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What do you get when you cross a poet with a camera?

By Shirley Henderson
Tribune Staff Writer

If music can soothe the soul, then poetry video—a mix of poetry often infused with music, pictures and graphics, must get the juices flowing again.

Creatively speaking, poetry video has caught on.

MTV now airs "The Spoken Word," mini-injections of poetry video with rhyme and rhythm. And in case you're not an avid MTV watcher and are still unsure of the concept, the fourth National Poetry Video Festival begins at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Hothouse, 1565 N. Milwaukee Ave., where, according to festival organizer and performance poet Jean C. Howard, some of the best poetry videos from around the country and Canada can be seen.

"Performance poets are very aggressive," says Howard. "They are not content with having their poetry published in little journals."

Howard describes a video that will be shown in the Poetry Video Slam on Wednesday by Ian Dankins-Moore, from Oakland, Calif., called "Desnat Series."

The eight-minute piece is an urban poem about living in a Third World Community in a First World country.

"It shows how people live in the streets. The footage shows a mother sending the children to the store for breakfast in the morning. She gives them a few dollars and they go down the street in their raggedy coats and drink orange pop and eat potato chips," explains Howard. The black-and-white footage shows a stark, harsh world of poverty, transvestites and prostitutes juxtaposed throughout the video.

Another entry in the poetry video slam, is a 30-second piece submitted by Jan McLaughlin from New York City called "Yoing," which shows a female torso, while the word "yoing" is chanted repeatedly in the background.

Breaking into the television industry, a renegade group of poets, Howard among them, have brought performance poetry to yet another venue, in effect merging two art forms into one.

When performance poets displayed their fiery brand of hair-raising, theatrical readings in slams like the Green Mill's on the city's North Side, they were viewed as unorthodox in their methods.

"Some of the academic poets considered performance poets to be crude," noted Howard, who says that performance poets don't usually publish their works.

While she and other performance poets are against artists who buy into the commercialization of their

Emmy-award winning TV producer Bob Holman has received recognition and awards for his work in videography.



When videographer Larry Winfield approached Warr and asked if she could shoot his video during one of the weekly poetry readings that Warr hosts, "I said sure," Warr recalled. "At the time, I knew of at least one other poet who had done poetry video."

A star was born. Warr feels that video poetry has become more accessible to poets who may not have had either the production skill or money to buy the equipment needed to make a video.

"It may have started with poets picking up the camera and reading into the mike, but now a new level have developed... a collaboration between poet and videographer," says Warr, who notes that there are no artistic parameters in the contest.

Videographer Kurt Heintz and New York poet and Emmy-award winning TV producer Bob Holman are two names that have received recognition and awards for their work.

An anthology of poetry videos from both this year's slam and last year's can be purchased for \$20 through the Guild Complex. Call 312-907-2189.

The festival continues at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday at Kino Eye Cinema at Chicago Public Kiosk, 105 W. Division



Jean C. Howard is the organizer for the fourth National Poetry Video Festival, to be held at Hothouse.

work (as in the case of one Gap jeans commercial that caused some conflict within the close-knit poetry community), she doesn't think that poetry video in its true form would be considered selling out.

"People get a lot of information from television. They watch it all the time, says Howard. "Video poetry is a national extension of that."

The idea has spread to Canada, where a stream of poetry videos can be seen on MuchMusic, Canada's answer to MTV. Video poetry can be seen with music clips by Smashing Pumpkins, Salt-N-Pepa and Moist, with Canadian, British and American poets reading their works.

Michael Warr, executive director of the Guild Complex, which sponsors the poetry video festival, sees a new level of creativity rising in video poetry.