

# The Heart and Soul of Our Poetry Community

Posted on **April 8, 2011** by **Marla Akin**



On **Friday, April 8**, poets from across the country will read at Austin Museum of Art downtown in a benefit honoring The University of Texas at Austin's Livingston Endowed Chair in Poetry **Dean Young**, beloved poet and teacher who faces a heart transplant.

Nationally acclaimed poets **Tony Hoagland, Thomas Lux, Dobby Gibson, Barbara Ras, Stuart Dischell, David Rivard** and **Joe Di Prisco** are volunteering their time to fly in for the free event and will read along with a raft of local poets, including visiting professors **Tomaz Salamun** and **Mary Ruefle**, and members of the University community **Kurt Heinzelman, Judith Kroll, Roger Reeves** and **Malachi Black**. Each reader will read a favorite poem by Dean and a piece of their own.

Dean joined the university's permanent faculty in 2008 as the first of two distinguished chairs created by the **Michener Center for Writers** and Office of Graduate Studies. A professor in the **Department of English**, he teaches poetry workshops and seminars in both creative writing programs. Among one of the most prolific poets of his generation, celebrated for his energetic and inventive style—a mercurial blend of tragedy and joy, the surreal and the minutely observed—he has more than a dozen books of poetry and prose to his credit, including "Fall Higher," forthcoming this year; "Primitive Mentor," shortlisted for the 2009 Griffin International Poetry Prize; "Elegy on

Toy Piano,” nominated for the Pulitzer Prize; and “Embryoyo,” as well as a critical work on poetry, “The Art of Recklessness.”

Dean’s imprint on the poetry program in English and the Michener Center has been immediate and distinctive. English chair Elizabeth Cullingford calls him a “consummate teacher who’s brought dynamism and new ideas to our Creative Writing program.” Leanna Petronella, a poet in her second year at the Michener Center, says that Dean uses “an odd and brilliant metaphorical language to get at what poetry *does*.” MFA candidate Zebadiah Taylor, whose thesis Dean is supervising *in absentia* this spring, says “No other person I’ve encountered understands poetry as deeply.”

But the heart Dean Young puts into his teaching and mentoring is in trouble. For the last dozen years or so, he has lived with congestive heart



failure due to hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a rare disease of the heart muscle. Naturally spry and athletic, he was, until last year, able to spring back from periodic episodes of weakness. Last fall, his condition worsened dramatically, until this spring he required surgery to place external mechanical pumps to take over the work of his heart. He’s spent much of the last several months hospitalized, fighting infection and setbacks, and still he has kept up with his students, texting and answering emails, and meeting in person, when his health allows, to discuss their poetry. He is at the highest priority on the transplant list at Seton Medical Center at Austin, and awaits only a suitable donor. Despite his health insurance, out of pocket expenses are enormous.

Among Friday night’s readers is Joe DiPrisco, Dean’s longtime friend who chairs a fund-raising campaign through the **National Foundation for Transplants**, a nonprofit organization that has been assisting transplant patients with advocacy and fundraising support since 1983. The organization will have information available at the reading about how supporters can help with Dean’s medical needs.

Donations are welcome, but the reading is free at **AMOA Downtown**, 9th and Congress and begins at **6 p.m.**

This entry was posted in **In the News**, **Literary Events** and tagged **Dean Young**, **Department of English**, **Michener Center for Writers**, **National Foundation for Transplants**, **poetry** by **Marla Akin**. Bookmark the **permalink** [<https://sites.utexas.edu/shelflife/2011/04/08/the-heart-and-soul-of-our-poetry-community/>].



### About Marla Akin

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1 THOUGHT ON "THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR POETRY COMMUNITY"



Soul retrieval

on **February 7, 2012 at 7:10 pm** said:

We were produced as creatures (souls ) which might with the heart connect to the Divine (this is my very own way of referring to the particular arena of your natural god ) and with the system ...

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