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Dade students' poems can turn to cash at Piano Slam

BY PARADISE AFSHAR
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Joseph Pierre uses hip-hop and R&B as an escape, but his passion for music doesn't stop there.

The Booker T. Washington Senior High School senior also writes.

“I write about life and the way I see things. I see life as a playground,” said Joseph, 17, of Overtown.

Joseph hopes that his love for music and poetry is enough to win him \$500 and a laptop when he enters into the Piano Slam.

The Piano Slam, in its second year, is a contest sponsored up by the Dranoff International Two Piano Foundation and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts.

Students are asked to write a poem about the way music has impacted their lives. Joseph plans on incorporating aspects of his neighborhood, Overtown, in his poem.

“You can have a positive experience growing up here,” he said.

Hundreds of kids from a dozen middle and high schools are expected to enter the Piano Slam, and the top 15 will win \$100. The top eight will get the chance to read their poem at the Arsht Center on May 12.

As students read their poems on stage, two pianist will play classical music and a DJ will spin and scratch.

It's an experience that Carlene Sawyer, executive director of the Dranoff Foundation, calls “crazy.” “Last year we sold out,” said Sawyer, adding that they got 600 entries from five schools. She expects close to 1,000 this year. Attending the concerts is free, but tickets are required.

When speaking to students about the Piano Slam, she tries to remind them of the role music plays in their lives.

“Music is who we are and how we communicate with people,” Sawyer said. “Think about when you're in a car with the bass up so loud that you feel the music inside of you.”

To promote Piano Slam, Sawyer went to schools with internationally renowned Greek pianist Petros Moschos and Dimitris Karydi of Duo Antithesis to give students a taste of classical music.

Ray Dominguez of The Write Side Poets and other poets will perform.

Listening to Duo Antithesis play was the first time Miami Jackson Senior High School senior Andrea Santamaria had classical music performed live in front of her, although she did grow up hearing recordings.

“My grandma usually plays it and I just sit and listen. It's very relaxing,” said Andrea, 17, of Little Haiti. “It was great.”

Andrea, a self-proclaimed poet, is planning on entering the Piano Slam, although she doesn't know what she will write as of yet.

Seeing teens as young as Andrea showing interest in classical music isn't new for Sawyer.

“People always say, kids don't like classical music. Well, how do you know if they've never been exposed to it?” Sawyer said. “You'd be surprised to see how many students have classic music on their iPods.”

Sawyer is expecting a large turnout of entries this year and encourages members of the community to get tickets for the free concert.

Tickets at arshcenter.org or by phone at 305-947-6722.

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