

## Poet FreeQuency comes to UNCA's campus for slam

TAYLOR SEXTON  
News Staff Writer  
glanius@unca.edu

Excited chatter and laughter bounced off the Highsmith Grotto's walls before going silent just as poet FreeQuency opened her mouth and let out her words of power.

Mwende Katwiwa, better known as FreeQuency, is a 26-year-old queer Kenyan immigrant, who is also a speaker, performer and poet. Her work deals with social justice topics such as reproductive justice, LGBTQ+ advocacy and Black Lives Matter. She ranked third in the 2015 Individual World Poetry Slam and in 2017 was also a TED-Women speaker.

Katwiwa emphasizes the point of her writing and performing seeks to get her message across and to start a conversation based on truth.

"I'm trying to think what came first, the poetry or the activism? And I think the activism came first," Katwiwa said. "Poetry for me has never been like art for art's sake, about like, you know, the sky is blue and the trees are green. We can say, OK, I know that, but what else out there needs to be named?" Katwiwa said.

One piece Katwiwa performed, titled "The Joys of Motherhood," gave a glimpse into the harsh reality of being an African-American mother and the fear of bringing a child into this world — a child who will constantly be discriminated against for the color of their skin.

In the piece, Katwiwa discussed police brutality and referenced Trayvon Martin, as well as how most African-American women who were either murdered by police or unjustly tried are often never even discussed in the media.

"I have written too many poems about dead, black children to be na-

ive about the fact that there could one day be a poem written about my kids, but I do not want to be a mother that gave birth to poems, I do not want a stanza for a son nor a line for a little girl. I do not want children who will live forever in the pages of poetry yet can't seem to outlive me." Katwiwa ended the piece with a final line, leaving the audience in stunned silence.

Julia Quigley, a sophomore new media major, was part of the team who helped bring Katwiwa to UNC Asheville's campus through a program called National Association for Campus Activities.

Quigley and others traveled to a conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee where there were different performers showcased. Here they chose who they wanted to come to UNCA and they decided on FreeQuency.

"We just got chills from her performance. She had the audience in tears," Quigley said.

Quigley said the team felt FreeQuency's content would be appreciated by many students on campus and would also be supportive to many of the population who go unnoticed at the university.

One of the many people in attendance at this event was junior photography student Hannah Locklear. This was her first time attending a slam poetry event.

"She's really powerful. I think the piece that got me most was the one about how she started to doubt her faith, because I relate to that," Locklear said. "I was raised in a strict Christian household and the moment that I started to doubt what I was taught was a really big one. And her quote, she said, 'Once the seed of doubt is planted in turn, always thirsty,' really stuck also."

After this event, Locklear said she plans on attending more events

PHOTO BY EMMA JORDAN

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

