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performance BY VANESSA SALVIA



Jorah LaFleur

Connect the Thoughts

Poetry slammers from 'All Oregon' converge on World Café.

Marietta Bonaventure owned Foolscap Books and was founder and director of the Eugene Poetry Slam team, which met in the bookstore for two years before moving to Territorial Winery for another two years. After recently completing her teaching credentials, Bonaventure is handing over organization of the Eugene Poetry Slam to fellow slammer Jorah LaFleur. Now ending its fourth season, the Eugene Poetry Slam is fresh from the Salmon Slam Regionals held in Vancouver July 31, and is hosting the All Oregon Slam with competing teams from Corvallis and Bend.

LaFleur got involved with slams when she lived in Olympia. Even though the city didn't have its own team, there were lots of events taking place. "When I moved back to Eugene [in 2005] and saw that during the time I had been away someone had started this vibrant spoken word poetry scene here, I was like, 'Wow, that's great,' and immediately started attending the events," LaFleur said. "I think that's so great when someone takes the effort to really create a forum for spoken word to happen. Poetry is one of those things — there's not always a really good forum for people to share their poetry."

Competitive poetry may seem like an oxymoron, but to LaFleur it's a challenging and emotive experience. Slammers have a three-minute time limit and complete an eight-month competitive circuit to reach the national finals. "Slams have a very strict time limit which for me is the hardest thing. Three minutes is just not very much," she said. LaFleur also seeks out opportunities to perform her poetry at events that are non-competitive. She's on a small record label that her partner started, Space Gnome Records. Having toured with some of the bands on the label, LaFleur appreciates being able to talk to audiences, plus she

likes to work with music. "But I love slam for the opportunities it presents, that it gets people excited about poetry, and I love that it's open to youth."

Slammers cram all the information, ideas and emotion they can into their three-minute pieces, and for most poets, the goal is to get the audience connected to the emotions involved. LaFleur says sometimes it's really intense. People come up to her after performances in tears because she has verbalized their long held pain. "It's a quick way to remember that people do have shared experiences and we're not so far apart from each other," she said.

Slam pieces are often political, motivated by social injustice or imbalance. One LaFleur piece is entitled "Virgin/Whore," and it's a searing look at what role models the media presents to young women and girls. She tackles the marketing tactics society uses on girls, such as selling make-up and sexy clothing to pre-teens, and music that steals innocence. At one point LaFleur mimics the high-pitched

voice of Britney Spears, singing "Oops, I did it again." She closes with a powerful hope that all young girls can grow into their sexual experiences and attitudes from a foundation of respect, not falsity sold to them by today's sexy-styled pop starlets.

This All Oregon Slam is the first of its kind and will be a multiple bout competition between the three teams, each composed of four members. This year's Eugene Slam Team features acclaimed local poets Dakota Belle Witt, Samuel Rutledge, Barbara Handley and Marietta Bonaventure. On Aug. 13 the winning Oregon team will give a victory performance at Sam Bond's Garage, followed by a Haiku Showdown, which is open to all who wish to compete with original three-line poems. **EW**

For more information on the Eugene Poetry Slam, contact Jorah LaFleur at (360) 259-9281.

**All Oregon Slam
featuring teams from
Eugene, Corvallis
and Bend
8 pm Saturday, 8/12
World Café, \$5,
all ages**

**Victory performance
and Haiku Showdown
9 pm Sunday, 8/13
Sam Bond's Garage,
\$5, 21+**

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