

The Comenian

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Spoken Word Artist Olson Brings Unique Voice, Energy to HUB Pavilion

Olson ignites spark of dissent and inspiration

by Grace Chehoud

If you found yourself walking through the HUB on Thursday, February 24 you would have probably heard the screams, you might have even seen the fire, and you definitely would have felt the heat. No, it was not a blazing fire in the midst of our college, nor was it a glimpse of this summer's heat; it was the radical, anti-war, pro-choice, lesbian, feminist poet, Alix Olson.

Dozens of students, faculty, and members of the community quietly sat in the Pavilion, unwilling to blink for fear of missing a glimpse of this poet. Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*, describes Olson as a "brilliant performer, an ingenious poet, a serious thinker, a funny person. She brought me to my feet," and she brought Moravian to its feet. She ignites the fires within us, inspires us, and moves to the next performance hoping that the ones she left behind will unite for the cause.

For Olson, poetry is not about the soft, tedious verses we are forced to learn and recite in our classes. It is the revolution, alive and on its way. Olson attacks every issue from racism to sexism, from homophobia to capitalism to consumerism. Her poetry is about truth, and to Olson, "sometimes it's just / F--- you / F--- you / You see, and to me / That's poetry too."

Olson is a national slam poetry champion and has appeared on *Russell Simmon's Def Poetry Jam* on HBO, featured on the cover of *Ms. Magazine*, *The Advocate*, *The Village Voice*, *Girlfriends*, and *French Elle*. She is the recipient of the 1998 Barbara Deming "Women in the Arts" grant and the 1998 "In Our Own Write" award.

Olson's coming to Moravian is not just another speaker coming and going in the history of the college. She came to bring us together because it is now our voices, through hers, that need be heard. You cannot but realize that every spoken word, which may awaken our minds with laughter, joy, tears, or anger, is more than just spoken word. We laughed with her and felt empowered by her words, but this was not for another memory of a fun-filled evening at Moravian. It was a precedent of what we are to be doing and how we are to be thinking.

Olson brought the crowd to its feet. You cannot but applaud such a fierce woman who knows what she wants. You cannot but think of what could be if each person present took a word of hers to heart. For those who missed the show, you may have just missed the show of your lifetime.

Poetry demolishes establishment

by Sylvia A. Paz

Copiously, silently, the snow fell outside the Pavilion at Hauptert Union Building on February 24. I sensed it gave up on trying to keep things cool inside where Alix Olson's igneous delivery lit a flame in every heart present in the standing-room-only audience. Not a word went to waste; eager ears absorbed every syllable because to sigh or blink risked losing the pace of the cadence of the loaded verse.

Directly across the platform, back against the limiting wall, I sat listening across the prism of three, four generations, through concepts of a different cultural perspective. I listened with every pore.

I became instantly aware that I was the minority in the room: married to the same man for 37 years, mother of five, grandmother of six, a modern—sort of—-independent woman; I find myself hurriedly looking inward for my neutrality to evaluate and react outside the box of my rigid upbringing and lifestyle, to Olson's sensually angry message.

I write my reaction to the poetry because, in America, moral dinosaurs are also free to speak and, in America, a poet who by her own description has the hair—and I add the audacity—of the lioness may just connect through that spot allowed for kindness to an old dinosaur sitting quietly in the audience also evolved although at a slower pace.

I find my neutrality and I begin to answer a checklist of the art before me: eloquent? Yes. Provocative? Yes. Original? Yes. Compelling? Yes. Powerful? Yes.

I ask: What does this poetry demand of me? To think as I never thought before. Oh, but that means I must give up complacency. I remind myself this commentary is supposed to be about Olson and not me. But it's too late, for everyone in the audience is now ideologically altered forever!

Olson uses words like Bruce Lee used his martial arts moves. What comes crashing down during the Olson performance is patriarchy, the foundations of the world that produced the stone buildings I study in, the graves of the public cemetery where ancestry rests, the system of justice that stands in spite of a myriad of imperfections.

Olson's poems are a demolition ball swinging with cataclysmic force against the establishment.

"The road to hell is paved with Republicans." Did she just say that? Wait, I think I like this girl very much. Even if for all the demolition going on there seems to be no crection in sight. That fierce intent to demolish is a bit worrisome to me—and no erection—not for Olson.



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