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ARTS

All the write moves

Performance art meets literature at competition at the BMA on Saturday

By Peter Krause
THE BALTIMORE SUN

It is not often that literature fuses with the swagger of hip-hop and the hilarity of stand-up comedy.

The Baltimore Literary Death Match, which comes to the Baltimore Museum of Art on Saturday, celebrates these qualities in fiction, poetry and everything in between, transforming literature into edgy performance art.

Co-created in 2006 by Todd Zuniga, founding editor of fiction-poetry-comics magazine *Optim*, Literary Death Match features a lineup of four authors who emphatically read seven-minute pieces for an audience and three judges. The authors face off in pairs, with judges offering commentary on literary merit and performance, among other things. The two finalists compete for the Literary Death



BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO 2009
Playwright James Magruder will be one of the four contestants facing off.

Match crown. In each city, the contest draws from local talent. Think Comedy Central's celebrity roast merged onstage with the New York Times Book Review. Performing this year are Daniel Wal-

lace, author of "Big Fish" (the basis for Tim Burton's 2008 film of the same name); Stephanie Barber, experimental filmmaker; James Magruder, author and playwright; and Cliff Lynn, poet and retired Navy veteran.

Barber will represent the Baltimore fiction journal *Publishing Genius* and Lynn will represent Baltimore reading series *Speak Your Piece*.

Judging their work will be William P. Tandy, author of "Smile, Hon, You're in Baltimore!" local musician Ellen Cherry and Baltimore beatboxer Shokolech.

Known by fans and critics as "the great literary roast," the Literary Death Match offers an experimental context for authors to present their work. The entire ordeal is framed with irreverence, humor and absurdity. Audience participation is highly encouraged, so be prepared to cheer, comment and laugh. More than 380 readers have been fea-

If you go

The Baltimore Literary Death Match's Verbal Smackdown is 9:30 p.m.-11 p.m. Saturday at the Baltimore Museum of Art, 10 Art Museum Drive. Tickets are \$10 and include admission to the museum. For more information, call 410-573-1582 or go to literarydeathmatch.com.

tured, including Tom Perrotta, novelist and Academy Award-winning screenwriter; Stephen Elliot, author and Stanford University fellow; and Michelle Richmond, a best-selling novelist and essayist.

More than 300 judges have participated, including Richard Russo and Anne Sauley, Pulitzer Prize winners, Scott Adsett, 30 Rock star and DJ Moby. Literary Death Match has held monthly events in New York, London and San Francisco. Other events have been held in 24 cities around the world, including Dublin, Paris and Beijing.

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