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WEB EXCLUSIVES

West's poetry slam team set to be louder than a bomb at finals Poets to compete Sunday at Vic Theatre

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West's Poetry Slam Team (PST) will compete in the finals of the "Louder Than A Bomb" poetry slam competition hosted by Young Chicago Authors, which will take place at the Vic Theatre this Sunday, March 8, at 6 p.m.

According to PST sponsor Paul Bellwoar, poetry slams started as a trick to expose poetry to a broader audience by giving audience members score cards to rate various original poetry of artists. Bellwoar said that West's team has evolved to express its unique place in the world.

"[PST members see themselves] as people who like to get together and focus on [their] writing [while being] performance-based and keeping the content of the pieces securely anchored in poetics," Bellwoar said.

Members of PST include seniors Chris Olivares and Aris Theotokatos and juniors Ainee Fatima, class poet, PST president Noor Hasan, Chase Langston, Irfan Qurashi, Rocio Ruiz and

West 'bombers' blow away competition

West's Poetry Slam Team's members beat three other finalists to win their first ever Louder Than a Bomb championship Sunday night.

After the five months of practice that led to the feat, seniors Chris Olivares, and Aris Theotokatos and juniors Irfan Qurashi, Noor Hassan, Ainee Fatima, Hera Shakir, Chase Langston and Rocio Ruiz emerged triumphant in the statewide competition.

Sponsor Paul Bellwoar expressed satisfaction at the team's performance. "All the drama, anger, and ego-bruising conflicts recede behind the corona of the gilded shine of the microphone-topped trophy that now presides over one corner of my desk," he said

The group will move on to the national teen slam competition Brave New Voices, which will take place in Chicago this year July 14- 17.



West's Poetry Slam Team gathers at the "Louder Than A Bomb" competition, including (front row from left) Chris Olivares, Aris Theotokatos, Noor Hasan, Ainee Fatima, Hera Shakir, Irfan Qurashi, (back row from left) sponsor Paul Bellwoar and Chase Langston; Rocio Ruiz is not pictured. Photo courtesy Ainee Fatima

Hera Shakir.

The evolution from pen to performance is a long process. Hasan said, "I had two solo pieces of poetry and decided to perform only one. It takes about three months to complete a piece [of poetry], but even then a piece is never done. It is a long process of revising and practicing before it goes on to stage."

Fatima commented on the bond that is formed by all artists at most competitions. She said, "This one time, a poet had a line which compared his ego to a play on the name of poet Langston Hughes and said his ego was like 'Langston Huge.'" Fatima went on to say that one line can really elicit a large response and that it may feel as if one knows all the other hundreds of students in the room.

West beat out 56 other high schools and independent group entrants to become one of the four group teams to compete in the finals. Each group consists of four members each of whom performs a solo piece, and a collective, group piece. West's PST members that will compete in the group include Hasan, Qurashi, Shakir and Theotokatos.

The West team went to the WBEZ-Chicago Public Radio studio Mar. 6 during the school day to record parts of their poetry performance to be aired on www.chicagopublicradio.org for one year and featured July-August on the radio program in part to showcase the four final groups and six final individuals.

In addition to West's PST members making the group finals, Olivares entered independently and beat over 400 other entrants

to be placed in the top six individual finals. Olivares said that poetry is an important outlet for his creativity and that he has grown on the team as a writer and performer.

Bellwoar profiled the team.

"This group of writers takes [PST] more seriously and is a lot more focused on creating the art that is in the poems; [they] put the poetry back in poetry slam," he said.

The Vic Theatre is located at 3145 N. Sheffield in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood.