

A Valentine's Day to Remember

By Cole Merbach

Brian Turner, a memoirist, poet, musician, and veteran, was kind enough to join the Winter with the Writers festival this week and was without a doubt the most fitting candidate to not only be a part of this festival during Valentine's Day week, but also to read from his work on the actual day. I believe he expressed this sentiment best when joking that nothing was more appropriate in capturing the mood of Valentine's Day than to sit and listen to poems and pieces that captured the carnage of war.

Beyond the paradoxical circumstances of the day, however, Brian Turner hosted an impressive two-hour master class, working closely with three of the festival intern's poetry before a crowd of students and community members alike. Inviting both feedback from this year's interns as well as the audience, Turner created an informal environment in which each poem was discussed, while offering his own teachings to the group at large. Keying in to the value of the sound of a poem in particular, he did not limit his exploration of each poem to simply what words were on the page, but how the sounded coming off of it and how subtle changes in delivery influence our perception of a work.

As the master class came to a close, Turner rushed off to perform a soundcheck for his band, *The Interplanetary Acoustic Team*, and prepare to read from both his published poetry, memoir, and upcoming work. Introduced before another audience healthily made up of both students and members of the community, Turner read from his works, commenting on the bizarre state of war and its never-ending quality in between stanzas and paragraphs. As he read, it was apparent the influence his time serving had on his work, during which he noted that he felt that capturing his surroundings in written form while he was deployed in active duty was a duty all in its own.

His wife, Ilyse Kunetz, who unfortunately passed in 2016, also had a profound effect on his work, which was highlighted when Turner switched from reading to performing. Her words made up a majority of the lyrics within the group's work. Making use of a plethora of instruments, as well as a plant, Turner and his band the limits of music as they "jammed with plants." Further, Turner made a point to utilize a poem from intern Camille Adkison, titled "Gaia," incorporating her words within the eco-minded message of his song.

At the close of the evening, Carol Frost interviewed Turner using questions provided by the audience, during which he expanded on the sonic aspects of some of his work, the process of choosing a specific audience, and how he views himself as a placeholder in discussing the war until a time comes when the children and families who it has most directly affected are able to find their voices.

As we bid farewell to Brian Turner, a wonderful writer, poet, and human being, we prepare to welcome Barbara Hamby next week at the Winter with the Writers festival!