

ARTS & CULTURE

A poetic evening in The Grove

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Lovers of literary and musical art gathered at the Cottage Events Venue on Tuesday (June 15) to absorb the performances of this month's Poetry Night.

Around a dozen participants made the bold step of bearing their souls, showcasing their talents and sharing appreciated works to an intimate audience.

The night was an eclectic mix of performances. Poets read their own works or the writings of others. Musicians and singers performed both original and popular songs. The mood was at times one of levity and others a somber dedication to lost loved ones.

"It can range from music to just spoken word," said Shannon Pool, who read from her own poetic works on Tuesday night. "There can be all kinds of different forms of poetry - some that rhyme, some that are free verse."

The monthly event is a loose collection of creative people who have forged a space in Cottage Grove to highlight local talents and bond through mainly literary art. From amateur to experienced artist, everyone is welcome to participate.

The event doesn't require that participants follow a theme, either, said Kim Still, who owns the Cottage Events Venue, but nights sometimes find synchronicity anyway.

"If you string it all to-

gether, sometimes there is just a powerful theme that runs through everybody's stuff in a night," she said. "And that is really, really cool. ... It's just giving people an opportunity to share their art, really."

For some, Tuesday night was a tentative dipping of toes into new waters. For others, a familiar harmony with the spotlight. For all, the audience was warm, welcoming and eager to support - a characteristic many said is the draw and allows for experimentation.

"I'm never let down on Poetry Night," said Michael Brennan, who emcees and organizes many of the events. "Every month there's something that just blows me away."

Brennan came to Cottage Grove from Berkley, Calif. where he recalls poetry events being so popular that lines of people would be waiting to pay to get in. He was eager to see poetry excite Cottage Grove as well and, 11 years ago, began attending the local Poetry Night which at that time had already been well established.

The monthly event was started around 15 years ago by Kalapuya Books owner Hal Harzell, whose business also served as the first venue.

With a growth in popularity, it moved to the Axe and Fiddle for a time before settling in the Cottage Events Venue in October 2019.

When Still was given the option to adopt the event, she accepted enthusiastically.

Since then, the gatherings have continued even through the pandemic in the form of virtual meetings. Last month was the first return to in-person events.

Participants and audience members share affinity for Poetry Night for a variety of reasons.

As a relatively new poet, Pool said she tried slam poetry at Tsunami Books in Eugene, but she found the competitive nature of it all a bit intimidating.

"What I liked about this is that it's smaller," she said of the Cottage Grove event. "It seems more accessible."

In point of fact, Pool's reading on Tuesday night had a warm audience reception.

"It's very supportive," she said. "That I think is the most important thing."

For her part, Still also enjoys the acceptance of a variety of degrees of talent.

"We're all at different stages and we all have different personalities," she said. "Some are really comfortable up front, some are not ... So we're mentored by each other."

Linney Frank, who also performed on Tuesday, hopes events like Poetry Night can serve as a stepping stone for shy creatives.

"I've always been a closet poet," she said. "And I think there are a lot of closet poets out there."

Frank emphasized the importance of poetry in our society "and that we don't lose that art form. In a world and a culture that is increasingly abbreviated

and detached ... I think that people have always needed poetry and need it now more than ever."

Having a safe place to be vulnerable is a characteristic many are drawn to as well. Frank sees it as way of sharing and exchanging trust in community.

"When we get up and make fools of ourselves or risk that, then we let other people know that it's okay to be that vulnerable - to express that part of ourselves," she said.

Pool, too, appreciates that vulnerability is so intimately tied to trust in their relatively small group.

"I love that there's vulnerability to it," she said. "And I think it helps us cement our own voices."

Long-time participants recall that in the past, performances have stretched the definition of "poetry" with interpretive dance, short plays or even stand-up. Despite the breadth of artistic expressions, Frank still views poetry as thematic to the experience month to month.

"Everything has the heart of poetry in it and we learn from each person who gets up," she said.

Local poet Charles Mattoon was in attendance for Tuesday's gathering and finds Poetry Night deeply rewarding for the participants and community.

"A huge part of the poetry night for me, it's just the kind of community and it's that sense of sharing, mutual support and people being vulnerable and creative," he said. "You don't know what's going to



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Gloria Campuzano read a few literary selections to the audience on Tuesday, including a Spanish tongue twister and one of her own creation in English.

happen."

Mattoon regularly sets up at the Farmers Market as the "Poetry Peddler," writing poems on demand. As an experienced poet, he also appreciates the monthly gatherings for adding an auditory element to poetry.

"Writing poetry and reading poetry is a different experience," he noted, "but the roots of poetry, historically, are old oral traditions and that's something that we're helping bring out here."

Part of that experience is the relationship between audience and performer, Mattoon said, a relationship which demands a certain connectedness.

"And you've got to really listen and pay attention because it only comes by once," he said. "The luxury of the page is you can

just keep reading over and over."

For Mattoon, the gatherings also serve to increase the accessibility of poetry to the average person by countering the notion that poetry is academic, lofty or highly intellectual.

"You feel like you can experiment and try things here," he said. "It's not like a classic idea of the stuffy reading."

This accessibility puts into orbit what Brennan described as a constellation of talent around the gatherings.

"It's the pulse of our community," he said. "I really feel it here."

Poetry Night is every third Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Cottage Events Venue on Row River Road.

Call 541-942-6888 for more information.



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- Avoid climbing on wet equipment
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- Use both hands when climbing

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