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AUSTIN TO HOST 300-PLUS COMPETITORS FROM NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE, FOR FIRST-EVER FIVE-DAY NATIONAL POETRY SLAM, AUGUST 7-11

(AUSTIN) – The National Poetry Slam, which started as a bardic grudge match between Chicago and San Francisco poets in 1990, will expand to a five-day festival for the first time in its 18-year history, when 75 teams of poets from North America and Europe converge on Austin, Texas for the 2007 edition of poetry slam’s flagship event, August 7-11.

The competition will involve more than 300 poets competing and reading at many of the venues that serve as home to performers during Austin’s famed SXSW Conference. This year’s NPS will draw audiences numbering in the thousands to the premier annual showcase for performance poetry. The event will culminate with the Individual Finals show on Friday, August 10, and the Team Finals show on Saturday, August 11; both events will be at Austin’s historic Paramount Theater, home to sold-out poetry competitions when Austin hosted the National Poetry Slam in 1998 and 2006. Tickets for both events, as well as passes for the entire week of competitions, readings, and late-night shows, will be available at gettix.net.

“Slam takes the best of traditional poetry, theatre, stand-up comedy, and hip hop and spits them out as an entirely new, unique experience,” said Mike Henry, Artistic Director for this year’s festival. “It’s a rare thing to see a gathering of artists of this caliber, and we’re proud to bring them to our home city for the second year in a row.”

NPS 2007: What to Expect

The National Poetry Slam pits teams of three to five members against one another in five-team “bouts.” Teams are formed through slam competitions in a number of North American and European cities following an autumn-to-spring schedule of open competitions. The teams then practice their poems throughout the summer in preparation for the event.

The three days of preliminary bouts, which will winnow the 75-team field to a semifinal lineup of 25 teams, will start on Tuesday, August 7 at five venues in downtown Austin and in the neighboring South Congress district. In addition to the competitions, Austin will host workshops and daytime reading events which are free and open to the public, featuring many of the competing poets in a series of themed readings which range from moving tributes to soulful declarations to irreverent and comedic send-ups.

More information about venues, tickets, competitors, and a schedule of events will be made available at the event website, www.nps2007.com, in the coming months.

A Brief History of Slam

Billed as the competitive art of performance poetry, slam was invented in Chicago in July 1986 by Marc Smith, a construction worker-turned-poet who included the slam as part of his performance poetry troupe's weekly show at the Green Mill Tavern, an uptown Chicago watering hole once frequented by Al Capone.

The slam, initially a King-of-the-Hill-styled gimmick involving two poets dueling against one another, quickly evolved into a competition involving all comers reading their poems and being scored by a panel of judges, selected from the audience, who rated the poems on an Olympic-style 0-10 scale.

The slam spread to San Francisco, Boston, New York, and Ann Arbor by the late '80s. Thanks to MTV's interest in spoken word in the early '90s, Lollapalooza's inclusion of a spoken word stage on its 1994 tour, the release of the documentary film *Slam Nation* in 1998, and the debut of the HBO original series, *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*, in the early '00s, slam has grown exponentially in its audience during its two decades as an art form.

Sometimes raucous entertainment and sometimes riveting confession, the slam movement has sustained and developed a format that has supplanted the open mic poetry reading as the prime live medium for 21st century poetry. Because of its cardinal rule of a three-minute time limit, the poets compete in a fast-paced show which combines the thrill of competition with polished, dynamic deliveries that ably showcase its ever-growing ranks of poets, spanning a diverse range of ages, ethnicities, backgrounds, and writing and performance styles.

The slam has not only found its way into popular culture, being referenced by television programs from *The George Lopez Show* to *The Simpsons*, but is also a major contributing factor in a recent resurgence of interest in poetry. The National Poetry Slam, which ran on a shoestring budget for much of its early history, is now regularly funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, by local and state government agencies, and by corporate sponsors.

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