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Poems everywhere

Madison embraces National Poetry Month

BY JOHN MCLAUGHLIN APRIL 5, 2018



MARTIN JENICH

Madison's poet laureate Oscar Mireles, left, believes poetry should be accessible to all.

Madison poet laureate **Oscar Mireles** is teaming up with the **Madison Public Library** to bring an unprecedented number of verse-related events to the city this month. The ambitious series will run through April as a way to honor National Poetry Month and to stoke the city's interest in poetry of all shapes and sizes.

With a host of free events, readings and discussions with local writers, the projects reflect Mireles's desire to spread the word that poetry isn't a stuffy academic exercise; it's for everyone.

"I think a lot of people see poetry as dead-people poetry — I pretty much saw it the same," says Mireles. "But with all of the different ways of expressing it — whether it's on the bus, the sidewalk, or at a City Council meeting — [poets] make it available and accessible."

The month's events kick off April 10 with a 7 p.m. reading and discussion with Mireles and other poets sponsored by the Greenbush Writers' Collective at the Neighborhood House Community Center.

The formal launch is at 7 p.m. on April 11 at the Madison Central Library, with readings from Mireles and former Madison poets laureate Fabu, Andrea Musher and Wendy Vardaman, along with poet laureate of Wisconsin Karla Huston.

On April 11, local poet Ali Muldrow will open a Madison Common Council meeting with the reading of her poem "Girl Got Game," a piece that addresses identity, personal strength and perseverance: "All she saw was / lovely / Though they called her / ugly / She was completely / unafraid."



"As a black woman, as a queer woman, it's very important for me that people have access to different narratives; to see that there are many ways to live," Muldrow says.

The Central library will also host the Word Power Grand Slam finals on April 12 at 1 p.m. The free event decides which poet will represent Madison for the 11th annual Brave New Voices Poetry Festival this summer in Houston, Texas.

One of Mireles' favorite projects is the Madison Metro Bus Lines Poetry Project, which will begin circulating this fall. Mireles chose 10 poems from Madison-area writers (including elementary school students, UW graduate candidates and senior citizens), who submitted works responding to this year's theme of "Home." The poems were illustrated by graphic design students at Edgewood College and will be posted on buses, transfer cards, and Ride Guides. The Central Library is celebrating the bus poets at a reception on April 13 from 6-8 p.m., followed by a screening of the film *Dead Poets Society*.

Additionally, as construction along Monroe Street picks up, Mireles and former Madison laureates will have their original poetry etched into the street's sidewalks, and these poems will later be turned into screen-printed posters. Mireles' poem "History of Monroe Street" pays homage to the neighborhood's lost businesses and institutions, including its old fire station, Mallatt's Pharmacy and Edgefest.

No matter where the words are found, Mireles believes in the power of poetry. "I believe now — with everything going on in the world — is a good time for more reflection, for more conversation."

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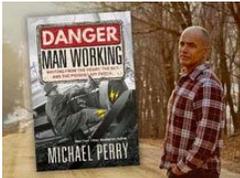
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