

Economist & Sun • Stouffville Tribune

PAGES

POETRY READINGS, FROM RAUNCHY TO RESPECTABLE, KEEP THE ART ALIVE

Better read than dead

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Ilya Nekrich had the audience at the pub howling with laughter. "My, what feet would you have had if you did not succumb to that Footlocker ad," he said in an exaggerated tone.

Coupled with his polyester shirt and fedora, the words provided a glimpse into the flamboyant personality of a man one could mistake for a comedian.

But the York University student is one of nearly 30 young adults at a recent poetry reading near Bathurst Street and Steeles Avenue in Thornhill.

His off-the-wall style embodied what the event was all about: a display of eye-opening work from young people who aren't afraid to reveal precisely what is on their minds, unrepentantly go beyond the bounds of good taste or revel in the bizarre.

While his absurd poems could yield more than one interpretation, Mr. Nekrich left no room for ambiguity about what they are and how he arrives at them.

"Basically, they are stream-of-consciousness poems, which are, unfortunately, done in altered states," he admitted after pouring himself a drink from a pitcher of beer.

Most of the audience seemed as interested in partying as they were in listening to the diverse poetry presented.

The setting resembled a raucous college party, with empty beer pitchers and full ashtrays covering several small tables. Cries of "Woo-hoo!" went up after most poets read their work.

At one point, audience members filled in the strategically placed blanks of a short story by yelling obscenities.

Organizer David Silverberg, a Ryerson University student, said his Suburban Spoken Word, which he hopes

to turn into a monthly event, gives writers between 19 and 27 a chance to showcase their talent.

The Thornhill venue, he added, provides people with an alternative to readings in Toronto.

"I've only been to stuff downtown. This is why I started this," Mr. Silverberg, who has written fiction since he was 11, said. "There's a lack of culture in my area. Nights like these can really serve the literary community."

Though a couple of poets took the opportunity to seriously recite haiku-like works or offer up musings on various issues, a comedic look at life emerged as the dominant approach.

One reader modeled his poems after the Deep Thoughts segment on Saturday Night Live and another man's poem focused on basketball star Vince Carter's armpit. Another young man explained the impact of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles through a tongue-in-cheek essay.

"The artistic community is notorious for not promoting itself well and being stuck in its own little world. It's about reaching out."

In contrast, The Moving Finger monthly readings at The Corner Coffee House on Main Street in Newmarket focus on the serious approach.

The pullovers and sports jackets of participants mirrored their thoughtful work, which they usually deliver in sombre tones.

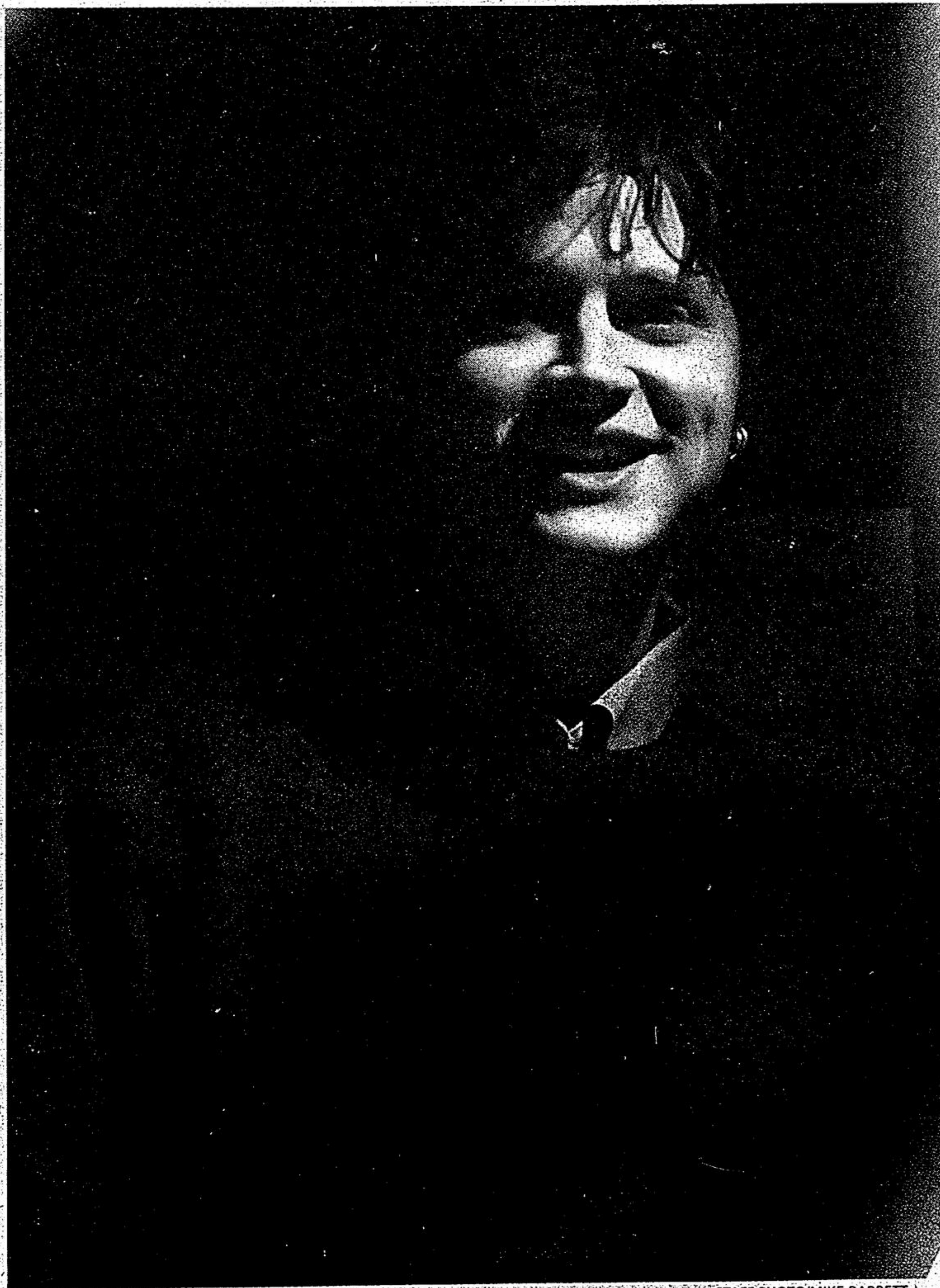
With tables covered in papers or cups of tea as their backdrop, poets waxed lyrically about forces eating away at the trust lovers share and the death of intellectualism through popular culture.

Unlike the Thornhill reading, references to sex were in the context of broader issues and most readers kept obscenities to a minimum.

One poet asked if there were any children present before launching into her rage-filled commentary.

Readers were encouraged to critique

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STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Thornhill poet Mike Drach appreciates the applause after reciting one of his pieces.

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