



Courtesy of Sandeep Ray

Performance: Crowds gather to watch local poets perform spoken word at Paviliun 28 in Gandaria, South Jakarta.

SPOKEN WORD

Young Jakartans embrace a new poetry

Jakarta's young creatives are putting a new spin on an old art form, as the popularity of spoken-word poetry grows in the capital city.

Sammi Taylor

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

Sspoken word poetry is a form of performance art; a unique blend of storytelling, rhythm, rhyme and theater. Popularized by Youtube videos over the past 5 years, it's become a new and exciting way for young Jakartans to express themselves.

One of the organizations helping young people to do that is Unmasked, a triannual open-mic poetry night held at various venues across Jakarta. Founders Ayu Meutia, Putri Minangsari and Pangeran Siahaan are poets and poetry lovers themselves, with one mission: to awaken the sleeping giant that is Jakarta's spoken-word poetry scene.

At the moment, this scene is still small. But spoken word poetry is quickly gaining traction in Indonesia, and co-founder Putri Minangsari is confident that the community will grow significantly in 2016.

"Spoken word poetry is a considerably new thing for Indonesians. We believe the more we hold free and open poetry events like what we do at Unmasked, the more poetry enthusiasts will learn from each other and develop the skill of 'performing' their poems in a spoken-word manner instead of simply reading them," Putri said.

"Jakarta's spoken-word scene is undoubtedly exciting, as much as it is in an early phase, and could definitely grow to a wider field in Jakarta."

It's clear that local talent is burgeoning in Jakarta — Putri Minangsari says that many attendees of past Unmasked shows have returned to future events to write and perform their own original works, after gaining inspiration from the poets before them.

"Local talent in Jakarta, I must say, is wow-inducing. The poems that they make and read [...] some of them are absolutely mind-blowing. There are some serious talents in Jakarta and it's such an honor to be able to give them a space to finally show what they've got," Putri said.

"Our oldest readers are in their 50s and the youngest is 14 years old. We wish to introduce and popularize spoken-word poetry to not only young people, but anyone. And I think so far we have made progress."

On Saturday a spoken-word event was held at the Goethe-Institut in Menteng, Central Jakarta, in collaboration with Unmasked and American education organization Project Voice. The night showcased a selection of local and international talent to an audience of over 200 people, arguably one of the biggest crowds Jakarta's poetry community has ever seen.

One performer was Unmasked co-founder Ayu Meutia, an advertising consultant and

copywriter from Jakarta. She was asked just an hour before the crowds arrived to open for American headlining poets Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye, and she leapt at the chance.

"There was doubt in me about whether I could deliver a great performance without a full rehearsal [...] my first thought was that I was pretty scared, but then, it was an honor to be there, so I took the chance," Ayu said.

"The crowds were great and lively. Despite the terror that hit Jakarta on Thursday, most of our attendees checked-in [online] and came to the show. It is the kind of story I will remember for life. I hope the audience felt the same excitement and the inspiration to write their own poems."

The audience was impressed, with roaring applause following every poem and even a standing ovation for Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye at the end of their performance.

Toni Benson-Rogan, a student from Australia and a newcomer to Jakarta's poetry scene attended Saturday's event. She said she would definitely attend similar events again.

"The room was bursting with energy and excitement. The entire night shattered my perceptions of poetry. To see Jakarta through the eyes of a poet was really inspiring and I will definitely visit anywhere that [allows] locals to share their amazing pieces," she said.

Spoken-word poetry offers

a platform for young Jakartans to express themselves and their emotions in a myriad of ways. Speaking poetry aloud puts a new, theatrical spin on a traditional art form, and Putri Minangsari says the options are endless when it comes to the themes of poems.

"I think a young mind with angst as well as an abundance of creativity and imagination suits the art of poetry making very much. Young people — especially those who have the advantage of better schooling where they are encouraged to read, write and come up with ideas on their own — often naturally find comfort in poetry."

So what's next for Unmasked? Putri would love to see an anthology of local poets' works published. But in the meantime, Unmasked have their sights set on a collaborative open mic event this Valentine's Day — to talk love, heartbreak and everything in between.

"After all, a good dose of melancholy is needed in poetry," she said.

The writer is an intern at The Jakarta Post

Meet up: Unmasked founders Pangeran Siahaan (second left), Putri Minangsari (second right) and Ayu Meutia (right) meet American poets Phil Kaye (left) and Sarah Kay (center) on the sidelines of a spoken-word event at the Goethe-Institut in Menteng, Central Jakarta,



Courtesy of Sandeep Ray

Common interest: Poetry enthusiasts come together at Paviliun 28 in Gandaria, South Jakarta, for a night of spoken word.



Courtesy of Christabelle Paljar