


GAY & LESBIAN

Issue No. 186 April 15-22, 1999

HOME

TIMEOUTNY.COM

What's Where

This week's picks ▶

Eating & Drinking Online

Film: Now playing

TIME OUT NEW YORK

Features

Check Out

Eat Out

Get Naked

Magazine archives

TIME OUT GUIDES - NY

Eating & Drinking Guide

New York City Guide

Student Guide

TIME OUT IN OTHER CITIES

N. American City Guides ▶

International City Guides ▶

Advanced search ▶

Contact us ▶

Get listed ▶

We're hiring ▶



Profile

Tongue twister

***Pier Queen* Emanuel Xavier puts a new spin on NYC's spoken-word scene**

By Les Simpson

As we all know by now, over the past several years the poetry scene has shed its staid, snoozefest image. Live readings are all the rage at hip coffeeshouses and bookstores, and today's compelling poets are akin to the rap lyricists of hip-hop and modern folk-singers like Jewel. Among this new breed is one of the rising stars of the city's spoken-word circuit, Emanuel Xavier. Through his poetry, including a self-published book of his work called *Pier Queen*, the Bushwick, Brooklyn, native has put to verse his emotions and experiences, including his rough-and-tumble adolescence.

?At 16, Xavier was kicked out of his home for being gay. With no money or place to live, he gravitated toward the Hudson River piers at the end of Christopher Street, a refuge for outcast gay youth. For the next few years, he survived by hustling and selling drugs. "At the time," he says, "I didn't really give a fuck about anything, and it was easy for me to make money off of somebody else's weaknesses."

?The harsh conditions of homelessness and the struggle to survive could easily have produced a brooding delinquent, but Xavier, who is now 28, has emerged as a gregarious young man with a quick smile. He credits much of his survival to New York's "house" scene—the gay makeshift families profiled in the 1990 movie *Paris Is Burning*, whose members compete with one another at elaborate balls in categories like "femme realness" and voguing. For a short while, the late Anji Xtravaganza, the transsexual "mother" of the House of Xtravaganza, provided Xavier with room and board. "She was very motherly and took care of me," he recalls. "That's what houses were about to me."

SERVICES

Personals

Dining reservations

Hotel reservations

Hostel bookings

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscribe now

Customer service

Back issues

Exclusive subscriber e-newsletter

PROMOTIONS

You're Invited!

Offers and Competitions

Caught on Camera

ADVERTISING

Media kit

?Xavier first encountered the poetry scene in 1997 at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe on East 3rd Street. "It was very street, and they were talking about issues that were real to me—poverty, racism, oppression," says Xavier, who is of Puerto Rican/Ecuadorian heritage. He was also struck by the similarities between the slam-poetry sessions and the ball scene. "They're both competitions about who's the fiercest. And there's divas and legends in both cultures."

?Soon after his first visit, Xavier began writing and performing his own poetry. "One night [at the Nuyorican], I read 'Bushwick Bohemia,' and by the end of the night, I was the winner of the poetry slam," he says. "The audience's love and support was something I really needed at the time. I had found my form of expression." Xavier immersed himself in spoken word and became a player on the queer-poetry scene, establishing the monthly Realness and Rhythms series at A Different Light bookstore, which is now hosted by Reggie Cabico.

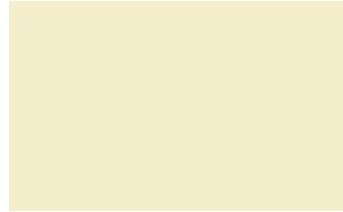
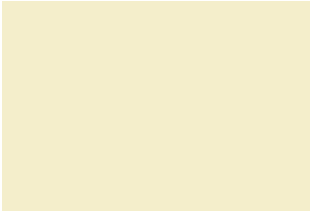
?Last year, Xavier decided to combine his love of both the poetry and ball scenes by founding the House of Xavier, a collection of poets, playwrights and writers. He is the house's father, and his friend Carlos is the mother. He admits that merging the two worlds has been a challenge and that at House of Xavier's first ball last fall, the participants were confused by categories like "Best Slam Poet in High-Heel Stilettos." "No one knew quite what to do; [they] looked like deer caught in headlights," Xavier remembers.

?For next autumn's event, Xavier has come up with a solution. "Before our next big ball in September, we're having two miniballs," he explains. "One is geared more toward the poetry scene, and the other is directed at the ball children. And hopefully, when we bring them back together, everyone will have more of an idea of what the House of Xavier is trying to do. I want to introduce poetry as a new means of expression and as an alternative for gay and lesbian youth."

?Whether Xavier can convince other houses and poets to embrace his hybrid remains to be seen, but if nothing else, he's created his own queer family, one he claims is all about "positivity, nurturing and supporting one another." Meanwhile, Xavier is putting the finishing touches on his upcoming semiautobiographical novel, *Christ-Like*, which is due to be published this fall. He is planning a national tour to promote the book, as well as his poetry, and in October, he hopes to star in a one-man show.

?Xavier admits that his brash, self-promotional game plan, including the founding of his house, has ruffled the feathers of other poets used to more modest behavior. "I've been criticized greatly for being aggressive," he says, "but I think the true sign of any artist is that you don't really care about other people's criticism; you just say what you feel you need to say. From the piers, I developed a thick skin, and I'm not afraid of what people think."

The House of Xavier's Slam Mini-Ball is on Wednesday 21 at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. See listings for information.



[Contact us](#) • [Advertise](#) • [Get listed](#) • [Subscribe](#)
© 2005. All Rights Reserved. Time Out New York. [Privacy Policy](#)