

Sound off

Posted on [April 8, 2014](#)
by [Rich Rennicks](#)



Words With Friends: Members of Juniper Bends Reading Series (from left, Dana Middleton, Reid Drake and Lockie Hunter) hold four standing-room-only events each year. Other popular spoken word programs range from open mics to curated showcases with out-of-town featured performers. Photo by Shara Crosby

Spoken word events around Asheville

The Asheville spoken word scene, vibrant since its '90s-era heyday, has continued to grow steadily over the years. Between several ongoing reading series, there's now a network of vibrant, recurring events where a large rotating cast of local poets (from polished veterans to earnest students) strut their stuff and share their latest creations. There are so many events that when Caleb Beissert, host of the Altamont Reading Series at N.C. Stage, gave a shoutout to several upcoming readings during a January event, almost every subsequent poet who read mentioned yet another event or series.

The audience left with an incredibly long list of events to check out.

So, where does one go for the best local spoken word events? Here are some of the principal programs taking place around Asheville and tips on how to attend them like a poetry pro.

- **Juniper Bends** — [The Juniper Bends series](#) is now in its fifth year, and the group hosts quarterly events at Downtown Books & News (67 N. Lexington Ave.). This event attracts a group of both established and emerging poets to share their works in progress. January's event featured (among others) local author and UNC Asheville professor Katherine Min, who read from her long-awaited second novel, *The Fetishist*.

The Juniper Bends series is produced by Lockie Hunter, Dana Middleton and Reid Drake. The group maintains an active presence on Facebook and Twitter to spread the word about events. The next Juniper Bends reading takes place on Friday, May 9, at DBN and features well-known local poets Vievee Francis and Holly Iglesias, as well as emerging poets Lily Latini, Trevor Clark and Timothy Burkhardt.

Expert tip: DBN is usually packed to the rafters for these events, so turn up early if you want a seat.

- **Altamont Poetry Series** — In the fall of 2013, Beissert and local poet Jeff Davis moved their regular spoken word event from The Altamont Theatre to [N.C. Stage Company](#) (15 Stage Lane) and rechristened it The Altamont Poetry Series. The format is slightly different from other local poetry gatherings as the event features a guest performer from out of town and consequently has a cover charge in order to meet expenses.

N.C. Stage is a great venue for poetry. Its black box environment — and the ability to socialize before the reading in the lobby — means there are no distractions from the performance. The collaborative aspect of the Asheville scene is evident at these gatherings: Poets share news and opinions as they introduce their work, and the guest performances bring some fresh voices and perspectives to the local scene.

The next Altamont Reading Series event takes place on Monday, April 21, at N.C. Stage. It features Mississippi native R. Flowers Rivera, a poet and award-winning short story writer.

Expert tip: It's not cool to leave immediately after reading your poems. These are serious poets eager to talk about poetry. Stick around, you might learn something. Third Wednesdays. \$5.

- **Open Mic at Noble Kava** — Beissert is also responsible for a weekly open mic at [Noble Kava](#) (15 Eagle St.). This is the most eclectic spoken word event in town, drawing, in Beissert's words, "a very diverse crowd from college students to wise white-haired wordsmiths to esoteric drifters [and] journal-keepers to performance spoken word artists."

Anything goes at this open mic, and Noble Kava provides an atmosphere in which young poets can read their work for the first time and more experienced writers can try out new work. Occasionally, tourists even get up to perform poems from their home countries. The audience is notably enthusiastic — and noisy, as this is a very social event — and aptly showcases the ongoing passion for spoken word in Asheville.

Expert tip: Get your name on the list early if you want to read. The event will continue until very late, and the crowd grows more raucous as the night goes on. Every Wednesday, 9 p.m.-midnight. Free.

- **Word Play Radio** — Hosted by Davis (of Altamont and organizer of the Mad Hat series, below) and Hunter (of the Juniper Bends series), Word Play is a weekly radio show on Asheville FM. It focuses on the local poetry and literature scene. Guests have included poets ranging from Pulitzer Prize winners to local high school students. Spoken word fans can listen to the programs (which often feature recordings of poets reading at some of these local events) at [ashevillefm.org](#). Live broadcasts are Sundays from 5-6 p.m., and shows can be streamed online after they air.

Expert tip: The station just received its FCC license, so Word Play will soon be broadcasting at 103.3 FM, bringing the eclectic Asheville poetry scene to an even wider community.

- **Mad Hat** — The Mad Hat readings take place at the [Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center](#) (55 Broadway). There isn't a set schedule, but there are usually about four events a year.

Expert tip: BMC+AC hosts the weekend workshop The Poetics of Audience: Experimenting with Points of Address in Poetry, Friday-Sunday, May 2-4. Jaye Bartell, Eric Gelsigner, Nathanael Roney and Bridget Elmer lead three days of lectures, writing exercises, bookmaking and panel discussions. For info and to register, call 350-8484.

- **Anam Cara open mics** — Local theater company [Anam Cara](#) hosts open mics around various themes. While there's not a set schedule (check the website for upcoming events), next week offers back-to-back events at Toy Boat Community Arts Space (101 Fairview Road). On Thursday, April 17, poetry and songwriting are featured. Amanda DePaola hosts, and bar sales benefit Toy Boat. A Tales & Ales storytelling open mic follows on Friday, April 18. Both events begin at 8 p.m.

Expert tip: As part of the poetry and songwriting open mic, willing participants will be "prompted to write a clever and erotic haiku in the moment for the chance to win a prize." Entry fee is \$3, and proceeds benefit programming at Anam Cara.