

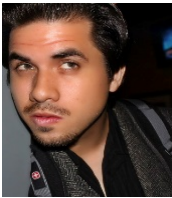
## Top 10 Finalists, Poet Laureate Program – City of Orlando



**Susan Lilley** was born and raised in the constantly changing landscape of central Florida, where she has raised her own children. Her poetry and nonfiction has appeared in dozens of journals, she has won both teaching and literary awards, and she is a proud member of Orlando's burgeoning and diverse literary community.



**Terry Ann Thaxton**, 5th generation Floridian, is the author of 3 books of poetry: *Getaway Girl*, *The Terrible Wife*, and *Mud Song*. Her book, *Creative Writing in the Community: A Guide*, is based on her 15 years of experience teaching poetry and storytelling to marginalized children, youth, and adults throughout central Florida. She is a professor of English at UCF.



**Curtis X Meyer** is published writer and poet. He both founded and serves as the Slam Master for The S.A.F.E.! Words! Poetry! Slam!, providing a platform for spoken word artists to gain experience and exposure on a national stage. He graduated from UCF with a degree in Creative Writing. He spends at least twice a week speaking publicly behind a microphone.



**Blu Bailey** is a hometown hero and staple in the poetry community. She has centered her focus on implementing fresh and innovative creative writing and performance programs for Central Florida teens. Blu exudes a fervency for spoken word that has earned her award winning notoriety both locally and nationally as an accomplished poet, writer, youth advocate and teaching artist.



**Obi Nwakanma** is the author of *Birthcry* and *The Horsemen and Other Poems*. A graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, his work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Brick*, *Wasafiri* and other journals. He has been a featured poet at festivals in Europe, Africa and the Americas. Before coming to the US, Nwakanma had an exciting career as a journalist in Nigeria. He teaches poetry and literature at UCF.



Founder of Exodus United Inc., **Shayna "Simba" Castano** is an internationally established poet, performer, philanthropist, mother, wife, educator, and human rights advocate. Shayna is both the founder of a non-profit organization that serves at-risk youth through the facilitation of arts-n-education programs as well as a Language Arts Teacher for Orange County Public Schools.



collection.

**Terry Godbey's** latest poetry book, *Hold Still*, is mostly about her breast cancer battle. Her other collections are *Flame*; *Beauty Lessons*, winner of the Quercus Review Annual Book Award; and *Behind Every Door*, winner of Slipstream's Annual Poetry Chapbook Award. A winner of the Rita Dove Poetry Award, she has published more than 130 poems in literary magazines including *Poet Lore*, *Rattle*, *The Florida Review*, *Slipstream*, *Passages North*, *CALYX* and *Harpur Palate*. She recently fell in love with photography and hopes to combine photos and poems in her next



**Tod Caviness** – As an active and published member of Orlando's poetry community for over 15 years, I have worked tirelessly on the page and stage. I've been honored as Orlando's Best Poet and/or Spoken Word artist three times by the Orlando Weekly, and have been an organizer of spoken word events and outreach at the Orlando International Fringe Theater Festival since 2007.



**Laura Ross** – I teach English to ESOL students at Lake Tech College, and have worked as a writing coach for Lake County Schools. My poems appear in *Blackbird*, *Meridian*, *The Florida Review*, and many others. My poetry chapbooks are "A Tiny Hunger" from YellowJacket Press, and "My Mississippi" from Anchor & Plume. I have been nominated four times for a Pushcart Prize.



**Amy Watkins** is a central Florida poet and artist. She earned her MFA in Writing from Spalding University in 2006. In 2010 and 2011, she was co-editor and host of the popular poetry podcast *Red Lion Sq.* She is the author of the chapbook *Milk & Water* (Yellow Flag Press, 2014) and art editor for *Animal: A Beast of a Literary Magazine*.