work with other queer artists, promote them and network with them," she said.

Kraft said the troupe hopes to continue growing as performers and expressing themselves verbally.

"We are inventing ourselves and creating ourselves as female performers and saying what we need to say," she said.

Oratrix will perform Saturday at 9:30 p.m. at Sam Bond's Garage, located at 407 Blair Blvd. Tickets are \$5.

Contact the Pulse reporter at natashachilingierian@dailyemerald.com.

Williams' unique poem spreads words of change

Saul Williams' third book contains one 178-page poem about revolution, freedom and a single kiss

By **Aaron Shakra**
Pulse Editor

People often respond to written work with the statement that it "spoke" to them. The unique thing about Saul Williams' poetry is not just its power to speak to us, but its ability to enable people to become speakers themselves. His newest book of poetry, "said the shotgun to the head," was released in mid-September.

This is Williams' third book of poems — after "The Seventh Octave" and "She" — although here, there is only one long piece, splayed across 10 sections and 178 pages. The numbers aren't as grandiose as they sound, and given the amount of text on each page, let's just say everyone will find this book a page turner. On average, each consists of no more than a few sentences, printed in large text with different typefaces (and Williams' own handwriting).

Some might consider this a prose poem because it does tell a story. Williams prefaces the poem in the introduction, saying the book was motivated by a kiss.

"Have you ever been kissed by God? ... Here is the account of a man so ravished by a kiss that it distorts his highest and lowest frequencies of understanding," he writes. "He wanders the streets disheveled and tormented by all that he sees that does not reflect her love. He is a wondering man, sort of like a modern day John the Baptist, telling of the coming of a female messiah that he has known intimately."

The title is perhaps misleading for a book about a kiss. And while Williams often likens the kiss-giver to a deity, there is no doubt that he is speaking more broadly of female divinity. The message is an embrace of femininity as a whole. The poet believes this power will act as a healing force in America's present-day legacy of patriarchy, militarism and self-centeredness. Section five, perhaps the poem's thesis statement, explicates these themes in political manner. One section reads, "a truth that mushrooms / its darkened cloud / over the rest of us / so that we too / bear witness / to the short lived fate / of a civilization / that worships / a male god." The next page makes the pointed statement: "Your weapons / are phallic / all of them."

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Orion Trist Freelance Photographer

Saul Williams performs at the fifth-annual 911 Power to the Peaceful Festival in San Francisco on Sept. 6.

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