

Alex Johnson (l), Brandon Grundy (background) and Brian Dekker (r) of the Black Poets Society.



The Black Poets Society

Poetry of the people

BY ROBIN CANFIELD

In the Black Poets Society you can speak your mind. The society exists to promote self-expression that opens and engages the minds of others. When all the colors of the rainbow come together, they make black — and that's the essence of the group's philosophy.

OSU Associate Professor Michael Ingram co-founded the now 15-person group in 1998. Today he acts as a role model and advisor and is also an active participant in the society. "As an organization, we try to maintain a socially active and aware presentation," said current society

president Brian Dekker. One of the key parts of the group is friendship. Members often become close at meetings and are always at readings to cheer each other on.

"I first got involved with poetry because of hip hop," said former society president Alex Johnson, "The Black Poets Society allowed me to bridge the gap between academics and spoken word." He met society co-founder Melvin Young when he first came to the campus and was inspired to keep the group going after most of the original members finished school. Now he serves as an advisor. "I help current mem-

bers keep perspective on the history of the group and where they want to go with it," Johnson said.

Anyone can join — all you need is an open mind, a desire to perform and an interest in poetry, any poetry. While slam poetry seems to be the preferred style of many of the members, at Sunnyside Up on Sept. 28, Black Poets big and small spoke, yelled and whispered lines. In front of a packed room, members read aloud as they shook with rage, leaned in close to the audience or stood, looking shy and frail, in front of the microphone.

Members don't have to perform if they don't want to, but making it to meetings is important. Starting this year, new members will also have to participate in diversity awareness training. "One of the main purposes of the group is to develop cross-cul-

ture bridges," Dekker said. "It's not as racially diverse as it is ethnically diverse."

Colin Wonnacott went to his first society meeting after a local poetry slam. "They went first, and said they were from the Black Poets Society," he explained. "I went up and mentioned that I wasn't a member and Brian shouted out 'You are now!' The first meeting I went to, I felt kind of intimidated, like I didn't belong. But everyone was so friendly."

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His own writing stems from listening to hip hop and he said the goals of the society haven't influenced his writing so much as reinforced it. "It's still writing and expressing opinion," he said, "It's just different in meter and sound."

The society hosts at least two events per term at OSU, and members often read at events held by others. "On campus we get asked to do a lot of multi-cultural events," Dekker said. They're also considering competing in the next National Collegiate Poetry Slam.

Off campus, members are often at venues that host open mic nights, poetry readings or benefits such as the relief effort for hurricane victims that happened at Sunnyside Up in September.

Now is the best time to join if you're interested. "It feels like a renaissance we're riding right now," Johnson said. "It feels like a rise in membership and in community support." Contact the Black Poets by e-mailing blackpoets@oregonstate.edu ■

Take the Stairs

Introducing Stairway Denied.

By Alana Yankus

As the music begins, listeners do a double-take. Is that Zeppelin? A sort of "Rock on, kudos to the men who gave the world 'Stairway to Heaven'" ripples through the crowd. But wait...this is live, and it's pretty certain Zeppelin isn't touring these days...especially not in Corvallis. It can only be Corvallis' own Zeppelin tribute band, Stairway Denied.

These guys sound like the real thing. Though the band strongly emphasizes its desire not to be a carbon copy of the magnificent original (no dressing like the band, etc.), when vocalist Noah Stroup utters the first line of the night, the likeness gives you chills. Guitarists Brian Hunter and Dylan Nelson mimic the immortalized riffs of Jimmy Page to perfection. And rounding out the sound are bassist Dust Stallings of Jahbong fame and drummer Chris Harver who bring their own incredible talents to the mix.

Stroup had wanted to start a Zep cover band for eons when he met the rest of the band through mutual friends. Three of the members (Stroup, Harver and Hunter) lived together and began the long search for a bass player. Once Stallings was on board, the only thing missing was that second guitar. Harver found him in a co-worker, and the work of building the stairway was complete.

Though the group is still in its infancy, the band members are no strangers to the



music scene. Harver and Stroup are also members of a well-established Corvallis band, Maryspeak. In fact, the only "band virgin" of the group is Nelson who, until drawn in by the power of Zep, was a casual player.

Musical influences range from AC/DC (y'know, the band on Butt-head's shirt) to Huey Lewis (who tried to convince the world that it's "Hip to be Square") to Nirvana. Harver notes that due to a neighbor who was also a professional drummer, he listened to a lot of Carlos Santana. On the other side of the spectrum, Hunter is into death metal, which hopefully rounds things out a bit.

In the seven months these boys have been together, not too many crazy things have happened. Mostly rowdy, drunken crowds abound, but that's not unusual anywhere in Corvallis. Harver does recall someone humping his leg as an expression of musical appreciation...well, to each his own.

Create some crazy road stories for this incredibly talented group by catching their very first Portland show Oct. 29th at the Ash Street Saloon. Take a listen at www.stairwaydenied.com and keep an eye out - these boys are going places. Stairway Denied play 10 pm Nov. 19 at Bombs Away Café \$5.