



POETRY

Collingwood Arts Center to host Aug. 6 poetry event

Written by Jason Mack | | jmack@toledofreepress.com

Poets from across the nation are gathering in Toledo for a festival hosted by a pair of literary magazines. *Zygote in My Coffee* and *Red Fez* are teaming to host “Zygote in My Fez” at the Collingwood Arts Center on Aug. 6. The event is co-sponsored by *Toledo Free Press Star*.

“It will be one of the bigger things that has come to Toledo, especially in terms of underground poetry,” said John Dorsey, program director for the Collingwood Arts Center. “I’m expecting about 200 people here, maybe more. They’ll be coming from all over the country. Most of the audience we get will be people who are really hardcore about it, but I’m hoping we get some new people that have never seen something like this.”

Red Fez is an online publication featuring poetry, fiction, nonfiction, illustrations and other works. Leopold McGinnis, who founded Red Fez Publications in 2002, will be traveling from Canada to attend the festival. Editor in Chief Michele McDannold lives in Chicago and runs the day-to-day operations for the monthly online magazine, and Toledo resident Michael Grover is the head poetry editor.

Zygote in My Coffee was founded in December 2003 by Brian Fugett while he was a photographer in San Jose, Calif. It started out focused on poetry and has grown to include fiction, comic strips and anything underground. It used to follow a weekly format but it is now published twice a year online.

“The idea for the event started back on Feb. 5,” Fugett said. “I was at a big poetry reading. I started having IM conversations with Michele McDannold. Just kind of joking, we said we should start our own poetry reading, like an annual event, later in the summer. We decided to call it ‘Zygote in My Fez.’ It started off as a fun little idea like that, and it blossomed into this big thing in Toledo now. We didn’t think it was going to happen.”

Part of getting the festival off the ground was finding a location. Fugett didn’t know where to host the event until Dorsey offered his venue for the festival.

“We were originally going to have it in Dayton, but there isn’t a good venue for it,” Fugett said. “John Dorsey offered the Toledo area and we went for it. I’d prefer to have it in Northern Ohio anyway. The Toledo and Cleveland areas are prime for poetry and the arts. The ball has been rolling ever since we picked the venue up there.”

Dorsey, a *Toledo Free Press Star* contributor, thinks the theater in the Collingwood Arts Center is the perfect venue for the festival.

“The acoustics are great,” Dorsey said. “It’s large, but it’s still intimate at the same time. It isn’t too big. You aren’t playing to a baseball stadium. I’ve been in theaters that size before. Some of these people haven’t read publicly before, even though they’ve been published in the magazines. It’s kind of good to have a smaller space because you don’t want it to be too intimidating for them.”

Dorsey is performing at the event alongside several local poets, but he is excited to see performances from poets across the country.

“What Toledo doesn’t have is poets coming in from all over the place,” he said. “Typically that doesn’t happen here. You can’t make that much money doing it. If you come in, you’re going to end up losing money paying for travel. Michael

Grover and I have been doing a reading series here for a couple of years. On a monthly basis, we bring in people from all over the place. It's nothing new to us for this to happen, but this is the largest scale we've done here."

One poet Dorsey is particularly looking forward to seeing is Dan Smith from Cleveland.

"He will have a band with him called the Cleveland Trio, although it might be a quartet now since they added a saxophone," Dorsey said. "He's great. His topics are about being a working-class guy in Cleveland and the history of poetry there. The history of poetry in Cleveland is wild. There are venues where a band can't get two people but a poet can get hundreds, and a band will get booed off the stage. That would never happen here, but it would be nice. He is part of the Rust Belt. He's definitely an Ohio guy."

Dorsey and other fans looking forward to Smith won't have to worry about anything keeping him from his time slot.

"Once he was supposed to read somewhere, but he had a massive heart attack the day before," Dorsey said. "He still showed up the next day. They let him out of the hospital and he went straight over there. The guy is hardcore."

The event will feature readings by 25 poets from across the country and Canada, ranging from Paul Corman-Roberts in Oakland, Calif., to Lester Allen in Ithaca, N.Y.



John Dorsey, left, and Michael Grover

Corman-Roberts is looking forward to meeting many of his co-workers face-to-face for the first time.

"The Internet is an amazing thing," he said. "You get to know people you don't have regular contact with. Some of these folks I've been working with for years and have never met them in person. I'm incredibly excited."

"It's a great idea, not just for Toledo but for poetry in the surrounding areas in general," Toledo poet Craig Firsdon said. "Having great poets from across the United States come here is something you don't see too much. I'm looking forward to it. It's great for the art community. I don't know of any other place that has done anything like this in recent memory."

Fugett will emcee the festival and doesn't plan to perform, but he said you never know what to expect at events like this.

"If worse comes to worst and I get tipsy enough, I might read something," he said. "Maybe I'll read my own poetry in the voice of John Dorsey or Michael Grover. I'd definitely have to be inebriated for that."

If that happens, it will fall right in line with Grover's expectations for the event.

"Somebody is going to do something really crazy," Grover said. "I guarantee it."

Dorsey said he agrees with Grover. He warned anyone attending to "expect a circus." He believes most of the audience will be hardcore poets, but he encourages newcomers to check out the festival, even if only briefly.

"If you want to come in for 20 minutes or come in for the whole thing, that's fine by us," he said. "We'd rather someone

come in for a brief period than not at all.”

The festival will run from 4 to 10 p.m. with four poets performing every hour. Red Fez will sell copies of its first ever print edition, Red Reader No. 1, at the festival. Fugett will be at the festival handing out copies of the latest edition of *Zygote in My Fez*.

Following the festival is a public afterparty hosted by *Toledo Free Press Star* at the Blarney Bullpen featuring an open mic. The afterparty runs from 10 p.m. to close.

“We’re going to have an open mic for anybody who wanted to be a part of this but couldn’t get on the main list,” Dorsey said. “We had so many people that wanted to be a part of this. There were people that got angry because they couldn’t do it. This list filled up within a week of posting we were doing it.”

The Collingwood Arts Center is located at 2413 Collingwood Blvd. Blarney Bullpen is located at 601 Monroe St.

Visit www.RedFez.net/ZyFez for a full list of poets performing. The festival is free and open to the public.

Tags: [Blarney Bullpen](#), [Brian Fugett](#), [Collingwood Arts Center](#), [Craig Firsdon](#), [Dan Smith](#), [John Dorsey](#), [Leopold McGiniins](#), [Lester Allen](#), [Michael Grover](#), [Michele McDannold](#), [Paul Corman-Roberts](#), [Red Fez](#), [Toledo Free Press Star](#), [Zygote in My Coffee](#), [Zygote in My Fez](#)

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Mix of poets converges to share works at area festival

Arts center event showcases creativity and collaboration

BY SARA FELSENSTEIN
BLADE STAFF WRITER



Zack Moll of Norwalk is spotlighted as he reads one of his poems during Toledo's largest poetry event in decades.

THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON

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Twenty-two poets gathered Saturday at the Collingwood Arts Center for the largest poetry event in Toledo since the 1970s, arts center program director John Dorsey said.

The festival featured poets from around the country and Canada who may know one another through online publications and social networks but never have met face to face until now.

"The amazing thing is, a lot of us just know each other from online," said Brian Fugett, founder of literary magazine *Zygoté in my Coffee*. "Now is the first time we've converged ... it's almost surreal."

The festival, called "Zygoté in my Fez," was hosted by online literary magazines *Zygoté in my Coffee* and *Red Fez*.

The event ran from 4 to 10 p.m., with four poets reading each hour. Topics included politics, Alzheimer's disease, Bohemian life, marriage, and divorce. While the atmosphere in the theater was cheerful and enthusiastic, many of the poems took on a much darker tone.

PHOTO GALLERY: [Click here to see more photos from Zygoté in my Fez poetry festival](#)

Mr. Fugett said there's a "really good scene" of poets in northern Ohio, particularly in the Cleveland and Toledo areas.

"All of these events are like a big family reunion," Mr. Dorsey said.

Steve Goldberg, an engineer from Cleveland who read at the festival, said his poems focus on dealing with middle age and a body that "can't do the things it used to."

He said the festival was a great opportunity to reunite with poets he hadn't seen in a number of years.

But Mr. Goldberg wasn't always a poet. On a trip home from Italy about 10 years ago, he read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in one sitting, and was immediately attracted to the art of free verse.

He participated in his first reading in Cleveland eight years ago and has attended them ever since.

Mr. Goldberg said balancing his analytical engineering mindset with the creativity necessary to write poetry is a struggle.

"I grab the Muse when I can," he said.

Holland resident Craig Firsdon, who has juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and uses a wheelchair, said writing poetry has been a form of therapy over the years.

"It's one of those things, I don't know where I would be without it," he said.

"One of my big beliefs is that poetry can help you with so much."

Mr. Firsdon said he is mainly known as an "angry" poet, writing extensively on political and social issues.

Cleveland poet Dan Smith describes his work as "surreal urban lyric." Most of his poetry is centered on Cleveland, particularly the decline of industry in the area. He said his poems also take a strong political edge.

Mr. Smith performed as part of the "Deep Cleveland Trio," which included himself, his son Morgan Ellington on bass, and Miles

Budimir on percussion. Mr. Ellington and Mr. Budimir played expressively as Mr. Smith read his poetry.

Michael Grover, Toledo resident and poetry editor of the Red Fez, said reading a poem out loud is completely different from reading it on paper.

“The performance of a poem is really important,” he said.

The idea for “Zygote in my Fez” came about in February after Mr. Fugett attended a 150-hour long poetry event in Elyria called “Snoetry.”

He jokingly sent an instant message to Red Fez editor-in-chief Michele McDannold, suggesting that the two magazines combine forces and create a poetry event of their own.

They never expected it to actually pan out.

“At first we didn’t really think it was going to happen,” he said. “[But] the joke blossomed.”

The whole reading list was determined in four days, Mr. Dorsey said.

“Easily, we had to turn away 30 people.”

Originally, Mr. Fugett and Ms. McDannold were looking to schedule the festival in Dayton but couldn’t find the appropriate venue.

That’s when Mr. Grover asked Mr. Dorsey if the festival could be held at the arts center.

“We’re real happy to bring it to Toledo,” Mr. Dorsey said.

He said a poetry reading of such scale in Toledo hasn’t happened for “probably three decades.

Red Fez was founded in 2002 and publishes a range of creative work including poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and artwork.

Zygote in my Coffee is a poetry-focused literary magazine that is published twice a year online.

Mr. Fugett said he hopes to make “Zygote in my Fez” an annual event at the Collingwood Arts Center.

“It’s amazing, it really is — getting to meet all these people live,” he said. “That’s the best part.”

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GLASS CITY MUSE

Dorsey: Zygote on the road

Written by John Dorsey | | news@toledofreepress.com

What began right here in Toledo has blown up into an underground cultural phenomenon. You may remember that just last August, *Toledo Free Press* sponsored the Zygote in My Fez Poetry Festival, an event that brought together many published poets from across the country at the Collingwood Arts Center's Lois M. Nelson Theatre.

This time around, the organizers are doing something a little different by taking the festival on the road to a number of cities across the country. All of these events will be weekend-long instead of the all-day marathon we had in Toledo. For those unfamiliar with the festival, the festivities are organized by the publishers of various underground magazines, including Zygote in My Coffee, www.zygoteinmycoffee.com, and Red Fez, www.redfez.net. This year will also feature contributions from Full of Crow, www.fullofcrow.com.

Things will start in Oakland, Calif., from July 5 -8, at the New Parish, located at 579 18th St. (at San Pablo). Scheduled readers include Lynn Alexander, Leah Angstman, Iris Berry, MK Chavez, Paul Corman-Roberts, Cathleen Daly, Brian Fugett, Bill Gainer, Jesus Angel Garcia, Debbie Kirk, Frankie Metro, Tim Murray, Jason Neese, A. Razor, Frank Reardon, Luis Rivas, David Smith, John Swain, William Taylor Jr., Lindsey Thomas, Three Times Bad, Zarina Zabriskey and Misti Rainwater-Lites. There will also be an open mic.

The Albuquerque, N.M., event is set to kick off on Nov. 2. There will be a reading the following day from 6-9 p.m. at the Blackbird Buvette featuring William Seward Bonnie, Corman-Roberts, Fugett, Gainer, Jack Henry, Anne McMillen, Rainwater-Lites, Doc Sigerson, Thomas and Zabriskey. The venue is located at 509 Central NW in downtown Albuquerque.

The Springfield, Ill., reading will take us into 2013. The readings are set for April 12-13. No other details are available at this time, but I will of course keep you posted as we get closer.

One of the primary reasons all of these artists are coming together now is because of the community togetherness they found in Toledo. This is something we can really be proud of.

Now, before you say that these events are too far to travel to, remember this: Many of these same poets came to our city, on their own dime, and read their hearts out. What are we saying about Toledo if we don't go out into the world with the same level of commitment? I myself plan to put my money where my

mouth is and travel to at least

one of these events. Do you want to sit there and read Jack Kerouac or do you want to experience the road that he was talking about? It's up to you.

Just how can you get involved? By going to Facebook and looking up the page for each of the separate events, you'll find them listed under Zyfez. All of the readings have open spots and I'm sure if you ask nicely any one these organizers would be happy to host another booming voice from the Glass City, so get in there!

Until next time ... keep your pencil sharp.

John Dorsey resides in Toledo's Old West End. His work is widely published and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

