

CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter 1

Putting Performance Poetry in Context	15
Historical survey	15
A fresh approach now	16
Page and voice	17
Essential reading	18
Your options	19
Key Points	23

Chapter 2

Monitoring the Preparation Required	24
Your important decision	24
What assets are universal?	24

Explaining the performance element	26
Rhythm and structure	27
'Voice' poetry - freedom and flexibility	29
A reading programme	30
Your profile of essential preparation	32
Key Points	33

Chapter 3

Taking the First Steps in Writing	34
Finding out what makes a poem for performance	34
Delivery	36
Know your own voice	40
Some useful research skills	41
Key points	43

Chapter 4

Applying Working Methods I	44
The problem of subjects	44
An idea to a draft	45
Using a tape recorder	46
Record and vary speech qualities	47
A question of tone	51
Key points	56

Chapter 5

Applying Working Methods II	57
Acquiring supporting skills	57
Developing a Character	59
Linking and 'patter'	60
Planning a set	62

Structure in Performance	63
Key Points	66

Chapter 6

Acquiring Performance Skills I	67
Confidence first	67
Learn by watching and logging	68
Studying radio performers	70
Non-Verbal elements	72
Key Points	73

Chapter 7

Acquiring Performance Skills II	74
Reading aloud-narrative	75
Reading aloud-drama	76
How to find positive feedback	78

Varying readings 79

Key Points 82

Chapter 8

Working with Others 83

The advantages of collaboration 83

Complementing and using themes 85

Dynamics! 88

Key Points 90

Chapter 9

Organising yourself 91

Networking and promotion 92

Essential paperwork etc. 93

Communication factors 94

Key Points 97

Chapter 10

Resources	98
The need for up-dating	98
The Scope of Potential Sources	100
Courses, societies and outlets	101
Essential reference: books and magazines	102

Chapter 11

Innovation and experiment	105
Key points	114

Chapter 12

Case studies	115
---------------------	------------

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a definite rise in the numbers of poets who have extended their writing interests and working methods into performance, rather than keeping to the 'page poetry' of meditation, or poems of love, faith, social commentary and so on. Much of this writing has been with comedy-poetry crossover in mind. But there has been very little in print which might supply some guidance and advice.

My involvement in organising poetry events, and in giving readings, has taught me that most failure in performance is due to delivery and preparation rather than to the actual poetic material being read. It has also become clear that the audience for poetry readings is growing (and changing) and that it is no longer satisfactory to stand up and read poems, expecting no audience rapport or interplay.

For these reasons, it seemed necessary to make a start and write something that will help you if you have picked up this book out of curiosity. We live in an age when poetry is no longer a part of that Romantic image of the lonely writer of genius in a garret. Performing poetry has become a central part of the comedy, mass media and literature scene, easily observed at any literature festival, book week or arts fair. It is an art form that is also making space for itself on radio, too. Popular programmes such as *Stanza* and *Poetry Please* on Radio 4 indicate the diversity of subjects and approaches possible to anyone interested in writing poetry for performance.

This book will provide you with advice on the special kind of writing needed here, details of organisational ability needed and techniques of improving delivery and voice projection. The idea behind this is that you may be led to consider extending your range if you are already a well-established poet, or that, if you are a beginner, this may be a short introduction to what is surely one of the most exciting developments in poetry in recent times.

As I write this, I note that on radio this week is (a) a series of readings of poems specifically written for radio by Peter Reading, Kathleen Jamie and Tom Paulin; Murray Lachlan Young has performed on the Paul Ross Show, *The Guardian* has printed a long feature on poetry bohemia, and my Artscene diary for Yorkshire events features no fewer than twelve poetry events in clubs, pubs and arts centres.

Stephen Wade
2007