

Pinsky in Boca Raton: Echoes of Sonny Rollins, Sid Caesar, Mos Def

BY BEN CRANDELL
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Poet, essayist and educator Robert Pinsky is the son of Long Branch, N.J., the same working-class town that spawned the elegiac rock 'n' roll of Bruce Springsteen. And like the Boss, Pinsky has made much of his art about and for the common man.

The popularity of his work prompted the Library of Congress to appoint Pinsky to an unprecedented three terms as United States poet laureate in 1997-2000, when he established the Favorite Poem Project, which explored poetry's place in civic life in America. Pinsky is the only member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters to have appeared on "The Simpsons" and "The Colbert Report."

A former Pulitzer Prize nominee and director of the creative writing program at Boston University, Pinsky sometimes intertwines his poetry with music of a jazz ensemble, and he has produced two CDs with Grammy-winning pianist Laurence Hobgood, "PoemJazz" and "PoemJazz II: House Hour."

On Tuesday, March 5, Pinsky will offer a "PoemJazz" reading at Festival of the Arts Boca, which continues through March 10 with more authors, music, dance and other offerings. In advance of his performance, Pinsky answered questions about his work.

Forty years ago this year, you wrote the book-length poem addressed to your young daughter, "An Explanation of America," in which you said, "A country is the things it wants to see." Which is a prescient assessment of where we are today. If you had to explain America to your young daughter today, what would you say?

Yes, I'm afraid it turned out that we wanted to see a semi-pretend big shot tell

people they are fired: a fantasy of power. As with the parts of "Explanation of America" about xenophobia, nativism, stirrings of fascism, I wish that "wants to see" were not prophetic.

My daughter has children who are about the age she is when I addressed the poem to her. As in the poem, I'd hope to tell them about the better things we want to see: the images of "The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest"; the students performing an all-women production of Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale"; the Sierras; the Vietnamese-language radio station.

You had a lower-middle class upbringing in New Jersey. What is the most important thing you carry with you from that experience?

My father was briefly unemployed and we lived in a "bad" neighborhood, on the shores of a white island, with two bedrooms for the couple and their three kids. But my parents were high-class in a certain way: pretty people, good dancers, excellent joke tellers, elegant dressers, and above all scornful of certain conventional deference paid to money, the right schools, all of that. Oddly, that was good preparation for pursuing poetry, considering it more glorious than accumulating billions of dollars or followers.

You play the saxophone. Who are your musical heroes and what influence have they had on your writing?

The melody of sentences is at the heart of my writing. I want the reader to hear that music, like the people — non-poets! — at FavoritePoem.org. When I perform "PoemJazz," as in this upcoming performance with musicians Neil Bacher and Peter Boeklus, I hope my voice is like a horn. If it's not too presumptuous, something like the playing of Dexter Gordon or Sonny Rollins.

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CELEBRITIES

Tribune news services



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY

Pharrell Williams will be one of the headliners at his new hometown music fest in Virginia Beach, Va.

Pharrell to launch music festival

Pharrell is heading home to Virginia Beach to launch a new music and culture festival.

The Grammy-winning superstar announced Monday Something in the Water, a multiday event he's calling a "cultural experience" that will debut April 26-28. He will perform on a stage set on the beach; other performers include Missy Elliott, Travis Scott, Migos, Dave Matthews Band, Janelle Monae, Diplo, SZA, Lil Uzi Vert and Pusha T. Tickets go on sale Friday.

Pharrell said in an interview with The Associated Press that he created the festival to give back to the community that raised him and helped him achieve his goals and dreams.

"Virginians are taste-makers," he said. "Virginia has been home to some of the most gifted artists, athletes, and scientists to ever live. And it makes sense — the people of Virginia are one-of-a-kind: uniquely gritty, bold, and brilliant," Pharrell said. "The world will see what we Virginians have known all along: there really is Something in the Water."

Something in the Water will also include a pop-up church service, karaoke featuring trap music as well as moments with wellness expert Deepak Chopra and Geoffrey Canada, the president of the Harlem Children's Zone.

— Associated Press

Morrissey to play Broadway:

Morrissey announced today that he will perform on Broadway for the first time in his career this May. The



seven dates, at New York's Lunt-Fontanne Theater, will be "an intimate yet exciting exploration of Morrissey's expansive career," according to the announcement. The announcement implies that Morrissey will be performing songs from his five-year tenure as singer and lyricist of the iconic group The Smiths.

Prodigy singer Flint dies:

Keith Flint, lead singer of dance-electronic band The Prodigy, has been found dead at his home near London. He was 49. His death was confirmed Monday by the band in a statement. Essex Police say the death is not being treated as suspicious. The energetic frontman was also known for his distinctive look: black eyeliner and hair spiked into two horns.

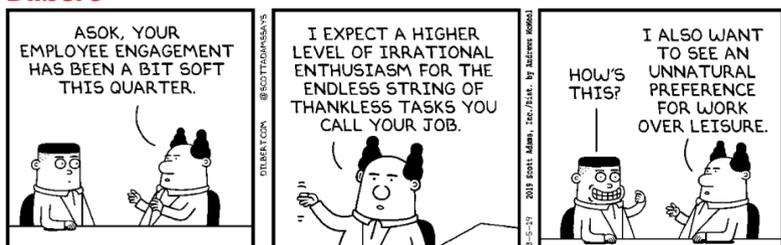
Royal Family warns against internet trolls:

Britain's royal family warned Monday that it will block internet trolls posting offensive messages on its social media channels — and may report offenders to police. Buckingham Palace, Clarence House and Kensington Palace spelled out the policy banning offensive, hateful and racist language. The guidelines come amid concern about the online abuse aimed at the wives of Prince William and Prince Harry.

March 5 birthdays:

Actor Eddie Hodges is 72. Actor Kevin Connolly is 45. Actress Eva Mendes is 45. Model Niki Taylor is 44.

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