

# Poetry —a matter of Chemistry?

September 10 at the Somerville News Music/Poetry Series, Mala L. Radhakrishnan will share her unique chemistry and non-chemistry poetry. Jennifer Mathews will perform as the music feature.

Radhakrishnan is a Boston-area poet (a member of Dr. Brown's Traveling Poetry Show) who has done featured readings in various venues in the area.

Radhakrishnan said she began writing poetry after attending poetry night at the Cantab Lounge for several consecutive weeks during the Summer of 2001.

She said that seeing enough people go up to the open mic and say shyly, "It's my first time up here," made her think, "Hey, I might as well give it a shot." One of Radhakrishnan's first poems was about Scrabble, which she still performs. She said, "It was the first poem I read at the Cantab

that people actually liked."

Radhakrishnan's chemistry poetry did not come about until the Summer of 2002.

She said, "I really like chemistry a lot, and I think that a lot of life's issues about love, friendship, being cool, etc. have wonderful analogies on a molecular level." Also, "Chemistry is a molecular soap opera, and trying to get at it from the molecules' perspectives is an effective and entertaining way to reach what might otherwise be foreign or difficult concepts."

Radhakrishnan said she taught high school for a couple of years, and the poems started out as a compilation of the stories and analogies she used while teaching. She said, "Humanizing chemistry is the first step towards making it fun and understandable. The challenge is to do this without losing any of the sci-



ific accuracy."

To start writing, Radhakrishnan said, "I have to have a cool story first—something I could narrate to the person standing next to me, about how this atom was lonely and tried a speed dating service and wound up with another atom through a reaction, etc., and usually there's got to be some sort of overly 'cute ending.' Once she has the storyline, Radhakrishnan starts brainstorming on rhymes. She said that after that, "The poem pretty much writes itself." When poems are difficult for Radhakrishnan to write, she said "It's because I don't have a good story."

Radhakrishnan's favorites, are generally the ones that she rarely performs because they are more technical. As far as the ones that get performed a lot, she said, "I like my James Bond parody ('007: Chemistry Never Dies'), just because when I first wrote it, I thought it was absolutely terrible but people really liked it when I performed it. It reminds me how you never know what will end up working out."

Radhakrishnan said her work is "all about finding something that you connect with and going along with it. Also, with charming humility, she said, "I knew I couldn't compete with all the amazing poets out there who write 'real' poetry...so I kind of made a new niche for myself."



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