

Syed Umar Warsi, Amir Safi, and Amal Kassir

An evening of spoken word poetry

Friday, February 21, 2020, at 7:30 pm
Strauss Hall, Hancher Auditorium

SYED UMAR WARSI is a spoken word artist, motivational speaker, and entrepreneur. He was born in the hustlin bustlin city of New York, and abruptly moved to a quiet suburb of Illinois. He shares his experiences growing up in the two very different environments with conservative immigrant parents from Pakistan. How did he try to meet the expectations of his parents and deal with the pressures of public school? What was it like being in sixth grade when 9/11 happened? How did his experience growing up influence his Muslim faith? Syed's spoken word poems and story-telling talent will take you on a roller coaster of emotions, excitement, and empathy.

Syed went from public school to a college preparatory school where he struggled to keep his grades up. He dropped out of high school while in the tenth grade. When Syed turned 19, he finally earned his GED and got admitted to a community college. Transferring to a four-year university didn't last long, as he was academically dismissed in his junior year. Syed fought his way back to obtain a bachelor's degree in social services and now holds an MBA from Indiana University.

AMAL KASSIR was born and raised in Denver, Colorado, to a German-Iowan mother and Syrian father. Two seemingly opposing worlds combined to grant Amal her lived experience. She spent years on her grandmother's farm in Syria and enjoyed the sweetness of fresh parsley and ripe lemons. Her grandmother taught them the secret recipes that stay highlighted on their restaurant's dinner menu.

This was long before any war or conflict. Amal enjoyed the company of her cousins, aunts, and uncles through each visit. Thirty-one of whom are no longer with us due to airstrikes, chemical attacks, explosions, and sheer chaos.

The landscape which she knew all too well, flattened by the heaping rubble of broken buildings. Trapped underneath were cousins that Amal spent the summers with. She watched from a distance, on screens, and video messages—as the number of casualties and murders grew bigger.

At home, in Denver, Amal designed her own undergraduate degree called 'Community Programming in Social Psychology.' She argues that nothing can change without the solidarity of community; a notion that led her into the undefined territory of social justice activism. A realm where public opinion has the power to change public policy. Nationwide, Amal organizes vigils, demonstrations, and fundraisers for victims, refugees, and under-served populations. She uses her voice to speak up for those who had been silenced due to language barriers or lack of representation.

Her fiery spoken word poetry and story-telling activism is the result of her lived experience. The sadness, frustration seeps through every single word. The urgency to act now boldly resounds in her voice. But she never walks away without giving you a sense of her name. Her name, Amal, which means "Hope" in Arabic. The hope that we will live to see a better world: one that doesn't hate people seeking asylum, discriminate over race, religion or gender—or look the other way when seeing police brutality in the streets. As citizens of the globally connected world, we need to be armed with information more than ever. It's at our fingertips.

Amal is a major proponent in education and building individual agency in particularly under-served and vulnerable populations. She hopes to take part in the global effort for literacy in war-struck areas and refugee camps through writing. She is an international spoken word poet, having performed in 10 countries and over 100 cities. She has conducted workshops, given lectures, and recited her poetry in venues ranging from youth prisons, to orphanages to refugee camps to universities to churches to community spaces for the public.

AMIR SAFI is from College Station and is based out of Houston, Texas. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University. He is the co-founder of Mic Check 501(c)3, the Texas Grand Slam Poetry Festival and the founder of Write About Now. He is a 2017 Houston Poet Laureate Finalist, a 2013 and 2015 Southern Fried Poetry Slam Champion, a 2013 National Slam Poetry semi-finalist, and his work has been featured by A plus, Upworthy, *The Huffington Post*, Whataburger, Total Frat Move, and more. Most recently, his work has been published by *Pittsburgh Poetry Review* and *Tincture Journal*, and he has received recognition as a semi-finalist for the *Crab Creek Review* 2017 Poetry Prize as well as a finalist for the *North American Review's* 2018 James Hearst Poetry Prize.

Amir's poetry is a blend of American culture and Iranian heritage that sheds light on the unique narrative of being Muslim in America, immigration, inter-sectional identity, and popular culture. He is a writer, a poet, and a masterful storyteller. Aside from nationally recognized performances, Amir also shares his gift through writing workshops.

Negin Farsad

\$10
STUDENT
TICKETS

Saturday, February 22
7:30 pm
Hancher Auditorium

A self-described “social justice comedian,” Negin Farsad has been named one of the 10 Best Feminist Comedians by *Paper* magazine and one of the 50 Funniest Women by *Huffington Post*. A regular on NPR’s *Wait Wait... Don’t Tell Me!*, she is also the writer, director, and star of the romantic comedy *3rd Street Blackout* and the director and producer of *Nerdcore Rising* and *The Muslims Are Coming!* While promoting the latter, she sued New York’s MTA for the right to put up humorous posters about Muslims. She won. She’ll win you over, too.

Following the performance, Farsad will sign copies of her book, *How to Make White People Laugh*. Prairie Lights will be on hand with copies of the book for sale.

TICKETS:

ADULT: \$40 | \$30 | \$20

COLLEGE STUDENT: \$36 | \$10

YOUTH: \$20 | \$10

EVENT SPONSORS:

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and Doris E. Abboud
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Jo Ellen Ross



A film by Negin Farsad & Dean Obeidallah

FREE RELATED EVENT:

The Muslims are Coming! film screening
Saturday, February 22, 2:00 pm
Strauss Hall in Hancher Auditorium

Join us for a free film screening of *The Muslims are Coming!*, a documentary by Negin Farsad & Dean Obeidallah following a stand-up tour of Muslim-American comedians. Farsad will participate in a talk-back with attendees following the movie.



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