

HoCoPoLitSo

Howard County Poetry & Literature Society

ENLARGING THE AUDIENCE FOR CONTEMPORARY POETRY & LITERATURE SINCE 1974

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2019

JULY 2018-JUNE 2019

We ask you to hold your tongue

By Tim Singleton
Board Co-Chair

Some moments are a sight to be told. When the poet Beth Ann Fennelly had a hundred-plus students open their mouths to hold their tongues at the annual Blackbird Poetry Festival this year, one such moment came to be. Yes, a room full of people, hands in their mouths, holding their tongues ... not to be quiet, but to gain insight into how they make sound, and from sound, words and meaning, and from meaning, how their own voices and those of others can be understood.

“Hold your tongue” usually means something quite different from this experiment: *Say no more. Be silent. Keep quiet.* No one cares about what you have to say. Shut up. “Hold your tongue” is frightening. Demeaning and stifling.

For forty-five years, the work of HoCoPoLitSo has been to ensure the freedom of tongues. Think of the voices that have filled rooms throughout the community – what great names, what great thinkers, what great writers we have been lucky enough to encounter because this organization has conjured them through devoted work. Think of the messages they have

shared, exploring identity and the will to be heard, divulging stories, sometimes showing, sometimes telling, all the while letting us in on something about ourselves and this experience of being human. How important it is that tongues remain free.

It is a silly thing, a room full of people literally holding tongues. Maybe that is why it was instantly memorable. Add to that idea the room full of people *literarily* holding their tongues and it is so much more. A hand-held tongue sounds more like Whitman’s yawp (okay, maybe more of a welp) than anything clear or understandable, but it is a way to understand the voice within us we take so often for granted, our ability to speak, to move muscles and air and make communicable sound, and with that convey our own song of self, like Lucille Clifton’s “won’t you celebrate with me,” a particular voice wanting to be heard, understood and loved, demanding to be present and part.

So we ask you to hold your tongue – literarily – for a moment, and understand something about how your own muscle-made voice communicates your truth to the world, and how most of us have the privilege to shape a life to sing about, and how the world is so much richer for the diversity of all of our voices. Let’s not take that for granted. These voices need to be heard.



The Year In Review

Public Programs

OCTOBER 26, 2018 A trio of poets, Michael Collier, Elizabeth Spires and David Yezzi, opened HoCoPoLitSo's season at the Lucille Clifton Reading Series. Poets discussed the ordinary wonders that can be explored through their poetry.

FEBRUARY 8, 2019 HoCoPoLitSo celebrated its 41st Evening of Irish Music and Poetry. His Excellency Daniel Mulhall, Ambassador of Ireland, introduced award-winning poet Vona Grooke. The evening opened with harpist Jared Denhard and concluded with traditional Irish music by The Hedge Band's Laura Byrne, Jim Eagan, Donna Long, and Billy McComisky and step dancers Maureen Berry and Saoirse DeBoy of the Teelin School of Irish Dance. Denny Lynch once again provided an exhibit of his photos of Ireland.

APRIL 25, 2019 At the Blackbird Poetry Festival, in partnership with Howard Community College's English/World Languages Division and Office of Student Life, HoCoPoLitSo sponsored three morning workshops with Teri Ellen Cross Davis, Steven Leyva, and Mississippi Poet Laureate Beth Ann Fennelly. The Sunbird, an afternoon reading, featured Beth Ann Fennelly with Teri Ellen Cross Davis, and Steven Leyva along with students, faculty, staff, and local poets. The Festival finale, Nightbird, was a solo performance by Beth Ann Fennelly. A recitation by Maryland's second place winner in the 2019 Poetry Out Loud Competition, Hanna Al-Kowski, opened the evening. A wine and cheese reception followed.

JUNE 30, 2019 As part of the Columbia Festival of the Arts, in partnership with the Women's Giving Circle, a film and author event celebrated The Columbia Film Society 50th anniversary and the beginning of HoCoPoLitSo's 45th anniversary with a showing of the documentary *Girl Rising*. Susan Thornton Hobby discussed the work of one of the film's writers as well as the mission of the documentary, to advocate for girls' education.

Wilde Readings

Wilde Readings, a free monthly reading and open mic session held at the Columbia Arts Center, continued to offer featured writers followed by the opportunity for audience members to read from their own work. This series, held on second Tuesdays from September to June, is coordinated by local poets Ann Bracken, Linda Joy Burke, Faye McCray and Laura Shovan. This year twenty-one writers were featured:

Sistah Joy Alford, Sylvia Beverly, Jay Hall Carpenter, Andria Nacina Cole, Danuta Hinc, Leah Henderson, Kate Hillyer, Dr. Dorothy Adamson Holley, Bruce Jacobs, W. Luther Jett, Wallace Lane, Steven Leyva, Gregory Luce, Lucinda Marshall, Jen Michalski, Yvette Neisser, Joseph Ross, Brenardo Taylor, Naomi Thiers, Lisa Vihos, and Pamela Murray Winters.

Student Programming

AUGUST 29, 2018 HoCoPoLitSo sponsored a Professional Development Day workshop at Long Reach High School with poet Alan King, who encouraged county teachers to push the boundaries of language, with exercises designed to spark student creativity including one on description, and one on metaphor.

OCTOBER 9, 2018 In collaboration with Howard County Library, young adult author Jason Reynolds spoke to an overflowing young audience and answered questions at the Howard County Library's East Columbia Branch.

NOVEMBER 2018 – MARCH 2019 Writer-in-residence Alan King made presentations at nine county public high schools, Homewood Center and Howard Community College.

For thirty-eight years HoCoPoLitSo has awarded book prizes to the winners of its All-County Writing Competition, and honored students nominated by their teachers for Promise and Achievement in Language Arts to foster lifelong reading habits and a love of literature. HoCoPoLitSo board members made presentations at all Howard County public high school senior honors assemblies.

The nine creative writing winners were Moira Alsbrooks (Atholton), Cassie Jeng (River Hill), and Charlotte Long (Atholton) in the personal essay category; Abigail Freeman (Homewood), Dayrin Jimenez (Reservoir) and Leslie Axtell (Reservoir) in the poetry category; and in the short story category, Isabel Anderson (Wilde Lake), Esther Olajide (Wilde Lake) and Leslie Axtell (Reservoir). This year's manuscripts were juried by Nancy Czarnecki's Secondary Language Arts team, Howard County Public Schools.

In addition, twenty-three students were chosen by their English Departments to receive HoCoPoLitSo's Promise and Achievement Award in Language Arts. The honorees were: Emily Bickel,

Zackary Garrigus (Atholton), Julia Cutroneo, Sofia Weddle (Glenelg), Ian Pinkerton, Kim Taylor (Hammond), Destiny Gilbert, Lindsay Young, Lindsey Kebeck (Homewood Center), Naomi Greengold, Cesar Llanos (Howard),

Hanna Al-Kowski, Eric Zhu (Marriotts Ridge), Christian Bekele, Jennie Hardman (Mt. Hebron), Seth Freeman, Lia Takaki (Oakland Mills), Leslie Axtell, Safiya Umrani (Reservoir), Cassie Jeng, Gabrielle Lewis (River Hill), and Isabel Anderson, Taylor Schwartz (Wilde Lake).

Other Collaborations



Local high school students (from left to right) Dalia Hassanein, Noah Adeyeye, Evan Bickel and Nyah Lampasone read poetry with a focus on nature during the Columbia Art Center's Plein Air event, Color Columbia, on September 8, 2018.

In April, HoCoPoLitSo collaborated with the Columbia Art Center's Blossoms of Hope poetry and painters' juried event, *One More than Nine, 10 Years of Hope Through Art*. Poems by Sally Rosen Kindred placed first, Patricia Van Amburg placed second, and Kay Weeks placed third. Honorable mentions went to Hiram Larew, Judith T. Krauthamer, and Ann Bracken.

On April 4, 2019, HoCoPoLitSo dedicated the Ellen Conroy Kennedy Collection in the Clark Library at Howard Community College. More than 1,400 books by more than 400 authors, many of whom have visited Howard County, are available for interested literature lovers to view and enjoy.

Tara Hart participated in *The Humanities in Person*, a Maryland Humanities podcast.

An Inconvenient Truth reading and discussion series facilitated by Susan Thornton Hobby and climate activist Julie Dunlap at the Howard County Library, Miller Branch started in spring 2019, and continues with books of climate fiction every quarter.

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*HoCoPoLitSo is grateful to all who support our programs and mission. This list includes contributions from July 2018-October 2019. Serial gifts by the same contributor are merged. Every effort has been made to include all names and to spell them correctly. Please let us know if there are errors or omissions. (** in honor and sponsorship of 41st Irish Evening)*

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Join us
Friday, February 21, 2020



The Writing Life

Produced at Dragon Digital TV on the campus of Howard Community College, *The Writing Life*, HoCoPoLitSo's writer to-writer talk show, streams on [YouTube.com/HoCoPoLitSo](https://www.youtube.com/HoCoPoLitSo).

Four new editions were produced this year: **Jason Reynolds** hosted by **Laura Shovan** (October 2018); *Ordinary Wonder* with **Michael Collier**, **Elizabeth Spire** and **David Yezzi** (October 2018); **Vona Groarke** hosted by **Cóilín Parsons** (March 2019); **Beth Ann Fennelly** hosted by **Teri Ellen Cross Davis** (April 2019).

Marilyn Chin, who was interviewed for the series in April 2018, posted the edition on the Poets & Writers website, www.pw.org/content/marilyn_chin_1

Forty-Five and Thriving

For forty-five years, HoCoPoLitSo has nurtured its rich legacy of bringing fine writers and literature to Howard County, and we are eager to honor this record. Please join our efforts as literary ambassadors to fill the seats at our events. Give what you can, knowing that we work hard to make every dollar count towards sustaining and growing this passionate enterprise.

Are you with us? Please let us know. Help us continue to provide unique literary experiences that connect, heal, praise, and enlighten our community. Donations can be made at HoCoPoLitSo.org or with the enclosed envelope.

A Note from the Treasurer

If you are 70 ½ or better and no longer receive a tax benefit for itemizing charitable deductions, consider making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to HoCoPoLitSo. To learn how a QCD could be a tax benefit for you and benefit HoCoPoLitSo, consult your tax professional or financial advisor. HoCoPoLitSo's Federal Tax ID is 52-1146948. Thank you!

Upcoming Events

■ Wilde Readings

Second Tuesdays of the month at 7 p.m. at The Columbia Art Center, 5100 Foreland Garth, Columbia 21045

■ Friday, February 21, 2020

Smith Theatre, Howard Community College
The 42nd Irish Evening with novelist **Alice McDermott**, dancers from the **Teelin School of Irish Dance**, and music by **O'Malley's March**. Tickets available at: www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4416880

■ Thursday, April 30, 2020

The Blackbird Poetry Festival – Monteabaro Recital Hall, Howard Community College