

October 22, 2008

Music poetry to the ears

Song natural progression for king of spoken word

By **ALLAN WIGNEY**

Greg Frankson apologizes for arriving 10 minutes late for a scheduled meeting at a Dalhousie St. coffee shop.

He needn't. The co-founder of the city's seminal Capital Slam series and four-time representative at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word maintains a schedule that finds him routinely racing the clock.

The previous evening, he was on hand at Umi Cafe for Bill Brown's 1-2-3 Slam. In a few hours, he will be back at the Cafe, presiding over a weekly open-mic poetry event.

He has devoted much of this day to organizing school visits throughout Ontario on behalf of his recently formed Cytopoetics arts-education service. This week's activities have included work on behalf of raising awareness of mental-health issues. And somewhere in the midst of a typically hectic next few days, Frankson will find time to prepare for the "official" debut of his latest project, Instant Release.

Reminded of his itinerary, the poet smiles.

"I don't sleep very much," he says with a laugh.

PERFECT MATCH

That is not likely to change in the immediate future -- for Frankson, in addition to his tireless efforts to spread the word about poetry and to generate awareness of mental-health issues, is about to combine the power of the word with music.

This week, we will have two opportunities to catch Frankson fronting Instant Release, a soulful combo dedicated to presenting the message in a new medium.

"It's a natural shift, spoken word into music," Frankson suggests. "All poetry is lyrical and musical in some way. The eloquence of those words comes through much stronger with that musicality added into it.

"The hits and the punches from the music that accentuate certain messages we're really trying to get across just allow the poetry to be taken to a whole other level.

"And it differentiates itself from other music that's out there because it is unabashedly socially conscious and it's trying to put out a message of positivity, of change, of action to people who I think are really ready for that type of message.

TIME HAS ARRIVED

"Music has been filled with banality. I think a lot of people have come to the conclusion that much of the modern music out there right now isn't all that relevant, isn't saying anything. This music is all about saying something. And I think people are ready for this type of a band."

You have to give Frankson credit for being an optimist. But then, when he settled here seven years ago after completing studies at Queen's University and a stint in Montreal, the future Ritallin could hardly have expected to make a dent nationally by practising spoken-word poetry in Ottawa.

So if Frankson and his band -- Brad Dubinsky (djembe), Richard Comeau (bass), Charlie Bellemare (guitar) and Denis Kashi (vocals, percussion) -- insist people are ready for Instant Release, one is tempted to accord them the benefit of the doubt.

"People don't want change in the traditional ways," Frankson clarifies. "What they want is to change the ways in which change can be achieved. And because we are espousing a different way, a different point of view -- and we're not afraid to say those things people have been longing for somebody to say and to have the courage and ability to say those things -- I really think we might be on to something. I am hopeful that we are on to something."

Musically, that something draws from a variety of roots-music influences, notably Caribbean, African and vintage R&B grooves. Frankson's is not the group's only voice, but his poetry is central to the band's message.

"I see Instant Release as the way to reflect both my evolution as an artist and the type of music I've wanted to create," Frankson says of his group's goal. "Instant Release speaks to real-life situations and political concerns that can more readily be expressed through that fusion of poetry and music.

"My poetry has always been musical. Now it's going to be put to a soundtrack."

MORE MUSIC MORE MUSIC ... Rockin' country courtesy of Shuyler Jansen and Luther Wright will be in order at the Elmdale House Tavern tomorrow ... the Rainbow's annual R&B Festival is set for Friday and Saturday ... Saturday, the NAC's Fourth Stage will host Ana Miura's Babes for Breasts benefit ... Matthew Barber and The Spades join forces at Zaphod's on Monday ... And Tuesday at 221 Rideau St., Swedish death metal heroes Dismember hold court at Mavericks while upstairs at Cafe Dekcuf Calgary's considerably quieter Azeda Booth serenade patrons.

SCENE SETTER

Instant Release at the Oneness Poetry Showcase

- Where: East African Restaurant, 376 Rideau St.

- When: Today, 7 p.m., \$7

Instant Release with The Idlers and The Discounts

- Where: The New Bayou, 1077 Bank St.

- When: Saturday, 9 p.m., \$8