

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## “Man Overboard” at Poetry in Motion

Eric Trules · Wednesday, March 20th, 2019

Poetry in Motion is one of LA’s oldest and most esteemed spoken word series, and this year it is celebrating its 31st anniversary in Los Angeles. As one of its featured poets/spoken word artists/story tellers over the years, I’ve been privileged to see, experience, and enjoy its longstanding evolution over three decades.

The series was created in 1988 by Eve Brandstein, Michael Lally, and Michael Des Barres as a “poetry salon” at Helena’s private supper club on Temple and Rampart in East Hollywood. The invited readers were first called the “Temple Street Poets,” that is until Helena’s closed its doors to the public for various nefarious and unknown reasons. Since then, Poetry in Motion became just that—a reading series constantly on the move—from the the Heartbreak Cafe on La Brea to Cafe Largo on Fairfax, until it finally landed a seemingly permanent home at LA’s most prestigious and historic literary venue, Beyond Baroque, in the old Venice City Hall.



From its inception, Poetry in Motion presented Hollywood celebrities reading poetry (their own or that of others) on the same program as well-known local LA poets reading their original work. For example, some evenings I would read with *Married with Children*’s Katey Sagal and *The Breakfast Club*’s Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy; on others with Charlie Sheen and Robert Downey Jr., back when he was still better known for his run-ins with the law than for his Oscar-winning performances or for that matter, his poetry. It was always an interesting mix that Brandstein, the Hollywood producer and casting director, and Lally, the St. Marks on the Bowery New York poet, would throw together, combining Hollywood stars like Harry Dean Stanton, Justine Bateman, Ed Begley Jr., Melanie Griffith, Carl Reiner, and Alfre Woodard with local poets like Wanda Coleman, Doug Knott, Michael C. Ford, “Library Girl” Susan Hayden, and heavyweight novelist and poet, Hubert Selby Junior, author of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. It was a great mix of Hollywood glitter, contemporary/beatnik poetry, and theatrical fun.



Harry Dean Stanton, Eve Brandstein, and Micheal Lally

Des Barres quickly disappeared as producer, and Lally moved back to his native New Jersey over a decade ago, so Brandstein has been Poetry in Motion's solo producer for the last ten years or so, and she has done a beautiful job of building a talented community of artists and sustaining a loyal audience. She is currently artist in residence at Jewish Women's Theater.



On March 2, 2019, I was part of a Poetry in Motion evening at Beyond Baroque called "Man Overboard." As you might imagine, it was a program of all men reading original work on the night's theme, "Man Overboard." Of course, the theme was more than timely, what with the prominence of women's issue's in the zeitgeist these days: Me Too, Times Up, more female Representatives in Congress than ever before, more female Democratic candidates running in the primary... on and on. It very much seems like men are indeed, cast overboard and flailing about.

It was a great lineup of artists: Rick Overton, Dylan Brody, Michael Harris, Ty Granderson-Jones, Greg Cope White, Christian Elder, Adrian Cunningham, Rick Lupert, and yours Truly.

There was a great variety of subject matter, personal style, and point of view. I wish I could give a sample and taste of each, but to keep my publisher happy on length, I am just including the piece I read myself, aptly titled “Man Overboard!”

Here it is:

Sounds like a cry for help. A plea, at least to me. A state of affairs.

Of men. In decline. In our country. In our society. Here tonight. At Beyond Baroque.

In 2019. Men overboard. Men in decline. Not women. Just men – overboard. Obsolete. Under attack. Not to mention – in particular – white men. Of a certain age. With a certain power. Within a certain tax bracket. It’s our turn, you say?

Whatever happened to John Wayne? Cary Grant? Marlon Brando? John Barrymore? Jimmy Cagney? Oh yeah, grapefruits in the face are out.



Steve McQueen? Paul Newman? Hud? Harper? Hombre? As in “he was a bad hombre.”

Seems like it’s just — out of fashion. Times up... for strong men. And bad asses – who Poetry in Motion used to celebrate. Back in the day. Now it’s all equality. Diversity. Me too. Me three. Especially in the academy – from where I’m so glad... I retired.

But remember one-eyed John Ford? Directing two-fisted John Wayne – in movies like Stagecoach, The Searchers, Fort Apache, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. Even “The Quiet Man”... where the Duke – isn’t a very *quiet* ex-boxer at all, but where rather... he pushes around Maureen O’Hara – physically and emotionally – and where he never takes “No” for an answer.



Well I take “No” for an answer – all the time – from my wife. And just for full disclosure... she’s an immigrant.

Dylan said “the times they were a changin’” way back in 1962, but I don’t think he had any idea of where women’s rights and feminism were heading. Because there was a lot of hypocrisy back in the 60s – when “free love” meant *one* thing – but when it *seemed to just expand* the opportunity of being macho – and notching another woman on your belt. And I always *wondered* about the honesty of polygamy – and about how many women fucked how many men – because they could – but at what price?

So today, I’m a man overboard too. I’m retired. I stay at home bringing up my 11 year old adopted Indonesian son, while my wife works full time and brings home the bacon – along with the benefits I used to provide.

I’m Mr. Mom, voluntarily so, and I love it, but I can’t tell you how many men I see in Elysian Park every morning at 8 am – both walking the dog and pushing their toddlers on playground swings.

W-w-work? As Maynard G. Krebs used to croon – on “The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis” – where Shelia Kuehl played Dobie’s wannabe, genius girlfriend, Zelda Gilroy – remember her?



But now 60 years later, Zelda, that is Shelia, has ended up being one of the five, Los Angeles County Supervisors. One of the most powerful and articulate politicians we have. Down with Dobie. Up with Shelia!



W-w-w-ork? I read that men don't do it as much as they used to in this country. Nor in my wife's native Indonesia. Men aren't the family providers they used to be. They're not as educated as women in America. Don't enroll in college as much as women. Drop out more. They're not as flexible. Not as resilient as women. Emotionally speaking. And flexibility, and resiliency and empathy are the new "strengths" in the work place, aren't they? I guess there just aren't as many back-breaking, brawny jobs as there used to be.



Bob Denver as Maynard G. Krebs

Man overboard! Men overboard!

What to do? What do I tell my son? Probably not that much. It seems that it's all taken care of – right there in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. "Gender equality. No bullying. No racism." I can't tell you how many times he's thrown those very words back in my face. "Bully". "Racist". "Gender discriminator".

As if I... me?... I... could actually be a bully, a racist, a misogynist? Naaaah. Not me!

Forget about the time I chased coke bottled-lensed, eyeglass-wearing, science nerd, Glen Mernone, home from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade – after school – with a posse of bike-riding Jewish bullies behind me.



Or forget about how many times I didn't take "no" for an answer when *I* – just so desperately "wanted to get laid" one more time, crossing the finish line – of adolescent manhood. Not to mention *adult* manhood. How many crimes and misdemeanors in the name of just getting laid?  
One more time?

I hate this "man overboard" thing. It's painful. Unsettling. Confrontational. Who amongst us isn't guilty of the charge?

If life's a ship, as this metaphor suggests... I just want to get back *on* board. Sail out my remaining years into the setting sun. Learn a little empathy, a little humility and compassion.

Maybe "overboard" just means "Stop raging against the machine." I think maybe Whitman and Rimbaud, Dillinger and Dylan, Jesse James and Teddy Roosevelt – just might have gotten it wrong. In fact, maybe... they're *all* piled up now – in the heap of "men overboard".

Time to take their medicine. Take to take *my* medicine. Time to apologize. Time to be a better man."



Men Overboard at Beyond Baroque on March 2, 2019

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If you haven't been to a Poetry in motion event, I highly recommend you do. Sign up for the mailing list [HERE](#).

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Listen to his podcast, "e-travels with e. trules" [HERE](#)

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