

"SLAMMASTER"
MARC KELLY SMITH
WILL TURN YOU INTO A
SLAM POET!

MARC KELLY SMITH

WITH
JOE KRAYNAK



TAKE

THE

MIC

THE
ART OF

PERFORMANCE
POETRY,

SLAM,

AND
THE

SPOKEN
WORD





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INTRODUCTION

Most of us have suffered through poetry readings during which the poets were about as animated as roadkill. No facial expression. No gesture. No intonation. No sign of life whatsoever. Even the poet's skin seemed ashy, as if he had just stepped off the set of *Night of the Living Dead*. A zombie who threatened to kill us all—not by eating our flesh but by droning on and on in a deadening monotone until he had sucked bone dry all our will to listen and to experience the poetry he was lowering into a premature grave.

Please don't be one of these soul-sucking zombie poets. Reach deep inside, pull out your pulsing heart, and fling it on the stage. *Make* the audience listen. Grab it by the throat...figuratively speaking, of course. Use your voice, your eyes, your body, your heart, your soul, and your mind to fire to life the passion, sense, and subtleties of the poetic words you toiled over past midnight, affixing them to the page. Make faces, stomp, gesture, whisper, yell! Be the fool, the prophet, the lover, the king, or the kangaroo your poems demand you to be. Do whatever it takes to capture the crowd's attention, keep it entertained, and communicate your poetry through professional, impeccable performance.

That's what this book hopes to inspire you to do. In it I ask you to:

-
- Learn the fundamentals of communicating poetry onstage in a public forum.
 - Acquire tools for overcoming stage fright and eliminating bad performance habits.
 - Develop regimes of rehearsal and memorization.
 - Attune your psyche and motivation toward the goal of connecting authentically with an audience's heart and mind.
 - Grasp the ability to assess any performance situation and retool it into an environment that provides the best opportunity for success.
 - Apply principles of good writing to understanding what makes an effective performance text and how to interpret it onstage.
 - Transform your body, mind, voice, and spirit into a finely tuned instrument of communication.

As a reward for all the hard work it'll take to accomplish these feats, I've included in Chapters 11 to 14 most of what I know about the practical aspects of earning a modest living as a professional performance poet—something I've been able to do for more than two decades. (No small order for a poet.) So, when you get your “chops” tuned up (that's jazz lingo for a musician's readiness to play) come visit me at the Green Mill in Chicago and I'll boost you up onto the stage for your debut as a “virgin virgin” at the Uptown Poetry Slam.


How to Use This Book


Although I encourage you to read this book from cover to cover to tap its full potential, it's laid out to facilitate a "skip and dip" approach. Just about every chapter, section, and subsection can stand on its own, so you can pick up the book, flip to what you want, and instantly obtain a mini-lesson on a particular aspect of polishing your poetry-performance skills or transforming yourself into a poet-professional.

As a result, you may encounter a tiny bit of redundancy. However, I believe that the redundancy is worth the price of having a book that reads smoothly from cover to cover and provides you with a quick reference when you need a brief refresher course to sharpen your skills.

Companion Book

We invite you to check out our companion book on staging a slam—*Stage a Poetry Slam: How to Create, Run, and Attract Huge Audiences to Your Slams*.





A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

A few years ago, Sourcebooks MediaFusion was privileged to publish *The Spoken Word Revolution*, edited by Mark Eleveld and advised by Marc Kelly Smith (coauthor of the book you're holding). In the tradition of our book *Poetry Speaks*, which featured historic poets reading their own work, *Spoken Word* brought forth today's vibrant, living world of performed poetry.

While those works included audio CDs bound into the book, today we have the opportunity to bring the world to you online in all its kicking, evolving glory. So we invite you to join the revolution at PoetrySpeaks.com, an emerging home for this vital art form.

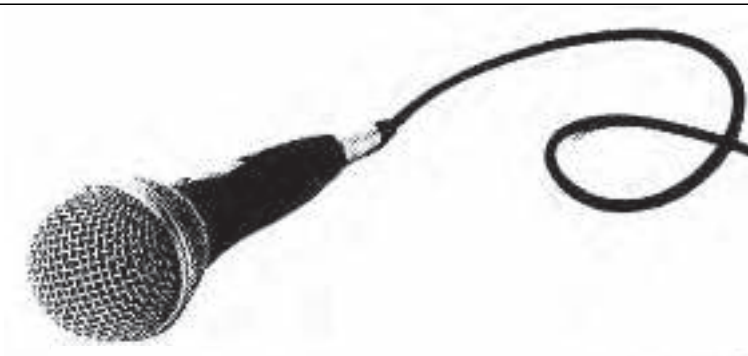
You'll find scores of samples, examples, and tracks you can use along with this book for inspiration. Some of the movement's best talent is represented there, plus you'll have the chance to join the community, post your own material, get feedback, maybe even inspire someone else. Come join the revolution and see for yourself at:

www.PoetrySpeaks.com



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the slammers around the world for their contributions to this book and to the slam community in general. Special thanks to Mark Eleveld, editor of the *Spoken Revolution* books, and to the folks at Sourcebooks who made this project possible.



NEXT UP!

The Big Definition of Slam Poetry

What Slam Is and Isn't
Poetry and Performance
Where Art Thou, Slam?
Finally...Attention and Respect
Staged Bouts for Audience Appeal

Sowing the Seeds of Slam

"The Points Are Not the Point"
Who's the Best and Who Cares?
Striving for the Best of Both Worlds
Performance Poet as Audience Servant

New Life for a Dying Art

If you remember anything, remember...

sample content of Take the Mic: The Art of Performance Poetry, Slam, and the Spoken Word (A Poetry Speaks Experience)

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- [click The Bishop's Man \(The Cape Breton Trilogy, Book 2\)](#)
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