What a Slam — poetry hits a new high

Youth Poetry Slam League and Competition kicks off in 200 schools

BY SOH WEE LING

POETRY in Mongolian, Kazakh, Tamil and Finnish brought a new twist to Velvet Underground's usual version of international flavour.

World Poetry Day Slam last Tuesday was an eye-opening experience, with many new faces trying out poetry slaming — the art of performance poetry.

It's good news for Chris Mooney Singh, a poet/writer and the driving force behind the Poetry Slam Cabaret. He said that the big challenge is getting poets to perform.

"Perhaps they feel they won't look good, losing to one of their peers, or worse still, some unpublished wannabe," he said.

"Or perhaps they feel themselves above the general audience reactions and responses. Or do they just doubt their ability to present well, and then put down the Slam because of their own fears and inadequacies?"

Chris stepped down from his usual role as host, and handed the show over to Slam regulars Lee Yu Moon and Richard Lord.

Poetry Slams have been around for three years and are often themed. At February's Slam of Art and War, the enthusiastic ones leapt onto the stage, occasionally in mock anger, punctuating their words with bold abrupt exclamations while at other times reciting in resigned tones, subdued and disgusted at the mess that war leaves behind.

Six contestants stepped up to say their piece, and the audience was encouraged to respond as they saw fit. There were more cheers than jeers.

The five judges were plucked from the crowd but by the end of the night, it didn't really matter who the winner was.

As Chris said, this month's winner would be forgotten by next month.

Like the many young people at the Slam for the first time, 21-year-old Sarina Mohd Diah from Ngee Ann Polytechnic found it an interesting and unique experience, rejoicing in the fact that "Singapore at least has a place where poetry is alive".

Chris wants more than that and is reaching out to young people with the launch of the Singapore National Youth Poetry Slam League and Competition in 200 secondary and tertiary institutions.

Schools are invited to register Poetry Slam chapters online (www.wordforward.org) and receive free workshop support.

Registered Poetry Slam chapters will then be able to hold slams in their own schools and compete in inter-institutional competitions and eventually a national event.

Poetry Slams are also a platform for budding musicians and singer/songwriters, designed to get new talents in the performing arts to work and grow together.

The Urban Legends Slam at Velvet Underground is at Zouk on April 26 at 7.30 pm. It's $10 per entry.

The writer is a final-year student at Singapore Management University.