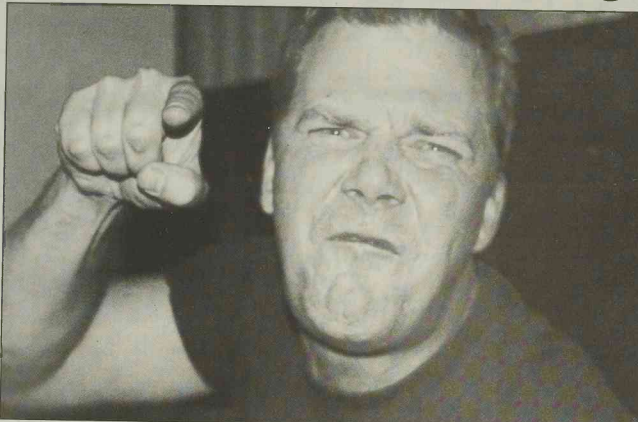


# FEATURES

## Slam poet Taylor Mali entertaining, yet cocky



Slam poet Taylor Mali visited UNCA Oct. 3, delivering his often-funny and in-your-face style of poetry to a receptive crowd. COURTESY OF CHRIS SUMMERVILLE

### Former teacher performs lively material to enthusiastic crowd in Humanities Lecture Hall

Sarah Grano  
Features Reporter

Slam poet Taylor Mali exhibited both talent and ego when he performed for a large crowd in the Humanities Lecture Hall Oct. 3. Mali was entertaining and full of energy. His poems were clever, critical and uproariously funny.

Like most slam poets, Mali talked fast and loud. His poetry relied just as much on performance as it did on the words in the poem. The performance was closer to stand-up comedy than it was to poetry readings at your average coffee house.

Mali's poems were more often entertaining than something to ponder. Like stand-up comic, Mali spent much of the evening articulately making fun of people. In one of his best poems, he mocked other slam poets and their passionate,

political sincerity.

"This is how you write a political poem, and how you deliver it with power," Mali instructed the audience.

He showed how to create a hook-line, and how to repeat it over and over throughout the poem. He led the audience in a call and response, and randomly broke into "Amazing Grace."

"There is emergency in a political poem! There is not time to waste," Mali preached. "Corruption does not have a curfew. Greed doesn't care what color you are, and the New York Police Department is full of police officers."

It was during such poems that it became clear how highly Mali thought of himself. While Mali was nearly always entertaining, he was also cocky.

"I may not be a dead white man yet," said Mali. "But, hey, two out of three ain't bad."

Several of Mali's poems made fun of the way younger people speak. One of them had to do with a girl who was a "like addict."

"Totally, Like, Whatever," Mali preached that people needed to speak with conviction.

"Like, don't think I'm uncool just because I've noticed this," said Mali, imitating young people. "This is just, like, the word on the street, you know? It's like, what I've heard! I have nothing personally invested in my own opinions, okay? I'm just inviting you to join me in my uncertainty!"

Mali's best poems were about being a teacher. For nearly 10 years, Mali taught during the day, wrote poetry at night and competed in poetry slams on the weekend. Many of his poems made fun of his former students, but it was also clear that Mali had a great love for teaching. Mali's subject matter ranged from

an impressive dyslexic Scrabble player to a student's inability to pay attention. He performed one poem laden with inappropriate and rather dirty typos that was a real audience pleaser.

The winner of the 2002 Virginia State poetry slam championship read a poem written by Mali entitled "Objection Overruled."

The poem portrayed an obnoxious lawyer asking how much teachers earn. The answer was an eloquent tirade about the value of teaching.

In the poem, "Lily, Like, Wilson" Mali spoke of one of his students whose mind opened in front of his very eyes.

"So I finally taught somebody something," said Mali. "Namely, how to change her mind. And (!) learned in the process that if I ever

change the world it's going to be one eighth grader at a time."

Most of Mali's poems were light and funny, even though many had a deeper point. Besides his own work, he performed several serious, literary poems, such as "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks.

On the whole, he performed them with great conviction and respect.

Mali performed a very poignant piece he wrote about being at the deathbed of his father that was truly moving.

He used a looping station for the poem, which enabled him to perform it with a song playing in the background.

In one of the more bizarre elements of the performance, Mali taped his voice in order to harmonize with himself while imitating bagpipes.

In the first looping poem, Mali repeated the phrase, "These are the voices in my head. Sometimes I wish they would go away. Sometimes I wish I had a beer."

When he prepared for looping he seemed quite amused with himself. It was, unfortunately, rather boring for the audience.

When he used the looping station to do group pieces by himself it was much more impressive.

On the group pieces, he included both singing and beats in the background.

While the preparation for this part of the performance was slow, the final effect was worth the effort.

Mali has two spoken word CDs, three videos and three books available.

He no longer teaches, and now supports himself on his slam poetry alone. The performance was truly entertaining, even if the performer was occasionally cocky.

### Review

## Phish returns from hiatus: one phan's praise and disdain

Stuart Gaines  
News Editor

Stop your glassblowing, slam on the brakes of that piece of crap Volkswagen microbus, roll one last kind-veggie burrito and tie back those nasty dreadlocks, because hey kids, Phish is back.

Much to the chagrin of Republican parents of suburban white Gen-X hippies and Christian rock fans everywhere, the super-sized jamband Phish returns from a self-imposed two-year-plus hiatus from touring.

Announcing a four-date holiday run late this past summer, the Vermont-based quartet will remake the stage beginning with a New Year's show at New York's Madison Square Garden and followed with three-night run at a fan-favorite venue, Virginia's Hampton Coliseum.

Tickets to all four shows sold out faster than most Phish fans can name their favorite strand of bud, and the hype surrounding their return is distracting oodles of Phish's happy, voting-age youngsters from the upcoming elections.

The online auction house, eBay, has seen tickets to the shows sell for hundreds, even thousands of dollars.



COURTESY OF ADAM FOLEY.COM

After a two-year-plus break from touring, one of the most loved and hated bands of all time, Phish, is back.

One eBay auction that ended Oct. 23 featured a starting bid of \$2,000 for a pair of tickets to the New Year's show.

But as unfair as it may be, there will always be enough trust-fund hippies, or trustafarians, to support the dreaded and evil concert-ticker scalpers at times like these, thus ensuring that tickets stay out of the hands of the grassroots run-of-the-mill fans who perhaps deserve them most.

For all practical purposes, Phish inherited much of the younger portion of the Grateful Dead's fanbase when Jerry Garcia died in 1995.

Since that time, the Phish phenomenon, or more accurately the

Phish phan phenomenon, has snowballed into a monster of almost immeasurable size.

The band's New Year's Eve 2000 performance drew over 80,000 fans (for about \$100 a head) to the Florida Everglades for two days of music in the swamp.

The unusual event featured a non-stop, midnight-to-sunrise performance on New Year's morning.

Phish, known best for their non-sensical lyrics, long-winded jams and intricate songwriting, sold out two and three-night stands at enormous amphitheaters in Indiana, Nevada, Georgia and California.

Many tour-happy, boogie T-shirt selling phans, despite their rabid

desire for more, more, more shows, see the two-year hiatus as a good thing.

Some argue that the band's endless touring schedule made both songwriting and live jams a bit stale in the last years leading up to the hiatus.

"The improvisation was boring at times," wrote Jeff Wafal in a recent article in "Relix" magazine. "Instead of the steep peaks and valleys (of performances during) the mid-90s, Phish's jams often became monotonous plateaus."

"But simply, the band members had run out of ways to challenge themselves and the music suffered." That's putting it nicely, too.

Phish's entire last year of touring featured almost no new material, only new cover tunes, and performances relied heavily on old favorites.

Nevertheless, fans bought tickets with constantly increasing price tags show after show and tour after tour.

The technical proficiency that defined the genius of Phish (and made them so noteworthy to begin with) began slipping away at the end of 17 years of near-constant touring.

And new legions of tone-deaf, trendy Phish fans looking for a thrill just kept screaming louder.

The whole thing started to feel hopeless.

One of the dumbest, cheesiest songs ever written in the history of chess, dub songwriting, "Jennifer Dances," debuted on the December 1999 tour, appeared three times, and then abruptly and jokingly retired from the performance rotation.

The disappearance of "Jennifer Dances" was likely from the band's pure embarrassment about the teen-idol ballad.

It quickly became the butt of even the most dedicated phan's jokes, and when compared with old-school tunes such as "You Enjoy Myself," "Fluffhead" or even "The Wedge," there is no comparison.

Old Phish material boasts complex chord progressions, amazing solos, unique drum-beats and bass

lines, innovative lyrics and a myriad of other qualities that any music-lover living outside of MTV and the top forty can really appreciate.

In short, with Phish, the old things were often better than the newer ones, and most serious fans want to see a return to the quality of those earlier days, in terms of songwriting, performances and band-member attitudes.

Since the time off, the band members have been busy with interesting side projects that should help bring them back into focus when they return on New Year's.

Bassist Mike Gordon recently collaborated with guitar legend Leo Kottke, pianist Page McConnell's band Vida Blue has toured to positive reviews and drummer Jon Fishman's band "Pork Tornado" continues touring as well.

Fishman's band as well as guitarist Trey Anastasio's band will both be in Asheville this fall for live performances.

One can only hope for the best with the return of the granddaddy of all the jambands, Phish.

Despite the hype over the return, Phish still hasn't done anything yet to deserve \$1,000 scalper-ticket prices.

And in this case, phan money may be better spent on organic produce, overpriced live-Phish releases or even, God forbid, a good, old-fashioned stick of deodorant.