

# Poetry

## STRAIGHT UP

SOUNDS GREAT? LESS FILLING? PERFORMANCE POETS ARE

REVIVING INTEREST IN AN ART FORM

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PHOTOS BY CRUCE BERKA

Does performance poetry widen the audience for written poetry? "I hope so," says Reginald Gibbons, poet and editor of the literary journal *TriQuarterly*. "The evidence of Tia Chucha Press is that it does. These people have produced books that are true books. They have carried their works onto the printed page with authority.

But the saloon poetry aesthetic is criticized even by some of those who have embraced performance poetry.

"Personally, I like to experience vivid imagery in poetry," says Jean Howard, who performs *and* publishes her poems. "That's what makes a poem come alive to someone, if they can grasp an image and reconfigure it and feel something, have their senses build this picture of them, rather than having it told to them.

"Often a performance poem is done in the first person or it is a narrative. It has to have straighter language to come across in a bar environment. I hear some very strong poems with strong political and emotional messages, but sometimes I miss the imagery. Some people rely on theatricality or subject matter—they push the hot buttons and get a response. There's an element of truth to the criticism that some poems would not succeed without somebody delivering them."

