



The MultiCultural Center Presents

Saul Williams

Thursday, May 19, Isla Vista Theater/ 8 PM

General \$5 & Students \$3 / tickets 893-2064

Sponsored by the IHC's Visiting Artist Program

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

POSITIVE PROCLAMATIONS

Saul Williams, in performance. At Isla Vista Theater, Thursday, May 19.

Reviewed by Ethan Stewart

If you don't know who Saul Williams is, it's time to go to the record store and check him out. That said, I'm not really sure how to write about Williams' sold-out show last Thursday night at Isla Vista Theater. The evening was, without any doubt, the singular most positive and engaging performance I've seen. On the same night that Malcolm X would have turned 80, Williams used his spiritual blend of poetry, singing, rapping, and philosophizing to break down walls and open the minds of the standing-room-only audience.

From the moment he stepped on stage and admitted to not having any specific plan of presentation, the New York native transcended the typical performer-viewer relationship and created a separate, safe, and elevated community during his nearly three-hour performance. As Williams went through eight poems - ranging from works in progress to his latest single "Black Stacy" - he often paused to answer questions from the crowd and to wax poetic on subjects ranging from the demise of hip-hop and how to end a poem to what book he's currently reading (*Verses of Forgiveness* by Myriam Antaki), as well as his hopes for the current generation. His message of unity and truth demands that we all "reject mediocrity" and "get beyond defining ourselves via negativo."

I first saw Saul perform almost 10 years ago at a poetry reading in New York City. Full of rage and power, he was on fire that night, very much a rough, rugged, in-your-face poet-warrior with a message. The man who performed in I.V. last week was very much the same artist, but now he's also a father of two and a seasoned traveler of the world. His poetry - filled with imagery from Greek mythology, astrology, the world's religions, and pop culture - is

equally comfortable explaining the day-to-day struggle of the ghetto as it is the history of Egypt and the depths of the human soul.

He often attacked contemporary hip-hop artists for their bogus posturing and materialistic obsessions, saying, "Most of these cats don't really understand the power of hip-hop." As the night wore on, the subject inevitably turned to President Bush and his foreign policy of pain and suffering. Williams took the tone of a hopeful prophet when he said, "More and more people are beginning the process of processing. We are becoming conscious. Believe me when I say the tables have already begun to turn. . . . The youth of this age are much more on the same page than you'd imagine."

UCSB's MultiCultural Center brought Williams as part of the school's visiting-artist program; his residence included writing workshops, classroom visits, and a KCSB radio appearance, and culminated with the I.V. performance. With corporate America in the driver's seat these days, so much has become a mass-produced, soulless mess. But as the poet said last Thursday, "There will always be things that cannot be commercialized or watered down." Luckily for us, an evening with Saul Williams is one of those things.