LIFE

BRUCE COHEN READS POEMS OF HUMANE REFLECTION FROM NEW BOOK



Bruce Cohen delivers his poetry at the Black Box Theater on Thursday, Oct. 8. He read several poems from his works Imminent Disappearances, Impossible Numbers & Panoramic X-Rays and his new work, Botrytis.

PHOTOGRAPH BY COLIN MITCHELL, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

by Elijah Polance
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/THEY/THEM
elijah.polance@uconn.edu

Bruce Cohen, a poetry professor at the University of Connecticut, gave a reading of poems from "Botrytis," his sixth book of poetry, on Thursday. Over 60 attendees gathered in the Black Box Theater at 6 p.m. to hear the reading, which was sponsored by UConn's Creative Writing Program.

V. Penelope Pelizzon, another professor in the English department, introduced Cohen and his new book of poetry, which released in September 2026. She described his writing as "disarming in the best way," connecting the feeling with his use of unexpected emotional turns and glimmers of humanity. She also shed light on the title, which refers to a genus of fungi that can damage crops with mold. However, one botrytis species has a use for making wine by concentrating grape sugars.

"Something potentially negative or even slightly repugnant that turns out to have these unexpected effects of heightening culture and increasing our ability to increase something might serve as a great metaphor for how Bruce's poems work," Pelizzon said.

Cohen began his reading with "Know What I Mean," the first poem that appears in "Botrytis." The poem sees Cohen weaving together a collection of intimate moments: navigating a foreign market, picking strawberries with a wife, preparing a picnic meal in a field and more.

Many of the memories come back to food and are honed by Cohen's diction and use of long, musical lines to squeeze the most out of each scene. Among the memories themselves come tender reflections from the speaker, who reflects on how capturing these moments through language can either "make them immortal" or "destroy them."

Cohen barely paused before beginning to introduce his next poem, "Born Homesick," but the sudden looseness in his vocal cadence made the transition clear. He prefaced by describing how frightening it was to witness the start of the AIDS epidemic and how the poem details time spent with his friend, nicknamed Cosmo, who self-quarantined while he visited in San Francisco. In 23 couplets, Cohen renders the speaker's barricaded interactions with Cosmo, the many attempts to coax him out of his room and the mess of uncertainty after he left in desperate detail, tinged by irresolvable confusion.

Throughout the poems, humor was ever-present, whether it was through unexpected and bizarre figurative language or the speaker's experiences themself. "The Opposite of Home," which Cohen introduced by saying "Perhaps the stupidest human beings on the face of the Earth are 15-year-old boys," drew multiple rounds of laughter from the audience. The poem explores a group of boys taking a motorboat to a tiny island in Norwalk during spring vacation, which Cohen referred to as a real experience that has "haunted him for a long time."

What begins as the boys taking part in crude humor and activities quickly turns into a dramatic survival story when winter conditions set it, prompting the boys to break into a cabin and burn its furniture to stay warm. The tonal shifts create plenty of tension and ironic comedy, but the reflective element toward the end brought a stone-faced takeaway. The final couplet soberly questions: "Is an unlocked door a flawed symbol of trust in humankind? If only we hadn't / Smashed those Goddamn windows, I could have lived forever in that cabin with myself."

Cohen also read from a group of new poems that will appear in "Don't Touch the Art," Cohen's forthcoming poetry book that's scheduled for release in 2027. One such poem, "Pre and Postmodern Post Office," was a surreal exploration of what it would be like to mail human bodies in the mail, which Cohen said was allowed until 1915.

After the reading, Cohen responded to questions from the audience. When asked about how his teaching relates to his writing, Cohen first joked that there was no relation, and that when he teaches an exemplary student poet, he tells them to stop writing so they "don't use up all the good lines." After the response, Cohen answered more seriously.

"It's exciting work for me, working with young writers, because they're doing things that I've never thought of," Cohen said. "It's inspirational and it triggers ways of thinking for me; it really keeps my writing alive in a good way."

Copies of "Botrytis" were available for purchase and for Cohen to sign after the event, and the books quickly ran out.

Brock Haster, a first-semester chemistry student, said he heard about the reading at the start of the week and thought it would be beneficial to check out to "broaden his horizons."

"I think it flowed very nicely," Haster said. "It was very well put-together, cohesively."

Kiara Korten, a seventh-semester English student and one of Cohen's students, described the poems Cohen read as "compelling."

"I was incredibly touched by his vulnerability," Korten said.

SUNSET FEST CREATES NIGHT TO REMEMBER

by Disha Rajasekar
CONTRIBUTOR
SHE/HER/HERS
disha.rajasekar@uconn.edu

On Thursday, hundrOn Thursday, hundreds of students arrived for the Student Board of Governor's (SUBOG) annual Sunset Fest at the Student Union lawn. Sunset Fest initially started off as a series of concerts hosted in the fall near Horsebarn Hill for the sake of helping students wind down. However, this shifted into a single yearly event in 2024.

Lawn chairs and tables were set up near the stage for people to sit back and relax, and a large crowd of students were waiting in line at the Dude's Donuts truck, eagerly anticipating a free donut and apple cider. There was even a giveaway of a Good Molecules skincare product for those who completed a short survey.

Four indie artists/musical groups took over the Student Union terrace from 6:30 to 9 p.m., introducing people to their raw talent.

First up, was Broken Throne, a Connecticut-based punk and hard rock band. They stunned the crowd with their memorable act, wowing people with their raw energy and electrifying sound.

Next was a solo performer, Marko Katra, who is currently a fifth-semester honors political science and music student at UConn. He impressed people with his singing and guitar skills. His performance consisted of both covers and his own originals. He played covers of "Jersey Giant" by Tyler Childers and "No Other Art" by Mac DeMarco among others. His treats to the audience were ballads he'd created on his own, such as "Vagabonds" and "Something Beautiful," which is actually a work in progress, currently unreleased to the public.

The third act of the night was Whiplash! and the Weather, another UConn-based performance group. This is a tight-knit rock band who introduced the audience to raw and catchy vocals and a magnetic presence that audience members couldn't help but interact with. The lead vocalist even shared a fascinating piece of advice, stating that she ate honey between songs to ensure that she didn't lose her voice. They played covers of songs, such as "Don't Let Me Down" by the Beatles. They also performed some of their own originals, like "Selfish Desire," a Latin fusion song with a rich beat.

Last but not least, Sunset Fest was closed by Artemis, an independent singer-songwriter who hails from Manchester. She blended pop and R&B into masterful creations and played originals that were inspired from her own life, love and heartbreaks, some of which she wrote in her teens. She brought dancers with her and showed that she was not only a talented vocalist, but also an amazing dancer. Her songs are available for streaming for those who want to check them out.

Anushka Kuntey, a first-semester speech language and hearing sciences student, said "This was such a cool event, and I did not realize how impressive it really would be." This was a night to remember, characterized by awe and enjoyment by both the audience and performers.



Artemis performs at Sunset Fest at the UConn Student Union Mall on Thursday. The music festival, hosted by the Student Union Board of Governors (SUBOG), featured four local musicians and bands.

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