

THREE-LINERS

That humble poetry form, haiku, gets its day in the sun at Southpaw



Reading Ground founders (clockwise from top left) Todd Carlstrom, Zachary Hug, Tomi Tsunoda, Sharon Eisman and Sarah Berns at Ginkgo Leaf restaurant in Park Slope.

The Brooklyn Papers / Greg Mango

By Alex Christodoulides
for The Brooklyn Papers

If the last time you felt like an accomplished poet was when you learned to write haiku in elementary school, fret not, because you can recapture that feeling at Southpaw on Wednesday, Nov. 19.

Breeding Ground Productions, an arts and theater group based in Park Slope, is incorporating a haiku competition into the release party for the third issue of its magazine, Reading Ground. At stake are prizes from Beacon's Closet, Something Else Records and Union Street burger haven, Schnack.

Haiku is a centuries-old Japanese form of poetry, usually addressing nature or the seasons. Its basic form, three-line stanzas with five, seven and five syllables per line, lends itself to expression of a single image or idea.

Haiku appealed to Breeding Ground for the simple reason that it's user-friendly and non-threatening. Sharon Eisman, one of the group's founders, said the idea of a haiku competition sprang from the competitive rapping in Curtis Hanson's 2002 movie featuring Eminem, "8 Mile." For the first issue of the magazine last year, she and other Breeding Ground members and friends made haikus using words cut out of magazines (which sounded to GO Brooklyn like the love child of a ransom note and a box of refrigerator poetry).

"It's an interesting art form, and it's very creative," Eisman said. "It's something people can get into, and it's easy. We try to make sure everyone can take part."

There's no complicated rhyming involved, no rhythm to get right or wrong, just 17 syllables in which to express a thought or idea. And, therefore, plenty of space for humor, beauty, inspiration, irreverence and diversion.

Haiku appears to be gaining popularity among non-academic and non-literary audiences and writers. Long known for his fiction, Beat Generation writer Jack Kerouac's haikus were published this year by Penguin U.S.A. In June, Villard Books published "Honku," Park Slope poet Aaron Naparstek's volume of 100 road rage-inspired haikus. Just since

1999, haiku books dealing with nontraditional subjects have quietly proliferated: "Haikus for Jews" by David M. Bader (Harmony Books, 1999), "Cat Haiku" by Deborah Coates (Warner Books, 2001), and "Redneck Haiku" by Mary K. Witte (Santa Monica Press, 2003), among others.

Once a lofty pursuit for serene masters, the simplicity of haiku could make it the next "Chicken Soup for the [fill in the blank]."

Eisman said the haiku concept has been well received among Breeding Ground Productions' friends and admirers.

"People have been very excited about the idea. They've been working on haikus at home" in preparation for the event, Eisman said.

Stage fright is no obstacle: Breeding Ground has recruited "readers" to perform the haikus of the bashful. (In addition to the haiku competition the party will feature live performances, music by DJ Nigel and a "white trash wedding cake.")

Since there's no need to be a poet, or even highbrow, to compete in Breeding Ground's haiku competition, start brainstorming now. There are plenty of opportunities to work on your "flow," your technique, your syllable count, but only one night to show how good you really are - kind of like how, as a kid, you'd spend 364 days talking about your next Halloween costume, but only had one night to wear it.

Breeding Ground Productions' Reading Ground release party will be held Nov. 19 at 7 pm at Southpaw, 125 Fifth Ave. between St. John's Place and Sterling Place in Park Slope. For more information about Southpaw, call (718) 230-0236 or visit the Web site at www.spsounds.com. Admission is free, and the haikus start flowing like sake at 7 pm. For more information about the event, contact Breeding Ground Productions at (347) 683-7698 or visit www.breedingground.com.

[BACK TO THE TOP](#)

GO Brooklyn, November 17, 2003 Issue . | . [View the rest of the issue](#)

