
Words Are More Powerful than Anything: Grand Re-Opening of The Muse Writers Center

January 19, 2016 By Jesse Scaccia

The most influential art form in the world just may be the most under-appreciated. There are forever echoing cries to support local artists, while boards filled with millionaires spend good chunks of their lives making sure art forms like theater, symphony, and opera are funded and in long-term homes.

Not so much when it comes to writing, an art form both in the shadows and as ubiquitous as light.

Which is why what Michael Khandelwal has done with The Muse Writers Center over the past ten years is so important. A true bootstrap non-profit driven by passion, The Muse has helped thousands of writers of all ages find their voice.

“We’re like a bright light house, and our beam is language,” said Khandelwal from The Muse’s new headquarters in the Ghent Market Shops. “Words are more powerful than anything you can imagine.”



L to R: Sarah Pringle, Michael Khandelwal, Michael Frost, Kindra McDonald

The new space is a grand improvement from The Muse's past home in West Ghent, with five classrooms, a small auditorium, two semi-private writing rooms, an impressive poetry library, and a kitchenette. It's not the Wells Theatre, but it doesn't need to be — and in many ways what happens at The Muse is every bit as important.

"We have to have things like The Muse," said celebrated local poet and Muse board member Tim Seibles. "We need places for writing that aren't under the dominion of colleges and schools. No entrance exams. No GRE. You sign up, you write."

And write they do at The Muse. There are 74 classes running this term, with something in the neighborhood of 350 to 400 students taking everything from poetry to memoir to screenplay writing. Classes are reasonably priced, from around \$45 to \$230, depending on how often the class meets. The opportunity to find new clarity of voice, new meaning to old stories, new worlds to create is, as they say, priceless.

"It's not something they're getting anywhere else in their lives," said Sarah Pringle, an ODU MFA grad and Muse instructor who often teaches teen creative writing. "We don't grade. It's more about teaching in the moment and how students grow through feedback and workshops. It's more of a serious group of writers than they're likely to find at their high school."

According to Pringle, numerous students have come out in her classes. Not because she prodded or asked,

but because of the safe environment cultivated in writer's groups. A special community develops among writers unlike I've seen in any other art community. There is so little artifice between our art and our truths, between our sentences and our souls. One's writing is as direct an expression of one's intellect and understanding of humanity as I know.

To write, as well, is to tap into the grandest human narrative, of which we are each nothing less than vital syllables.

"College degrees can be lovely," said Seibles, "but they're not the only way to develop a voice."

To wit, I have never met an editor who cared more about my degrees than my writing samples. If you can write, you can write. Period.

"Writing gives anyone a voice," said Khandelwal, a Norfolk Christian and University of Southern California grad. "It gave me a voice. It's a way to express important things and stories from our lives."

Writing, I believe, taps into a thought process not accessible through any other way. It is vital for understanding ourselves, our worlds, the madness of it all.

"Human nature is the basis of life," said Khandelwal. "If humans weren't so peculiar and wonderful, we'd have no fun."

The Grand (Re-)Opening: The Muse Writers Center takes place on Saturday, January 30th, from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. For more info and schedule, [click here](#). For more on The Muse, [here is their website](#).

Disclosure: like most local writers, I proudly am a former instructor at The Muse, and likely future, too.

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Krista Vowell Clark · Virginia Beach, Virginia

I Love learning at The Muse! It has brought out my Artistic Creativity that has been hidden inside of me for many, many years! It's a Blessing to realize it's Not too late for me to Dream. Michael Khandelwal is Great at what he does and I'm sure The Muse has gained it's success due to His involvement! Skye Zentz is an Amazing teacher, songwriter & singer. I look up to her and feel Honored to be a student in her class!

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The Muse Writers Center

Grand opening now the 30th due to weather... See you in a week!

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Rebecca Burcher Jones · Randolph-Macon College

Has the date of the open house changed? I thought it was Jan. 23, not Jan. 30. Muse web site says Jan. 23.

Like · Reply · 1 · Jan 20, 2016 10:36am



The Muse Writers Center

Grand Opening now the 30th due to weather. See you then. I called Jesse while I was in the car... but the web is now updated! Thanks!

Like · Reply · 2 · Jan 20, 2016 12:40pm



Brett Bluestein · Richmond, Virginia

Just moved to the area and cannot wait to take my first class here this spring!

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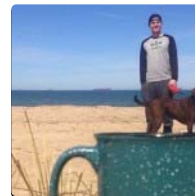
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Jesse Scaccia

Jesse is the editor in chief of AltDaily. He has many biases and local involvements. They include being the chair of the public art committee and board member for the Norfolk