

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## *SlamNation* Short Synopsis

*SlamNation* is an exciting look at the latest in literary blood sport: Slam Poetry. This nonfiction narrative illuminates the competitive spoken word movement as it fire-spreads across America. New York City's Slam Team journeys to Portland, Oregon to compete in the National Poetry Slam, engaging in battle poetic with 120 performance poets on 27 city teams for 4 days of incongruous elimination bouts. Along the way they encounter Machiavellian strategizing, personal animosities, fulfilling triumphs and some truly electrifying language.

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## the Sport of Spoken Word

*a film by  
Paul Devlin*

Emmy award-winner Paul Devlin (NBC & CBS Olympics, ESPN2's *Extreme Games 101*) gives you a ringside seat at the most compelling verbal slugfest of the century. *SlamNation* chronicles The National Poetry Slam - the Olympics of verse, in which spoken word artists (the adrenaline junkies of the literary world) compete fiercely in battle poetic.

*SlamNation* is a feature-length nonfiction narrative that takes you on a trip through this phenomenon, following New York City's novice team on its journey to join over 120 spoken word artists on 27 city teams at the National Poetry Slam in Portland, Oregon. Here, *SlamNation* discovers not only the raw energy and sheer talent of some of the greatest performance poets in the country, but a good old fashioned tale of heroes and villains amidst the dramatic tension of fiery competition.

From the inevitable rivalries, highly charged controversies, and unusual characters emerge some classic struggles such as art versus ego, and self-expression versus self-advancement. The stakes are unexpectedly high: audience adulation and thunderous applause that few poets will ever experience.

Let the poetry begin!

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## Some Background on Slam Poetry

“...But is it really poetry?”

That question has been asked ever since Chicago poet Marc Smith started Slam Poetry in 1986. As this issue continues to be debated for years to come, the best answer for now may be “Who cares?!” The Slam is an exciting, outrageous, energetic phenomenon that is spreading wildly, and may indeed be one of the most important grassroots arts movements in America today.

In a Poetry Slam, judges, randomly chosen from the audience, score poets on a scale of one to ten—the poet with the highest score at the end of the evening wins. The audience participation and the democratic nature of the event (often signing up is all that is required to perform at a local venue) have helped the Slam catch on across the country.

In many cities and regions, local competitions are used to choose a four-poet team. Then each year since 1989, the Slam Community of nearly 200 poets converges upon a different city to compete in the granddaddy of them all: the National Poetry Slam. Whether competing on teams or as individuals, all slammers must follow these rules:

All work must be original to the poet.

No props, costumes, or background music.

There is a three-minute time limit for all performances.

The number of Slams held regularly has become impossible to count as Slam Poetry spreads from American cities to small towns and on to other countries. Marc Smith could never have imagined that his invitation to the crowd to participate in the poetry through judging would create unprecedented audience opportunities for poets. It seems as if everywhere, people are packing cafés & clubs to catch spoken word artists engage in several rounds of breathless verbal competition.

And in the process, it is turning on a whole new generation to the power and the beauty of words.

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## Cast of *SlamNation*

Of the many poets appearing in *SlamNation*, the following are featured most prominently:

### **Saul Williams - Team New York City**

Saul is also the star of *Slam* - winner of the Grand Jury award at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival, and the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

### **Jessica Care Moore - Team New York City**

As a spoken word artist, Jessica won the Apollo Amateur Night five consecutive times and has appeared on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times*. As a publisher, she recently established Moore Black Press.

### **Beau Sia - Team New York City**

A student in the screenwriting program at New York University, Beau also appears in *Slam*.

### **mums the Schemer - Team New York City**

A hip hop as well as spoken word artist, mums has made regular appearances on the HBO dramatic series *Oz*.

### **Taylor Mali - Team Providence**

Taylor is a school teacher in New York City. In 1997 he led the first corporately sponsored Slam Team - Team Mouth Almighty Records (a division of Mercury Records) to victory at the National Poetry Slam in Middletown, Connecticut.

### **Daniel Ferri - Team Berwyn, Illinois**

Dan is a school teacher in Illinois.

### **Marc Smith - SlamMaster, Chicago, Illinois**

Marc, a former construction worker, is "the Father of the Slam," which he began in 1986 at the Green Mill Jazz Club in Chicago.

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## Partial Credit List, *SlamNation*

Paul Devlin	-	Director / Producer / Editor / Camera
Tom Poole	-	Co-Producer / Camera
Michael Shaw	-	Co-Producer
John Anderson	-	Director of Photography / Camera
John Kayne	-	Audio Editing / Sonic Restoration
Chris Parker	-	Music Supervisor / Original Music
Maxime Giordani	-	Assistant Editor
Plazm	-	Graphic Design

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## *SlamNation* Review Excerpts

“Frenetically high-powered... make(s) poetry sexy again in a way it hasn’t been since the heyday of the Beats. *SlamNation* could one day be viewed as the genre’s answer to *Monterey Pop*.”

- Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*

“Bristles with passion and drama! Even those who don’t like poetry can’t help but be riveted.”

- Leonard Lopate, *New York & Company*, WNYC Radio

“An extraordinarily vivid portrait of the surprisingly cutthroat world of spoken-word... The trade-off between art and self-advantage has seldom been rendered on screen with such assured ferocity. The real thrill of *SlamNation* is the realization that it plays by all the rules of the documentary, yet still adheres to the finest traditions of the storyteller’s art. See it!”

- Steve Schneider, *Orlando Weekly*

“The drama is always full-flame! So is the comedy!”

- *LA Weekly* “*Film Pick of the Week*”

“As colorful and chock-full of characters as any pro wrestling match, as peppered with strategy and finesse as Wimbledon... There’s heat, humor, and outrage onstage. It captures the feverishness and the artistry of this national championship with humor and clarity.”

- Cate McQuaid, *The Boston Globe*

“\* \* \* ...a pop culture phenomenon...”

- Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

“Director Paul Devlin’s...unerring instincts illuminate an old fashioned quest for glory, a tale more akin to *When We Were Kings* than *The Belle of Amherst*.

- *Box Office Magazine*

“The *Woodstock* of spoken word!”

- *Time Out New York*

“A drama, the likes of which have not been seen since Sylvester Stallone stepped into the ring with *Apollo Creed*.”

- Richard Bambridge, *The Independent Film Video Monthly*

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## *SlamNation* (More) Review Excerpts

“Mesmerizing! Raw Excitement!”

- *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*

“Articulate, adrenaline-driven performances... combine with Devlin’s fast-paced editing to make *SlamNation* an exciting and entertaining film.”

- Nicholas Paterson, *The Boston Phoenix*

“Dramatic is the key word here! The energy pulses, snaps and crackles!”

- Teresa Wiltz, *Chicago Tribune*

“*Leaves of Grass* this ain’t... Devlin nicely captures the frenetic, poetry-as-warfare pace; it’s fierce, hilarious, brooding stuff, with nary a red rose or blue violet in sight.”

- Mark Savlov, *The Austin Chronicle*

“Viewers can’t help getting caught up in the event’s excitement and being simultaneously absorbed by the performers’ craft.”

- Larry Worth, *New York Post*

“...Urgent and eloquent...”

- *Los Angeles Times*

“If you’re wondering where the new mavericks will come from now that independent film has been co-opted, check out the talented nonconformists in this movie.”

- Sura Wood, *SF Weekly*

“Some of the poets, notably Saul Williams, are often able to get the crowd cheering and clapping along with them, like solo musicians on a hot riff.”

- M.V. Moorehead, *Phoenix New Times*

“Taylor Mali is particularly entertaining, a loudmouthed ironist out for the poetic kill.”

- Ken Marks, *The New Yorker*

A FILM BY PAUL DEVLIN

# SLAMNATION

## *SlamNation* (Still More) Review Excerpts

“Widly entertaining... this film should find its way into the classroom. A year's worth of dry lectures can't touch this experience.”

- Robert W. Butler, *The Kansas City Star*

“Blazing energy and a jackhammer pace!”

- J. Shepard, Mill Valley Film Festival

"The film truly gives an insiders' look into the lives of the slam poets, and will be seen as a classic film on the subject of the American slam poetry for many years to come.”

- Keystone, *Radio Poetry*

“Verbal acrobatics and theatrical chutzpah... poets chipping away at each other like bobsleds hitting the ice wall.”

- “8 Days A Week,” *The Providence Phoenix*,

“Fast, funny, furious and every now and then poignant.”

- *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

“Riveting! I don't know if it's literature, but it's way more fun than ‘Moby Dick.’”

- Patrick Beach, *Austin American-Statesman*

“Marvelously eloquent and perfectly paced.”

- Jay Gluckstern, *GoGaGa Internet Radio*

“What lingers in memory are the poets themselves, who come from all over the cultural map to bond and fight with words. Most feature films are still too segregated to show even that.”

- Steve Boone, *new york citysearch*

“New York poet Beau Sia's whiny megalomaniacal rants are hilarious.”

- David Proffitt, *The Arizona Republic*

“*Slam Nation* defeats the stigma of its genre with vibrant depictions of compelling individuals that skillfully illustrate the beauty and savagery of language and its purveyors.”

-Matthew A. Travis, *New Mexico Daily Lobo*