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TEENS DECLARE THEMSELVES PRESENT AT THE 19TH ANNUAL YOUTH SPEAKS TEEN POETRY SLAM

San Francisco, CA – The voice of the 21st century resounds in the Bay Area, as the 19th Annual Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam gets under way from February 12 to March 21, 2015. The month-long Olympic-style competition, taking place in San Francisco and Oakland, features close to 200 teen poets competing to make it into the final 14, who will advance to the Grand Slam Finals on March 21st at the Nourse Theater in San Francisco. One will win the honor of being named the 2015 Youth Speaks Grand Slam Champion, and a team of six will go on to represent the Bay Area at Youth Speaks' national Brave New Voices Festival, taking place in Atlanta in July.

Deeper than just poetry:

Open to any Bay Area youth 13 - 19 years old, the Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam is attended by upwards of 10,000 Bay Area audiences, who witness and cheer the poetry of the participating teens over the course of the month-long competition. The Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam offers something deeper for the youth involved: "The Slam provides a safe space for teenagers to connect in real time, sharing their words, thoughts, and ideas in a space that celebrates ingenuity and bravery," states Dr. Susie Lundy, Youths Speaks' Bay Area Program Director. The latter echoes Youth Speaks' mission – "...to create safe spaces that challenge young people to find, develop, publicly present, and apply their voices as creators of societal change." Most of the youth targeted come from Bay Area urban backgrounds where environments and societal pressures may not allow a budding poet to shine. Dr. Lundy adds that, "There seem to be fewer and fewer spaces where young people are seen with dignity and listened to as experts on their own lives."

A global movement:

During its 19-year history, Youth Speaks has created a movement that has spawned an entire network of similar organizations (85 total) throughout the country, and abroad. Last year, the team from South Africa took second place at the Brave New Voice Festival. Founder and Executive Director, James Kass, receives national and international enquiries from inspired organizers who want to start similar organizations in their community. “We are very proud to have created a movement where the voices of young people matter,” comments Kass. “And the Bay Area is the movement’s nexus. Which is why the slam still matters after all these years. New kids keep showing up.”

Bourgeoning Talent:

Building such a unique space for a diverse population of teens to come together has created an influential community that has fostered a cadre of names to watch out for in the artistic and intellectual community. Some notable names are poet, playwright and screenwriter, educator Chinaka Hodge. Writer, rapper, performer George Watsky, who won the local slam and Brave New Voices in 2006, and has exploded onto the musical scene with appearances on the Ellen Show and features in Billboard Magazine, and the New York Times Magazine. Hollis Wong-Wear, who won a Grammy for producing Maclemore’s Thrift Shop video and has gone on to launch her own musical career to much acclaim, and Daveed Diggs, who was just featured in the NY Times review of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s new play in NY are two other of the many examples of Youth Speaks Slam alumni who have gone on to bigger and better things in the arts.

Even last year’s Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam champ has seen bigger stages. 14-year old Caitlyn Clark was featured in a John Legend performance at the Hollywood Bowl, and will be a special feature at the Grand Slam event on March 21st. The array of talent and the energy created during the Youth Speaks Slam and the Brave New Voices Festival led to Russell Simmons knocking on Kass’ door to jointly create two seasons of original HBO programming dedicated to highlighting the power of these young poets.

During its 19 years of existence, Youth Speaks has also received high praise for its work from notable foundations dedicated to arts and education. Last year, the Wallace Foundation named Youth Speaks one of 8 exemplary arts and education organizations in the country. The Ford Foundation recognized Youth Speaks as one of the 10 most important arts organizations in the United States. “The accolades have been many but there is still much work to be done” recognizes Kass. “There are still many young people who are looking to both explore and share the power of their voices,” adds Kass. “Young people are paying the price for the failing educational system in this country, so we try to use the Youth Speaks spaces as a place to celebrate their creativity, their lives, and their minds.”

ATTENTION CALENDAR EDITORS

Celebrate the voice of 21st century America! Youth Speaks presents the 19th annual Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam

WHO

Youth Speaks

WHAT

19th Annual Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam

WHERE

Preliminaries and Semi-Finals: Various locations in SF and Oakland
Visit youthspeaks.org for complete schedule

WHEN

Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam: Feb. 12 to March 21, 2015
Grand Slam Finals: March 21, 7pm at The Nourse Theater
(275 Hayes Street, San Francisco, CA)

TICKETS

Preliminaries and Semi-Finals: Free
Grand Slam Finals: \$5 Youth under 24, \$10 Adults, \$50 VIP
Tickets and info: youthspeaks.org

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