

Taking a Break from the Tour

By Shea Leading
The Current Beat

Buddy Wakefield has performed at hundreds of venues across America and on February 23rd, Champlain College's Argosy Gymnasium is being added to the list. His speech and poetry often remix, weaving between casual conversation and his own poetry, which he spouts from memory. Even through a cellphone speaker, he exudes a kind of vibrant energy that radiates through his voice, even as he sits in traffic heading to his next performance.

Buddy, born in Shreveport, LA, and raised in Baytown, TX, now calls Seattle, WA home. But Buddy likes to "live for a living," which inspired him to leave his gig at a biomedical firm in Washington in 2001, sell and give away everything he owned, and begin a life on tour. He spent several years traveling around in his Honda Civic, writing, and "couch surfing." Since, he's spent the majority of his time on tour, traveling from one venue to the next without much pause between them.

"[I'm] quite busy. I'm on the road for five weeks, working every day, and trying to get to the next venue. I'm in North Carolina right now, headed to Chapel Hill," Buddy said February 9th, while still traveling from his show in South Carolina the previous evening.

"There's this movie I just watched, it's called *Lars and the Real Girl* and I wish that *Lars and the Real Girl* could do the interviews for me," Buddy said, after mentioning that interviews aren't his strong suit. "I would rather be someone who's ready to give you a milkshake hug and get on a waterslide and talk about playing piano."

Buddy released his first full slam poetry album, *A Stretch of Presence*, through Strange Famous Records, a label owned by popular rapper, writer, and performer Sage Francis. Strange Famous Records also produced Buddy's next album, *Run On Anything* (2006). His most recent album, *Live at the Tyler Cannon Grand* (2009), however, was produced by Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe Records.

Buddy has also published four books through Write Bloody Publishing. His most recent project, *HENHOUSE*, "based on Penthouse, but for chickens and their lovers" and a guide to raising your own chickens, is close to home, as Buddy is the proud owner of eleven chickens, among other animals.

Buddy gained international recognition when he won the International World Slam Poetry Competition (2004), and then became the first slam poet to win twice in a row (2005). Still, Buddy says he's "just a regular ol' Joe Blow who also gets nervous almost every single day." Even with all of these accomplishments, Buddy has a clear favorite.

"Have you seen the TEDx Talk by any random chance?" Buddy asked, referring to a TEDx Talk he gave at Utah State University in November 2012 on Vipassana.

"That [talk is] all I wanna say to anybody right now. That's my favorite thing I ever wrote. While I don't feel like I was the best representative of breath or breathing that day, or even in this moment, it is everything I aspire for," said Buddy, reflecting on the speech he gave that day.

Vipassana, a form of meditation, means “to see things as they are,” and Wakefield is an active participant. Even now, his tour schedule on his website, lists several weeks at the end of March and beginning of April being reserved for Vipassana.

“[Vipassana] is everything that got me out of where I came from. It is my one and only answer, a love of this life,” said Buddy, adding, “The whole world is so addicted to tragedy right now, you can get plenty of that in anybody’s manipulative music or movies or anything.”

“I’m so focused on getting to the next town and sharing this discovery, and that’s a real responsibility to me,” Buddy said. Vipassana is more than meditation for Buddy. It’s his mission, spreading breath and love of life to everyone he can reach.

“If there’s anything that I could really say, it’s that folks, especially myself, should practice more and know less,” said Buddy, “We already know all the answers. We have to practice them now.”

To view Buddy’s TEDx Talk, visit his website at www.buddywakefield.com