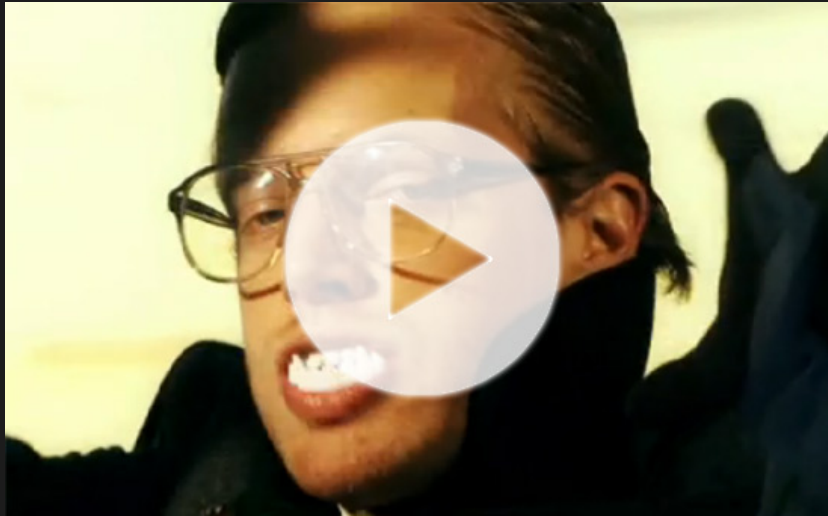




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## Astronautalis

Astronautalis is an artist who has long since stopped to perform traditional hip-hop - we can hear indie rock, lo-fi and broadly understood experimentation in his music

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Quite a calibre →

### Sincerity, distance and good craftsmanship

Posted on January 22, 2012 by Lukasz



An interview with Wojtek "Kidd" Cichoń, a slammer, who will host the poetry slam during the Asymmetry Festival Before Party.

The starter-dish before Asymmetry Festival, will be the Asymmetry Festival Before Party, planned to take place on February 2nd in the Wrocław-based "Puzzle" club. It will feature performances by excellent independent artists from the US, Astronautalis and Bleubird, who developed their music on the basis of hip-hop, in order to gradually include the influences of other stylistics into it.

A poetry slam will be a part of the Before Party. Poetry slam i.e., as mentioned in the prior information, a spoken word contest. The slam will be hosted by Wojtek "Kidd" Cichoń, renown on the scene of Polish independent hip-hop. He is an experienced slammer, taking part in this form of expression since many years. For those, who don't know much on what a poetry slam is, the below interview with Wojtek will surely be a valuable reading. Maybe it'll even encourage someone to try his, or her, strength on the stage? I encourage warmly to give it a read!

For those, who might not know what a poetry slam is, please describe it in a few words, and tell us why it is worth showing up at the Puzzle club on February 2nd, 2012, to admire the struggles of the Asymmetry Festival Before Party?

**WOJTEK "KIDD" CICHON:** A poetry slam is an open poetic contest, during which any one can perform, while the audience gathered on the event, decides on the winner. Poetry slam is a party, during which different performers "battle" one another; and with them - all kinds of poetry. Apart from that, the slam is great fun for the audience, because it actively takes part in the event and choses the best poet.

The poetry slam was born in the USA. How long has this form existed in Poland? Can we say that there's a slam scene, slam community?

Slam came to Poland in 2003. The first one took place in Warsaw and the oldest regular poetry slam is held there. At the same time, similar events took place, more or less frequently, all around Poland (Kraków, Lublin, Poznań, Toruń, Wrocław, Gdańsk and a number of smaller cities). Many years have passed since the first slam, so I guess, we can say about something like a slam scene. There are poets/performers, who perform during slams around Poland, on a regular basis, and we can say, that they are regular slammers.

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You fell in love with the slam in 2003, and that feeling exists up to this day. But it all began with hip-hop. You recorded albums, representing the mentioned genre, with e.g. Skwer Corporacja. What element of slam touched you to such an extent, that you basically gave up hip-hop? Does slam e.g. enable you to move the listener more successfully?

If we have to resort to the word "love", than let's say, it was tough love. I didn't give up rap up to this day, I still try to record, however, the poetry slam was an occasion to cross beyond the boundaries of writing to a hip-hop beat. The works I occasionally perform with on a slam, can be called "spoken word". I don't think too much about what allows me to move the listener. Spoken word or writing texts, having in mind that one will perform with them on stage, and not give them to someone to read, is another development stage for me, when it comes to writing.

**What do you think is the current condition of Polish hip-hop? There were times that it was almost omnipresent, but slowly faded since a couple of years...**

It's difficult for me to state my mind objectively, as I stopped following the scene a few year ago. On the other hand, I constitute a part of this scene, as I still record and publish tracks in the, so-called, underground (although, now it's quite hard to speak of such a clear division into mainstream and underground artists). Unfortunately, I associate Polish hip-hop with pattering truisms to uninteresting and cheap background music, so I stopped showing interest in it. At the same time I realize, that there's a dozen acts, who really introduce a lot of new elements to Polish hip-hop - unfortunately, they won't ever be as recognized, as the stem of the rap scene in Poland. Due to the reason Polish hip-hop is as it is, it exists somewhere outside of the, written with capital "c", culture. It's still seen as a curio created for frustrated youth or juvenile criminals. Because of the simplicity of rap texts and a lack of any rooting in literature or anything more than praising consumerism, egocentrism, male point of view, rap will never be treated as art.

**Does being a hip-hop artist help in becoming a slammer? Is it not, that acting and recitation experience is more useful at this point?**

The experience of performing with your text on the stage, is definitely helpful in becoming a slammer. Poetry written, when having the stage performance in mind, is much different than the one, we are treated to in poetry tomes. Acting and recitation experience is often quite tricky - the audience don't want actors reciting texts of some other individuals. They are set on receiving a stirring message, coming straight from the artist.

**What are the things a slammer can and can't do on stage?**

The rules are different from slam to slam. I usually comply with the time limit of one performance (3 minutes), the necessity of performing with a piece text you are the author of and using no requisites.

**Now a layman's question. There's notion of spoken word, and thanks to the task of conducting an interview with you, I found about the existence of the poetry slam. But is there something distinguishing spoken word from poetry slam? Is, spoken word e.g., prose, while slam swivels around poetry? Please, enlighten the blind!**

A poetry slam is the event/contest itself, presenting the performances by authors with their own works. This kind of creations are frequently spoken word - i.e. poetry, stories, songs, rap - everything that was created, having the stage performance in mind; having in mind the fact that it will be told to the listener, not handed to in the form of a sheet of paper printed over with letters.

**Do you have your favourites (foreign, Polish) when it comes to spoken word, slam? How are the individuals you admire and what do you admire them for?**

My adventure with spoken word started with Saul Williams. I think, for me, he is still an unequalled ideal, although his most recent release ("Volcanic Sunlight") doesn't appeal to me at all. There are many performers, whom I had the chance to see live, like e.g. Polarbear, Ian Keteku, Hollie McNish - I admire their craftsmanship, commitment, as well as sincerity and directness during the performances. They are the same people on and off stage.

**You perform abroad as well. Does your message reach the audience outside of Poland? Do they understand, what you'd like to pass on?**

I frequently perform with translations, which are screened somewhere near during my performance - something like film subtitles (laughter). I also happen to perform with something I wrote in English myself. At the same time, I realize that there are some cultural differences, which are hard to interpret in the text. That's why I think that, in this

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case, all the cultural gaps are diminished a little thanks to the emotions accompanying the performances, as well as their audio layer. There were times when, after the performance, I was approached by some people who said that they didn't understand a single word I was saying, but that they liked the show due to the language and emotions enclosed in it.

**You also conduct spoken word/slam workshops. So I understand, that one can become a slammer? Learn how to be one? A person doesn't have to be born a slammer?**

The workshops' aim is rather to bring the phenomenon of spoken word and poetry slam closer to the people. They include the elements of creative writing, reveal the arcane of performing on stage and the usage of the microphone etc. I don't know if it's possible to teach anyone to become a good poet/slammer, but one can surely give them a few good advices and encourages them to search and develop their own individual voice on the slam scene.

**What are the traits characterizing a good slammer according to you?**

Sincerity, distance from oneself, good writing and stage craft.

**You come from Elblag, but since years reside in Warsaw. Did you move because you wouldn't have the chance to engage in slam, in your hometown, or were the reasons more prosaic, educational-economic? Did Warsaw change you as an artist? How did the new environment influence You?**

I moved to Warsaw to study, I found a job and I stayed - typical plotline (laughter). Warsaw gave me a lot of possibilities - I had the chance to perform on the first ever Polish slam and to catch the poetry slam virus. At the same time, I keep big distance from the city - the world doesn't end on the capital.

**You are a member of the Asymmetry Festival crew, responsible for the selection of rap/hip-hop artists who'll perform during the event. What's your lead? What are the criteria you resort to before sending an invitation? Other way around, what artists from this particular music segment would you like to see in Wroclaw? From the point of view of, e.g., the attitude towards art, performance.**

I'm set on inviting artists, who treat rap and hip-hop as a starting point and are not impeded by development, travelling in all possible directions, experimenting with form, a unique mix of their own inspirations and, in result, creating something original and true. Artists who develop constantly and improve their musical and lyrical craft.

**You will host the poetry slam during Asymmetry Festival Before Party; later representatives of independent hip-hop from the US, Astronautalis and Bleubird, will appear on the stage. Why these two? What, according to you, makes them so special, that one need to see them?**

Astro and Bleubird are exactly such figures, who fit the vision I mentioned before. Both gentlemen have a strict hip-hop past behind them - it can't be denied, that they owe a lot to this particular form of expression. At the same time, they are not afraid of development, of crossing such genres as folk and even punk, in their output. These are independent artists, who, in order to survive, need to prove themselves in stage conditions - during live performances. In Wroclaw, they'll be in the middle of their two month European tour and I'm sure, that they'll give all they got on the stage, especially that it'll be their first, and only, show in Poland (laughter).

**As an experienced and travelled slammer, please tell me what future awaits this scenic form? Will there be a bigger interest in it or will the poetry slam, rather, stand aside, however gaining a gradually more numerous and faithful group of recipients?**

The poetry slam is a form, thanks to which, the discussion of poetry's democratization started in Poland; as well as presenting poetry on stage. I hope, that it'll bring what it spoken word, and also show how many creations can be called poetry, closer to the Polish people. The poetry slam serves as a kind of a platform for numerous voices, which with time can become recognized not only on the slam od hip-hop scene, but literary and music as well.

Thank you very much for the conversation.

Lesław Dutkowski

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





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