

Battle of the voices

Dayton's spoken word collective Metaphorically Speaking turns three

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



Metaphorically Speaking's 3rd Anniversary event Battle of the Sexes will take place on April 2, at the Victoria Theatre; photo: Lamar Paclay, Shutter Eye Photo

If you've ever been privy to the intensity of a spoken word poetry slam, you know the spine-tingling effect that the power of well-chosen words can have on your very being. Metaphorically Speaking does just that. A collective of local artists, creatives and advocates for the arts, Metaphorically Speaking hosts events that entertain, educate and challenge their audience.

"It's pretty radical to just have people get on stage and speak their minds," says Jay Martinez, Metaphorically Speaking co-founder.

Metaphorically Speaking's third anniversary show, Battle of the Sexes, will take place Saturday, April 2, at Victoria Theatre. It will showcase all types of artists, from musicians to dancers to comedians. And of course, the evening will be headlined by poetry.

Fans and followers of Metaphorically Speaking can expect a few differences between the monthly slams at Therapy and this anniversary production at the Victoria. Ambiance will play a big part in those differences. "Even though it's three times as many people [as at Therapy], it's almost more intimate," explains fellow co-founder Tony Nalls, also known as Ace Metaphor. "So you feel like it's just one-on-one with you and that artist on stage. ... At Therapy, it's more of a showcase. It's a social place. There's chatter. It's more of the spectacle of it. Where, at the Victoria Theatre, they can be more fed, slowly. You can take your time. Digest it. You can get 700 people listening. You can hear that audible 'Mmm' when you fed them something good."

Ultimately, it's about the truth, Nalls says. "It's about being honest, but being clever with it. Being funny, being entertaining. Being enlightened. Intelligent artistry.

"It's about moments, though," he continues. "I don't think a listener comes to be able to fully grasp and digest every single thing. It's about how that word impacted that person at the very second it hit them, because somebody may forget the poem, but they'll never forget the feeling you

gave them when they listened to the poem."

Nalls emphasizes that while you want the audience to hear your words, you really want them to feel how you felt. "That's what we focus on as creatives

and as artists," Nalls says. "How do we inspire? How do we evoke emotion? Good or bad, happy or sad. How do we do that? Because that's the essence of entertainment."

Metaphorically Speaking has come a long way from their humble beginnings. "The first couple times was modest, a modest turnout," Nalls smiles, recalling the early days of Metaphorically Speaking's slams at Therapy. "But through hard work and dedication, consistency ... we were able to get 700 people into the Victoria Theatre on January 23 [for Love, Sex, and Poetry], and we're going to try to fill it up on April 2. The journey has been long, but it's just been one foot in front of the next."

Metaphorically Speaking is not just a small, exclusive group of artists. It's a collective, and as such has the ability to get as many people as possible from the community involved, in any capacity that they're able. "When you have the collective, it's just more arms reaching out to so many more people," Martinez explains.

Metaphorically Speaking is about more than performances. It's about outreach as well. Through the Human Relations Council's Community Initiative to Reduce Gun Violence, Metaphorically Speaking partnered with Dayton Public Schools to bring workshops to interested students and instruct them on the art of spoken word poetry. The workshops encourage students to be more powerful in their speaking, and the skills they develop enhance their ability to use

their words instead of other means to get their point across. Breaking down the basics of stage performance, students receive instruction on annunciation, stage presence and how to break the nervousness. At the end of the workshop, they hold a mock slam where the students are judged and receive notes afterward. "We give them a feel of what it's like to be on that stage," Martinez says. "You won't believe the level some of these kids are at. We would never know that they have these platforms. If we don't create them, they'll never be there."

Martinez says that he'll have students ask him where they can go to participate in youth poetry slams, and he has to tell them that there isn't a place for them. Yet. But they're going to make one. Referencing Louder Than a Bomb and Brave New Voices, Martinez says, "Man, we can have that here. So the next move is a big Midwest youth slam poetry competition. That's what this is for. It's the training grounds for that." So what barriers are there to overcome in making that happen? "At the end of the day, like everything else, funding."

Jovan Webster, a motivational speaker and part of the collective, has faith that Metaphorically Speaking's realm of expansion will know no bounds, surpassing even the cross-over success that has been Broadway's *Hamilton*. "I think that they can actually create something that is more revolutionary in thought and style than Broadway. I

think you can't contain their kind of creativity. It's something that stands alone. ... They're able to push envelopes and go right to the edge and beyond with their style, and that's what sets them apart."

Metaphorically Speaking's 3rd Anniversary full-stage production *Battle of the Sexes* will take place from 8-11 p.m. on Saturday, April 2, at the Victoria Theatre, 138 N. Main St. in Dayton. This show is rated mature for language and adult content. Tickets range from \$30 to \$80 and may be purchased at ticketcenterstage.com. You can also catch them the final Friday of every month at Therapy Cafe, 452 E. Third St. in Dayton. To stay current with Metaphorically Speaking, check out their Facebook page at facebook.com/metaphoricallyspeakingdayton.

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