

bowerbird intelligentman

bowerbird intelligentman is the hardest-working poet in show business.

he is one of the original performance poets, and still one of the most unique, and has -- ever since starting the art-form back in the stoned age of 1987 -- loudly proclaimed his goal of "exploding performance poetry globally".

and since then, he has worked ceaselessly and tirelessly to "make it happen".

bowerbird has always been a strong advocate of _performance_ over _print_. he rejected print as a medium suitable for his work right at the outset, and has spawned many attempts over the years to channel poems in that direction. bowerbird also pushed the envelope of the performance poetry art-form. one of the first such poets to work from memory as a matter of course -- the i.a. times called it, on 7/11/87, a "rhythmic high-energy recitation" -- he has always showed a keen awareness of the role of performance, while still writing the words one-at-a-time and crafting them carefully, performing in a visually distinctive style, he has always caught the eye of photographers, and pictures of him performing have been published far and wide, including the most well-known magazines in the world.

his sharp attention to "transforming the audio into video" also led him -- when he first started performing, in 1987 -- to a unique innovation: interpretation of the performance in a.s.l. (american sign language). mona jean cedar attended one of his early signed poetry performances, and has gone on over the subsequent 15 years to develop this hybrid, in her compelling conglomeration of dance, poetry, and sign language.

as a computer junkie, though, he was a pioneer in using desktop publishing to serve the poetry community. he published one of the first poetry calendars to inform people about upcoming events (even before there were many events). he then went on to assist in the debut of "out loud", a subsequent calendar that lasted for years. he also taught desktop publishing to g. murray thomas, who went on to publish "next..." magazine, the poetry newsletter that served as the definitive los angeles poetry calendar for the entire last decade.

bowerbird also assisted several print poetry small-press magazines. he did desktop publishing for "the moment", one of the first magazines that grew out of the open-mike movement that sprang up in the 1980s. he also created an electronic version of several issues of the magazine, long before the mass phenomenon of the world-wide-web was to emerge. he ran type out for other magazines (like "verve"), and for broad-sides too.

bowerbird has also done other aspects of computer/poetry interaction. he has created computerized slide-shows to back him in performance, written multimedia authoring-tools that poets can use to create shows, and even wrote a computerized scoring program for use at slam nationals. (the program can process all the scores from all of the bouts in minutes, and create a website to show them all in a half-hour after a single click.)

bowerbird has also written a wide variety of electronic-book programs, including one that does automatic imposition of chapbooks for printing. no more will a poet need to waste a whole tree in printouts to simply get all of the pages of their chapbook to come out in the proper order. along the way, bowerbird also invented the "bowerbook", a fun means of printing and binding a book one-at-a-time that mimics perfect binding.

in addition, bowerbird has experimented with the telephone for poetry. for a time, he owned 1-800-get-poem (now defunct). he was also the original sponsor of "cut-foot" (310.cut.foot) -- active to this very day -- the music/art/poetry hotline that his friend eric brown made famous.

but alas, bowerbird is also one of the world's worst poetry producers.

one of his first productions, created first in association with the poet pedro derycz (author of the infamous "my butt itches") and then independently, was "the let's go poetry and beer party", an open-mike poetry event that doubled as a party with free beer. the parties started in his apartment, and experience a short term of success, growing into a wide range of other venues, including the electronic-cafe, the art-house, and even a steel-art workshop. at several of these locations, video-phone connections were made to share poetry with venues like the nuyorican poets cafe in new york, the stone soup poetry collective in boston, and various other places. but even with free beer, he didn't draw a crowd large enough for him, so bowerbird eventually brought the series to a close.

he should have just quit right then and there, undoubtedly. after all, if you can't make an event work when you are giving away free beer, what hope will you ever have? but did he quit? no sir. he just plunged stupidly ahead...

another of his failures was "the 100 monkeys project", an attempt formulated in the late 1980s to gather 100 poets pooling \$100 each to create two videotapes, one a 2-hour tape (with a 1-minute poem from each poet), the second a 6-hour tape (with 3-minutes from each). that project stalled out with between a half-dozen and a dozen poets...

then, in 1993, he created the "one and one only" series, at barnsdall art park, using the gallery theater there, a 300-seater, a size that was unprecedented in the open-mike poetry scene (and would remain so until many years later), as with the "poetry and beer" show, even though many observers on the scene considered this as one of the premiere poetry events in the city to the time, it didn't draw a large-enough crowd for his taste, so bowerbird took it down. the "voice-change-on-every-poem" format later proved its worth in the slam.

along about 1993, poetry became a hit on m.t.v., with poets from the nuyorican, thereby vindicating bowerbird's longstanding prediction that this would happen. another prediction was validated when def jam took poetry and put it on h.b.o. but perhaps his most uncanny prediction was made in the late summer of 1996; after murray thomas had informed him that his dream of "100 monkeys" had manifested itself at the 1995 slam nationals, when 100+ poets participated, bowerbird predicted that this festival would garner "the top press available" by the year 2000. pushed to name what he meant by "the top press available", bowerbird responded "oh, 60 minutes." sure enough, on november 28, 1999, just 34 days before the calendar said 2000, 60 minutes aired a story on slam. people called him crazy every step of the way, but bowerbird was always right.

in 1996, in cooperation with mark schaefer -- his best friend for many years, in poetry and otherwise -- the entity known as "opposed thumb" was created, and it has proven to be the major exception to bowerbird's long road of failure.

but in spite of his clear legacy of failure, bowerbird's biggest failure was still to come, in 1998, with "nap jam" -- the north american poetry jam. intended as the "yin" counterpart to the "yang" of the national poetry slam, based on cooperation rather than competition, nap jam was conceived as a 4-night explosion of performance poetry, where every participant would get to perform in front of all of their peers, with everything videorecorded, with the whole event brought to life in "potluck" style, by its participants. sounds good, but he couldn't get enough poets to travel to las vegas for it, so after a couple years of failed jams, he finally took down that show too, after having lost tons and tons of money on the whole venture...

even though he obviously can't get anything to work well himself, bowerbird nonetheless seems to have absolutely no difficulty in butting in and telling other people what they should be doing. since he started doing performance poetry, he has been telling los angeles poetry producers that they should try to concentrate the community's resources rather than diluting its critical mass. absolutely no one ever listened to him. (or realize he was right.) for years he was a thorn in the national slam family, using their own listserve (which he had helped bring about and make a success) to tell them exactly what they were doing wrong. in explicit detail. with convincing argument after convincing argument. day after day. until they had no choice but to ban him from the listserve, thereby fully demonstrating the depth of their commitment to free speech. that wasn't the first listserve from which bowerbird has been banned. and it probably won't be the last either... some people just never learn.

even though (as is clearly evidenced here), once he actually gets going, it is extremely difficult to shut him up, it nonetheless remains true that bowerbird is very uncomfortable talking about himself in the third person -- which is why he rarely writes a bio -- so he will stop doing that now, and he will go have a sandwich because he is kind of hungry right now...

autumn (a haiku)

leaves falling from trees
fluttering so gracefully
back to mother earth

+ poetry
art
party

OPPOSED



thumb

MY LOVER SAYS HER FRIEND CAN T TAKE A HINT, BUT I DON T KNOW WHAT SHE S TALKING ABOUT

It's not so much
A matter of
Building a shell in which I'm stubbornly determined to stay
It's more a matter of
Building an elaborate
Communication network and maintaining it day after day

It's not so much
A question of
Being reticent or shy
It's more a question of
The expression of
Private thoughts to whoever happens to be passing me by

Honesty is the best piracy
When you don't know how you feel how can you be accused of lying
Where have you been all my life
-- come to think of it, where have I been

It's not where you're coming from
But who you're running from
That makes you go around in circles backward in a hurry

It's not where you're going to
But what you're going through
That makes the travel worth the journey

Honesty is the best comedy
If I didn't laugh I'd pout
Where have you been all my life
-- come to think of it, where are you now

Why live in the past
Re-opening wounds with a laugh
'Cos you consider each one to be some kind of good luck charm
Or are you going to marry
One of those dweebs who carry
A torch for you in the hope that that will keep you warm

I'd bare my soul but it's unbearable
So I turn people into numbers and numbers into variables
Put them on the stat sheet 'cos love is just a spectator's sport
Which you put through a Rorschach test
Just to get if off your chest
Because it was a little too close to your heart

Honest is the best apology
I'm sorry the future has yet to be unproven
Where were you on the night I fell in love
-- come to think of it, where haven't you been.

four fingers vote in favor,

one thumb is opposed.

two eyes say "yay",

"nay" negates one nose.

the ears don't want to hear it,

but the mouth just won't close.

jump into the thorns,

you'll come out smelling like a rose.

jump into the thorns, boy,

you'll come out smelling like a rose.

opposed thumb consists of mark schaefer and bowerbird intelligentman.

opposed thumb is called "opposed thumb" instead of "opposable thumb" because we want people to know that we are actually *in* a state of opposition -- to the self-centered greediness of many (most?) poets.

we are not just *capable* of the opposed state, we're actually *in* it.

the most visible manifestation of that selfishness in most poets is that, over the course of time, their support for the community dwindles, most notably in their attendance at events on the scene.

in their first year or two, many poets are out 8-to-10 times a month, but by their fourth or fifth year, many of 'em have simply disappeared.

one of our primary objectives, then, was to set up a schedule that would keep us out and active on a *regular* basis, consistently attending shows across the *spectrum* of the poetry scene, through the whole community.

so opposed thumb meets each month on the first monday, second tuesday, third wednesday, fourth thursday, and the fifth friday when there is one.

because we've taken things into our own hands, and only our own hands, opposed thumb has managed to transcend bowerbird's legacy of failure. in the 9 years of opposed thumb, we have a *perfect attendance record*. even when we have not been in the same physical location, we have both dedicated some portion of an opposed-thumb day in some poetic pursuit.

opposed thumb is also the heart and soul of the "pacific ocean team" -- "p.o.t." -- which has attended slam nationals nine years running, as a non-competing (i.e., cooperating) team. we are of the firm belief that cooperation is better than competition. the pacific ocean team has brought its own brand of zany fun to the west coast slam championship in big sur several times in the past 5 years, leaving our indelible stamp on that show.

the night before departing for our first slam nationals, in portland in 1996, mark bought a video-camera, to help our dream of "exploding poetry globally" come true, and we shot the tournament extensively. we donated our footage to paul devlin and subsequently received camera credits on his "slamination", the first documentary to cover the national poetry slam. then again in 1997, we shot the tournament, our footage was used in a show on connecticut t.v.

for a period of several years at the end of the 1990s, opposed thumb were "house poets" at the world-famous whisky nightclub on the sunset strip, performing a lighting-fast 90-second set before we introduced a band. those heavy-metal fans usually didn't have any idea what had hit them...

opposed thumb is the best audience for poetry on the whole i.a. out-loud scene.

MARK SCHAEFER is far too modest to write one of those bragging bios, so i (bowerbird, writing in the first-person now, which is much better), am here to tell you that there are tons of excellent los angeles poets who -- having become familiar with mark's work -- respect him very highly, as important as his respect from his peers is; there's another component: the audience at da poetry lounge, having witnessed mark for years now, is in love with his poems. (especially his titles, which are mini-poems.) mark has earned their respect with fresh, quality work, week after week. in sum, mark schaefer is one of the best poets that you've never heard of; he is, with little question, better than most poets you have heard of...