



## Poet Bluz Rogers earns national acclaim

# Slam!

By Rhiannon Bowman

This past December, on a bright Carolina-blue day, Boris “Bluz” Rogers spit “American Pie” at the Belk Tower. “American Pie” being one of his many poems and the action of spitting being the act of delivering slam poetry, which is a competitive art with roots buried in the 1950s jazz-inspired Beat movement that

emphasizes not only content but, with equal weight, delivery. The only rule for slam poets regards length — performances are kept to three minutes and ten seconds. “Four minutes and you’ll lose your audience,” Bluz said.

His words are serious and lyrical, meant to make people think outside of their



own lives, but his message isn't pieced together from an angst-filled artist's life; Bluz is a happily married father of three, internationally ranked poet — he's number 13 — and the reigning Slammaster of Slam Charlotte. He spits his poems to crowds large and small, local and international, and always aims to touch the humanity in everyone while encouraging compassion and acceptance. "We [Slam Charlotte] always say, 'If we just make a difference for one person — reach one person — then it doesn't matter if we win,'" he said.

Yet, it is true that he began writing poetry as a teenager after a heart-wrenching breakup with his high school sweetheart. In a 2008 interview with David Dunn, Vice Chancellor of University Relations and Community Affairs, on the UNC Charlotte Alumni Today Show, Bluz said, "I was horrible, but I got the bug."

It didn't take him long, however, to realize his popular poems, full of lovelorn woe, were self-absorbed and disparaging to women. In the spring of 1995, while

pursuing his Communication Studies degree, he heard fellow poet Jessica Care Moore perform on campus. "She made me care more about what I was saying and want to deal with women in a more respectful way. I saw her years later and told her she changed my life," he said.

Today he is active in the local community, encouraging youth poets to develop their talent, and a devoted family man. And, People cannot get enough of his positive spirit. When they see him at venues, like Wine Up in NoDa or at Spirit Square at the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, where Slam Charlotte competes monthly, people reach out to touch his arm, call his name — quietly as if they're not sure it's him — only to move on once he's acknowledged them and wished them well.

These days his words are reaching a wider audience. In addition to his work with Slam Charlotte, NASCAR introduced Bluz to their audience in 2008 when Speed TV showcased his original poetry during each race of the season. They plan to bring

him back — maybe even in syndication — in 2009. It's a great fit for Bluz, who is a longtime fan. "If you think about the energy and speed of slam and the energy and speed of NASCAR — they naturally go together," he said.

He also hosts a segment, Spoken Word Fridays, each Friday morning, at 7:50 a.m., during Power 98 FM's Morning Madhouse show, has made appearances on numerous other radio and television programs, opened for national recording artists from Pink Floyd to Outkast and performed for business leaders like Ted Turner, Bob Johnson, Jerry Richardson, among others.

"His stars are slung so high and he's reaching for them. That is just inspiring, his progress is so impressive," said Cheryl Spainhour, UNC Charlotte lecturer and Journalism Curriculum Committee chair. Bluz was a student in one of her evening feature writing classes a few years ago when his writing caught her attention. "He is a soft spoken man who is really intelligent."

Even though he admits, "I do feel a little famous," the fame isn't getting to him. His family, which includes son Antonio (16) and daughters Akire (7) and Endya (6 months), keep him grounded. "My son is like, 'Yeah, my Dad's a poet.' He's not impressed," said Bluz with a chuckle.

His met his wife, Erika, during an extended break from his studies when he worked as a teacher's assistant for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system's afterschool program. She encouraged him to return to UNC Charlotte to finish his degree, which he did in 2006. Erika, who is pursuing her Masters Degree at Gardner Webb University, is an educator. "A lot of what I am now is because of her support. It's kind of a tag-team effort. It's not hard, but it's not easy, either," he said.

With a new book, *Articulate Slang*, an album, *StoriLyne*, and an upcoming tour of college campuses — in addition to his NASCAR gig — 2009 is going to be a busy year for this rising UNC Charlotte star.

To hear and see Bluz in action, visit his Web site at [www.poetrybluz.com](http://www.poetrybluz.com). Slam Charlotte performs on the third Friday of each month at Blumenthal Performing Arts' McGlohon Theatre at Spirit Square. Twelve contestants compete at 8 p.m. General admission tickets are \$10 each.