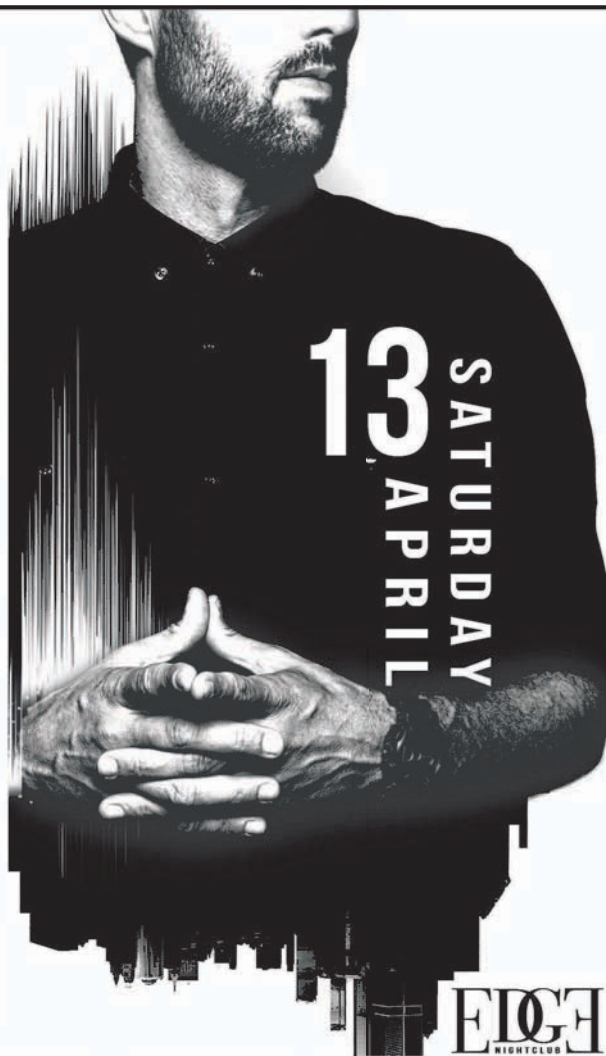


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ART OF THE STATE

BY LUKA STARMER



Spoken Views Collective meets the third Thursday of each month at the Holland Project.

PHOTO/LUKA STARMER

Have words

Poetry slams

National Poetry Month is blooming, but the poetry scene in Reno is perennial—you just have to seek it out.

The first place to turn is a poetry group called Spoken Views Collective. This growing group of poets and writers has provided a performance outlet since 2006. The group hosts poetry events at the Holland Project every third Thursday of the month.

“When people hear ‘poetry,’ they don’t really understand that spoken word is a hybrid of performance and poetry,” said Iian Watson, founder of the Spoken Views Collective. “You see hip-hop style. You see traditional. You see so many influences, and it represents who these poets are.”

Poems bounce across the spectrum of human emotion and experience, peppered with humor and somber truth. They tell stories. They’re sometimes bilingual.

Watson is a spoken word artist influenced by poets like Saul Williams and by the cadence of hip-hop. He’s also a third grade teacher at Rita Cannan Elementary School in Reno. He’s been organizing the collective since the beginning, hosting monthly meetings with the other members to coordinate events and manage fundraising.

“Reno is a great place to try something out,” said Watson. “If you have an idea, put it out there; see what happens.” He said there was no real established poetry scene here before the collective. He admits organizing the collective has been a labor of love, but the events at Holland Project have recently seen a swell in attendance.

Every event kicks off with an open mic where anyone can sign up to read

or perform. Lately, the second act of the night has been a featured poet from out of town. Watson said there’s a Facebook group for touring poets, and Spoken Views gets hit up for shows all the time. Later this month they’ll feature Wil Gibson from Humboldt County, California.

The third part of the night is the poetry slam. This is a standardized format where poets compete against one another head-to-head over three rounds. Judges are selected from the audience and score each performance. One poet is crowned champion at the end of every event.

In the past, Spoken Views Collective has built poetry slam teams, sending them to regional and national competitions. This year, the National Poetry Slam is on hiatus, but that doesn’t stop Reno poets from sharpening their skills.

SaMoura Horsley, Sylvia Stephens and Jenny Calzada are a few of Reno’s poetry slam competitors who began writing and performing when they were teens at Wooster High. Now they’re studying at the University of Nevada, Reno and have started their own poetry club called UNR Wolf Speaks. This is the club’s first year. They meet regularly, focusing on writing, group editing and spoken word performance. They want to build a poetry scene on campus that wasn’t there before.

“Everyone’s writing process is different,” said Horsley. “Some people write a poem a day, and some people it takes the entire semester to write a poem they’re proud of.”

Wolf Speaks has hosted events for Black History Month and regular open mic slams. Their next event celebrating national poetry month is April 18 at the Laughing Planet near campus. Some of their members cross over to perform Spoken Views open mics and slams, too. □

The Next *Spoken Views* event will take place at the Holland Project, 140 Vesta St., from 6 to 8 p.m. on April 17.