Spoken Word Poetry: Bringing poetry to life

Spoken word poetry is a very general category of poetry. Spoken word poetry is when poetry is performed. It is meant to make a powerful statement within poetry. Why do you think people want to participate in spoken word poetry? The answer is simple. They want to be heard. They want their writing to reach out and effect people and that is exactly what spoken word poetry does. The true performers of spoken word poetry are passionate about their work and their passion can be seen in their performance. It is not to say that poetry itself does not make an impact on people. It surely does. But spoken word poetry goes a little further and deeper within that impact. When authors are writing spoken word poetry that is exactly what is going through their minds. It is a way for an author of a poem to express their work to the fullest extent. They want their writing to make an impact when performed, an impact that will truly affect people. Spoken word poetry arose through a movement in the 1990’s with a goal to bring poetry back to the people. It aims at revealing poetry as more than just meaningful words on paper but more as a living art. Within the genre of Spoken word poetry there is an extremely strong emphasis on the performance of the poem. It allows the author to express their own poem in the way they want it to be expressed. Spoken word poetry brings a poem to life, for the audience, by putting just as much of an emphasis on the writing of the poem as the performance of the poem.

Spoken Word Poetry has a plethora of topical themes. Spoken Word poetry, a lot of the time, is telling or revealing a deep experience that the author is attempting to express. It can express what a poet is going through or thoughts that they are thinking. It also can be a way of expressing beliefs that you have. In “Beyond Heaven’s Gate” by Albert Gazeley it states, “Of course I feel sad—for my family/ For they are missing me so much/ I hope their grieving-helps them/ I’m sure one day our prayers will touch”. By this statement it is clear that he is thinking of death and what he believes about death is shown. This is just one example of many that demonstrates how Spoken Word Poetry can bring out most any kind of theme that the author wishes to be brought out.

Spoken Word Poetry is usually written in lines and verses known as Stanzas. It incorporates sound into poetry which allows the author to use figure of speech, voice tone, pauses, and emphasis on specific words to give vivid images of the theme of the poem. There are three main elements of Spoken Word Poetry that are used to catch the listener’s ear and aid in the effectiveness of the performance towards the audience. The first is rhythm. Rhythm is the most important element to Spoken Word Poetry. Every poem that is spoken needs and must have a definite driving rhythm. But it is not a regular, constant rhythm. It is similar to free verse rhythm. It keeps the poem going smoothly from one line to the next. The second element is repetition. Spoken word poets will usually repeat a word within his or her poem in order to keep the listener focusing back on the central idea of the poem. The third element is rhyme. Not all spoken word poetry has rhyme but it is a relatively common element that is usually seen. Also within spoken word poems there is not a specific kind of rhyme sequence that is constant throughout the poem. The rhyming that does occur is used to direct the listeners toward a particular theme. The entire poem is never all rhyming. The rhyming is varied to grab the attention of the listeners. Therefore it can be concluded that the main purpose of the three main elements: rhythm, repetition, and rhyme, is to give the performance more of a concrete effectiveness and to grab the attention of the audience.

Yes, it is true that any poem can do these things; such as express beliefs, thoughts, experiences. But what makes Spoken Word Poetry special is that beliefs, thoughts, experiences etc..that are written can be acted out and brought to life. The poem becomes real and vivid when read and performed. The reader of the poem may or may not be the author but the reader has the ability to present the poem to give it more meaning. The way a poem is read has a huge effect on the way the poem is viewed and the effect it has on the listeners. There can be certain emphasis put on certain words, silent pauses, the raising of the voice etc… All these aspects help bring the poem to life and give it the ability to have a deeper meaning. When a poem is being performed, the goal of the performer is to lure their audience to feel what they, the performer, are feeling, see the picture they are painting with their performed words, and grasp and experience the deepest possible meaning of the poem. When looking at Spoken Word Poetry, you can tell that the poetry was specifically written to be performed. For example, when listening to Sage Francis’s poem it is evident that it was written to be performed. She uses very strong sensory words that when properly performed are very effective. One of the lines of her poem she says, “But my poetry has become a scab lies just can’t help picking/ Tickling too many worldly fancies whimpering on my hands/ and knees/Crawling fast through laundry mats pilfering girlie’s panties/ Ya heard me? Man please”. Within this segment of her work it can be seen that certain words are written to be said in certain tones with certain gestures. She paints a detailed picture with her writing which allows for a more creative performance.

Spoken word poetry performances can be seen in many different settings, from the most formal to the most casual. They vary in setting so much because there are limitless ways to write and perform spoken word poetry. Many different kinds of people can choose to write and perform poetry, from the most scholarly poets who perform for huge articulate crowds to people who are simply trying to express what they are feeling to their local society or group. Therefore settings in which spoken poetry takes place varies along a large spectrum.

Along with there being much variation among the writers and the settings of spoken word poetry, there is also a lot of variation among the level of writing. Some spoken word poetry contains deep thoughts that are hard to grasp and then some contain simple thoughts that are at the basic level of thinking. Some are very lengthy and some are rather short. This allows for the audience to vary as well. With the variations among the writing of the poetry there comes variations within audience that is being spoken to. Different poems will be more or less effective in certain audiences. An example of variation can be seen by comparing two specific spoken word poems: “The Rights of Women” by Robert Burns and “To be a fish in the ocean” by Robert Arthur Miller. “The Rights of Women” involves with a much deeper issue than “To be a Fish in the ocean”. Robert burns develops deeper, more serious thoughts in his poem. For example it states, “Each man of senses has it full before him,/He’d die before he’d wrong it—it’s decorum.--/There was, indeed, in far less polish’d days,/ A time, when rough rude man had naught ways,/Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,/ Nay even thus invade a Lady’s quiet.”. Burns’ poem is rather serious and strong. Robert Aurthur Miller’s poem is at the other end of the spectrum in that is has a more light hearted thought and theme. In the poem it states, “To be a fish in the ocean/ What would it be,/ To swim throughout waters/ So gracefully.”. Robert Aurther Miller’s poem is completely different than Robert Burns’ poem. The poems have totally different levels of depth and seriousness of thought and therefore the way they were performed was totally different as well. Totally different tones of voice and rhythm were used in each performance. The performance of the poems gave off completely different moods. Also, due to the fact that the two poems have a lot of variation, their audiences also probably varied. This is just one example of many of how spoken word poetry can differ.

Therefore it is seen that with such an emphasis on performance, a poem can be brought to life by spoken word poetry in a variety of different ways. There are many aspects of performing that go along with the mood, meaning, and overall effect of the poem being performed and the influence it has on its audience. The fact that spoken word poetry is that which is performed causes it to be more influential to its audience and listeners than poetry that is simply written. Spoken word poetry brings poetry to life!