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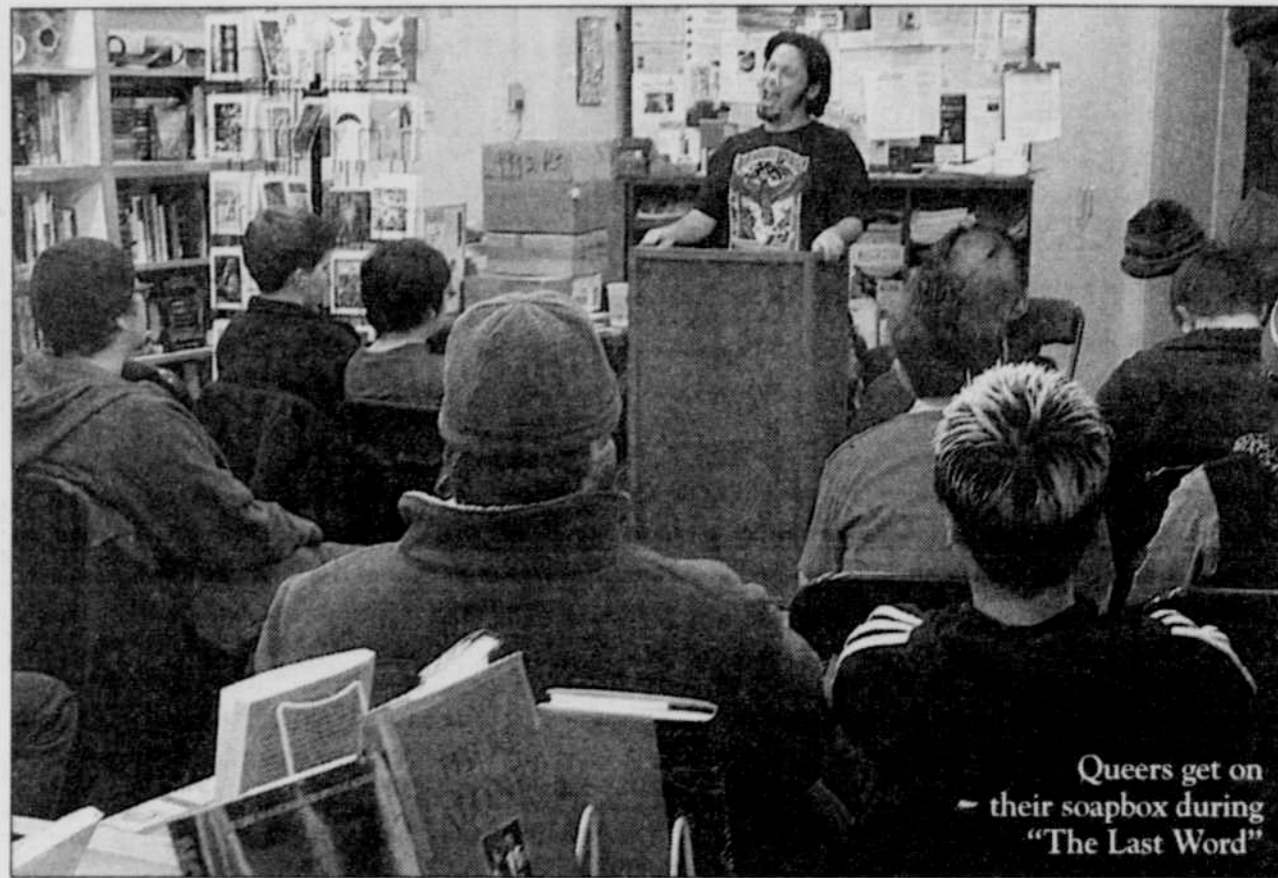
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**CULTURE**

**Drink it up**

Queer open mikes offer libation for the soul

BY ERIC PLEMONS



Queers get on  
— their soapbox during  
"The Last Word"

**W**hether you have been dying to dust off that poem you know will blow people away, are anxious to tune up your six-string and get in front of an audience again or are just hungry for some engaging performance, there's a queer-friendly seat in town waiting for you.

On the last Tuesday of every month, In Other Words Women's Books and Resources hosts "The Last Word," an open mike space that started up again several months ago after a couple of earlier successful runs. The latest permutation began as a zine reading but has expanded to include many mediums of expression.

At 7 p.m. the store is filled with folding chairs all set to face a podium. Last month, by the time the show started at 7:30, it was standing room only, with listeners lining the magazine racks and bookshelves.

While the mood feels somewhat formalized by the fluorescent lights overhead, presenters bridge the gap by offering very personal and engaging pieces. Some read from self-produced zines that are available for sale. Styles range from narrative personal essay and prose to rhythmic poetry and original acoustic music. There is a strong presenter focus on genderqueer and trans issues that often provide interesting and complex juxtapositions to one another.

A half-dozen readers and one musician performed in January, but the pool grows with every event. Interested presenters throw their names into a hat and are drawn at random for the chance to sit at the podium and do their thing. The audience is respectfully quiet during readings and delivers raucous appreciation at the end of each offering.

Click Patterdale has been organizing "The Last Word" for roughly six months, and he's heard a lot of positive feedback from people excited to hear new work. "This is a really accepting environment—very queer," he says. "It is a great space for those who may not have another venue in town."

As a genderqueer himself, Patterdale has received a great deal of support from the staff at the feminist bookstore. The core group of presenters are genderqueer and read on related topics, though all are welcome to speak up on any subject.

January's presentations focused on love, body image, gender fluidity, identity flux and identity as flux. There was also a charmingly

humorous piece on bike repair and a sexy B/D/S/M poem thrown in to spice up the mix.

**A** couple of miles away every Thursday night, gay-owned 3 Friends Coffeehouse slips out of its Southeast neighborhood cafe costume and becomes a hip, connected performance space. A seating area in the front window gives way to a small, spotlighted stage, complete with a full sound system. The house lights dim, pool play stops, and the couches and chairs fill with performers and eager listeners.

Queer songwriter Tamara J. Brown hosts the evening, which starts around 7 p.m. Sign-ups for performance begin at 6:30, and the stage is open to just about any genre of expression. The sound system is ready to support readings of prose, traditional poetry, slam poetry and music.

"Open mikes are a unique opportunity for artists to showcase their work, learn from each other and network. That's what it's all about!" says Brown.

Themes of love, sex, gender and the corporate adoption of queer culture are very present in spoken word pieces, keeping the environment positive and affirming. Knockout instrumental performances keep the evening infused with kinetic energy and leave the audience excited for the possibility of what may come next.

If you've been itching for an opportunity to let loose a political rant or softly contemplate the intricacies of love, the stage at 3 Friends is your place. While the crowd is predominantly youngish, there is space for every engaged listener to settle into a comfy couch or lean against the long service counter.

Brown, who used to run several open mikes on the East Coast, says her motivation is simply getting people up on stage "to share their stuff, to promote their shows, sell their CDs or writing works—but most of all, for my own selfish reasons, to witness all of the great talent here in Portland."

Open mikes at In Other Words and 3 Friends definitely buzz with different vibes, but each offers a safe place to speak your mind. Brown's right: There is no limit to the talent that's brewing in Portland every day, and there is nothing more exciting than seeing that born out on stage.

Support queer-positive businesses and your fellow revolutionaries at the same time. Brilliant. **J**

"The Last Word" is 7 p.m. the last Tuesday of every month at IN OTHER WORDS, 3734 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd. 3 FRIENDS COFFEEHOUSE, 201 S.E. 12th Ave., plays host to open mike at 7 p.m. Thursdays.

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS