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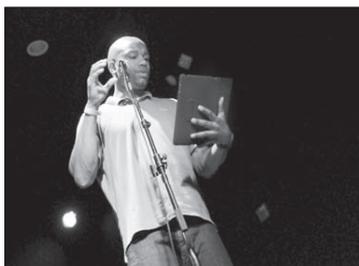
**WICKED**  
Kennedy Center  
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**FRAGMENTS IN TIME AND SPACE**  
Hirshhorn Museum  
June 23 to August 28  
Free

## The soul of Busboys

*Spoken word, shared heart*

Story by Joel Goldberg, Hatchet Staff Writer  
Photos by Gabriella Demczuk, Hatchet Staff Photographer



The weekly open mic night at U Street's Busboys and Poets restaurant is about far more than just words.

The night is about a community, the people, their names and faces.

"Treat it like a black Baptist church," May 31 open mic host Tokia "Twodeep" Carter said. "If you hear something you don't like, go on and tell the poet."

As the lights dimmed a few minutes after 9 p.m., Carter introduced the first poet, a man normally known as Face who donned the nickname "The Baddest Bitch" for the evening. His series of poems used explicit detail to first exalt women for their sexual exploits and then denounce them in his very next breath. Eyebrows were raised in the dimly lit room when, through garbled speech, Face ended his performance with the statement, "Life is a bitch with AIDS."

Derrick Weston Brown, a poet-in-residence at Busboys and Poets, and organizer of the monthly poetry series Nine on Ninth, said Face has been a constant amongst the U Street community for the last 15 to 20 years.

"You don't have a poetry venue unless Face has come in and shaken everybody up with his style. You know, make people uncomfortable, make people mad," Brown said. "People are like, 'Who the hell is he?'"

Another regular member of the poetic family, CeLillianne Green, paid tribute to Langston Hughes, the restaurant's patron saint, by reading Hughes' poem, "Ardella." Green, a practicing lawyer and mediator and a former instructor at Howard University, attended the first ever open mic night at Busboys in 2005. She published her first poem, which still hangs from the wall of the restaurant, in 2003, and in 2010 she released her first book, titled "That Word."

Since Busboys and Poets was founded in 2005, the restaurant has managed to attract numerous high profile guests. In 2005, two of

these guests included Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez, described by Brown as "forerunners" of the black arts movement in the 1960s. Baraka and Sanchez took the stage at one of the restaurant's first open mic events, setting precedents for future poets to follow.

In February, the Busboys and Poets bookstore welcomed filmmaker and author John Sayles, who has been nominated twice for an Academy Award for best original screenplay.

Brown became a part of the Busboys and Poets artistic family before the restaurant even

opened for business. After receiving a master's in fine arts in creative writing with a concentration in poetry from American University, Brown was introduced to Teaching for Change, a non-profit organization that was opening up its own bookstore at Busboys and Poets.

"Busboys and Poets was built with that in mind," Brown said, citing that the restaurant's name itself references poetry. The restaurant is distinct in that it has a built-in stage for poetry readings and live music, rather than the make-shift performance areas that other bars and restaurants use.

Brown believes the U Street corridor is a natural home for the first Busboys and Poets. He notes that U Street served as an incubator for many prominent artists of New York City's Harlem Renaissance, such as Countee Cullen and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Also, the name of the restaurant stems from Langston Hughes' work as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel, now owned by Marriott, in Woodley Park, about an eight-minute cab ride from Busboys' location at 14th and V streets.

The company has already expanded to Chinatown and Arlington and will soon open a new location in Hyattsville, Md.

Anas "Andy" Shallal, founder of Busboys and an Iraqi-American artist, activist and restaurateur, insisted on holding a weekly open mic since he opened the establishment's doors. In November 2005, Busboys started holding open mics on Tuesdays from 9 to 11 p.m. and, according to Brown, the event has "been going strong ever since."

"I feel like it's the heart and the soul of U Street," Hamilton said. ♦