Poetry Stacked: Building a 21st Century Reading Series at the Library

The Details:
Thursday February 8, 2024, 1:45 pm to 3:00 pm, Room 2215B, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

Category:
Program Development Event

Description: Tasked to enrich and engage the University of Cincinnati campus and community, UC (University of Cincinnati) Libraries and Elliston Poetry Room partnered to create Poetry Stacked, a multimodal reading series staged in the stacks of UC’s Langsam Library and curated with 21st century values. Poetry Stacked brings faculty, staff, student, and community poets together in-person and live streamed. Panelists will discuss the planning and staging process, sharing lessons and adjustments, feedback, and the future.

Moderator

Melissa Cox Norris: Melissa Cox Norris is director of library communication at the University of Cincinnati. Melissa has worked promoting and communicating about the services, people, and collections of academic libraries for 25 years. She started her library communications career at the University of Virginia and has published and presented on library communications regionally and nationally.

Participants

Ben Kline: Ben Kline lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and works for the University of Cincinnati Libraries as the Director of Access Services. Author of Sagittarius A*, Dead Uncles, and the forthcoming It Was Never Supposed to Be, Ben is a storyteller and poet whose work has appeared in Copper Nickel, Florida Review, Poetry, and other publications.

Michael C. Peterson: Michael C. Peterson serves as Curator of the Elliston Poetry Room and Archive at the University of Cincinnati. He is a poet, the recipient of fellowships from Yaddo, MacDowell, and Vermont Studio Center, and is an editor of Tom Postell: On the Life and Work of an Unsung Master (Pleiades, 2024).

Dior J. Stephens: Dior J. Stephens is a proud, Midwestern Pisces. He is the author of three chapbooks, and their debut full-length collection, CRUEL/CRUEL, is out now with Nightboat Books. Dior is pursuing a doctorate degree in Philosophy at University of Cincinnati and serves as Managing Poetry Editor for Foglifter Press.
Opening Remarks, Melissa Cox Norris:

Good afternoon, and welcome to “Poetry Stacked: Building a 21st Century Reading Series at the Library.”

Poetry Stacked began with a simple question: how can we bring people back into the library after the pandemic’s then-seemingly worst? What resulted was Poetry Stacked, a semi-regular reading series held in the stacks of the University of Cincinnati’s main library. The mission of Poetry Stacked is to celebrate poetry and raise awareness of the collections of both UC Libraries and the Elliston Poetry Room. Each reading engages audiences via exposure to contemporary poetry and increases appreciation for both the talents of UC and the community poets, as well as for poetry itself.

The intent of the series is to enrich and engage the UC campus and Cincinnati communities in accordance with the Libraries Strategic Framework and the university’s NEXT Lives Here Strategic Directions in support of Academic Excellence.

In just our 1+ years of existence, we feel that we have accomplished that and so much more.

Introduce panelists:

Participant Initial Remarks:

Ben Kline:
I will follow up Melissa’s discussion of origin and Next Lives Here by delving into curation and tone; highlight some of our big ideas for what a reading series with support could be – new campus relationships, new collaborations, and new approaches to existing projects – and talk about “why poetry” for a series aimed at bringing users and stakeholders together in the library again.

Michael C Peterson:
My remarks will speak firstly to how a Library strategic framework and a Departmental strategic framework (in this case: a Department of English) might align in a collaborative partnership that draws from student, staff, faculty, and community populations. Secondly, I will address how special collections/archives might come to see their role in community initiatives as one of a broader, more participatory archival praxis.

Dior J Stephens:
I am here representing both student poet participants and being a member of the Poetry Stacked audience. I hope to shed light on how Poetry Stacked impacts the academic side and the community.
Moderator Topics and Questions

1. Organization/Planning - Ben and Michael, could you discuss the curation of poets for Poetry Stacked?
2. Promotion – Melissa will touch on promotional strategies and show examples.
3. Collaborations – One of the strengths of Poetry Stacked is the many collaborations we have formed. Ben & Michael, please touch on these.
4. Participation – Dior, you have participated as a poet and a frequent audience member. Can you tell us about your experience as a poet? How does Poetry Stacked compare with other poetry readings you have done? How does your experience change as an audience member?
5. Benefits - one of the main goals of Poetry Stacked is to increase engagement with the library, Elliston Poetry Room, and poetry collections in new ways, and to foster community. Can each of you tell us from your perspective ways that we have achieved this?
6. Outcomes - after just a year+ under our belts, Poetry Stacked has produced numerous outcomes (workshops, exhibits, anthology), can you talk about some of these? Why not just focus on the poetry reading, but expand it past the event into something more?
7. Lessons Learned - What are the adjustments we have had to make and the challenges we have encountered?
8. The Future - what does the future hold for Poetry Stacked?

Open for Q&A