

“An affecting and superbly paced celebration of American youth at their creative best”

Robert Koehler, Variety

“Fresh and vital and exhilarating”

Steve Pond, The wrap

“Genuinely stirring...irresistible”

Michael Phillips, Chicago Tribune

LOUDER THAN A BOMB



A Film by Greg Jacobs & Jon Siskel

**For information about the film and to view the trailer:
www.louderthanabombfilm.com**

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Louder Than a Bomb is a film about passion, competition, teamwork, and trust. It's about the joy of being young, and the pain of growing up. It's about speaking out, making noise, and finding your voice.

It also just happens to be about poetry.

Every year, more than six hundred teenagers from over sixty Chicago area schools gather for the world's largest youth poetry slam, a competition known as "Louder Than a Bomb". Founded in 2001, Louder Than a Bomb is the only event of its kind in the country—a youth poetry slam built from the beginning around teams. Rather than emphasize individual poets and performances, the structure of Louder Than a Bomb demands that kids work collaboratively with their peers, presenting, critiquing, and rewriting their pieces. To succeed, teams have to create an environment of mutual trust and support. For many kids, being a part of such an environment—in an academic context—is life-changing.

Directed by Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel, ***Louder Than a Bomb*** chronicles the stereotype-confounding stories of four teams as they prepare for and compete in the 2008 event. By turns hopeful and heartbreaking, the film captures the turbulent lives of these unforgettable kids, exploring the ways writing shapes their world, and vice versa. This is not "high school poetry" as we often think of it. This is language as a joyful release, irrepressibly talented teenagers obsessed with making words dance. How and why they do it—and the community they create along the way—is the story at the heart of this inspiring film.

Louder Than a Bomb premiered at the 2010 Cleveland International Film Festival, where it won both the Roxanne T. Mueller Audience Choice Award for best film and the Greg Gund Memorial Standing Up Film Competition. Since then, the film has won audience awards at the Palm Springs, Chicago, Philadelphia, Wisconsin, Salem, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Woods Hole film festivals, as well as jury prizes at the Austin, Chicago, Woods Hole, Ashland, and Virginia film fests. The film

also won the 2011 Humanitas Prize for documentaries. *Louder Than a Bomb* was selected for the 2011 American Documentary Showcase, which was created by the U.S. State Department to “cultivate greater understanding among people around the world.” The film will have its television premiere in January 2012 as part of the Oprah Winfrey Network’s “OWN Documentary Club.”



NATE

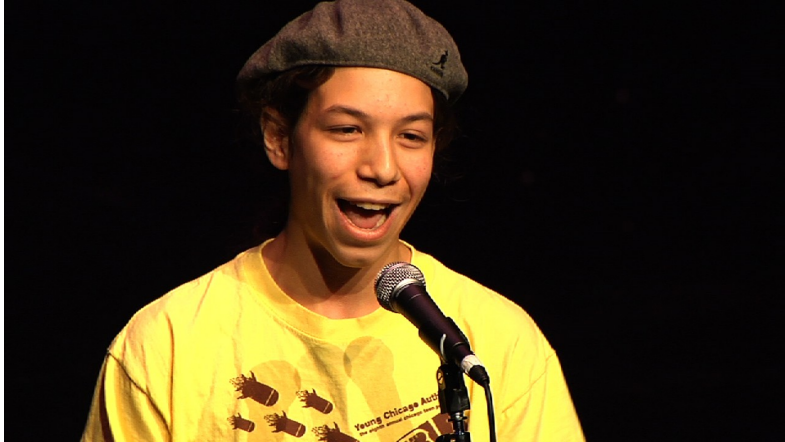
For Nate, poetry is identity. The son of two recovering drug addicts on Chicago’s far South Side, Nate was identified as gifted at an early age, and became an academic prodigy in a neighborhood where incarceration is more the norm. In ninth grade, he reached a crossroads, forced to choose between his two loves—basketball and poetry. He chose poetry, and has never looked back. Now a senior, Nate has to take an inexperienced Whitney Young Magnet High School (most famous alum: Michelle Obama) team under his wing, and carry it on his shoulders. An accomplished rapper as well as a poet, Nate also wrote and performed five of the songs on the film’s soundtrack.

NOVA



For Nova, poetry is therapy. Half-Indian, half-African-American, her cool

exterior and thousand-watt smile conceal a tumultuous upbringing. Estranged from her father, she has little time for teenage things—she’s an honors student at Oak Park/River Forest High School (most famous alum: Ernest Hemingway), works bagging groceries on weekends, and helps her mom take care of her 12-year-old brother, Cody, who suffers from a combination of Fragile X Syndrome, autism, diabetes, and seizure disorder. A three-year “starter” for slam powerhouse Oak Park/River Forest High School, Nova views the team as a respite from the burdens of everyday life, and poetry as a vehicle for expressing the anger and vulnerability she’s otherwise forced to suppress.



ADAM

For Adam, poetry is community. His passion for writing—and evident talent—make him one of the most popular performers at LTAB, and with his ponytail and beret, he definitely looks the part of a poet. Yet he’s anything but a tortured artist. Instead, he’s a disarmingly sweet kid, with a stable, loving family to match. A senior at Northside College Prep, one of the best public high schools in the country, Adam is the star of an already strong squad, the most gifted writer on a team of gifted poets. But while he and his teammates come from a world very different from that of many of their counterparts, their combination of skill, self-awareness, and enthusiasm puts them at the center of the LTAB community.

THE STEINMENAUTS

For the team from Steinmetz Academic Centre—Lamar, Kevin, Jésus, Big C, and She’Kira—poetry is family. A poor-



performing, working class school on Chicago's far West Side (most famous alum: Hugh Hefner), Steinmetz typically has little to boast about. Yet against all odds, their slam team, in its first year, won the 2007 competition. Entering this year, they're determined to repeat, and—more importantly—to prove that their victory was no fluke. But will the unfamiliar pressure of high expectations, and the personal conflicts that come with success, derail their dreams?



Posted: Sun., Aug. 1, 2010, 4:31pm PT

Louder Than a Bomb

(Documentary) A Siskel/Jacobs Prods. presentation. Produced by Greg Jacobs, Jon Siskel. Directed by Greg Jacobs, Jon Siskel.

With: Nova Venerable, Adam Gottlieb, Nate Marshall, Lamar "The Truth" Jordan, Kevin "KVO" Harris, Jesus "L3" Lark, She'Kira McKnight, Charles "Big C" Smith, James Sloan, Kevin Coval, Peter Kahn, Cody Venerable.

By [ROBERT KOEHLER](#)

Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel's "Louder Than a Bomb" is an affecting and superbly paced celebration of American youth at their creative best. Inexplicably missing from the country's major fests, this saga of Chicago high schoolers competing in the city's popular annual Louder Than a Bomb teen poetry festival is the rare good-hearted film that wears its political correctness on its sleeve yet exudes honesty throughout. Los Angeles and New York DocuWeeks slots may give theatrical hopes a boost.

The filmmakers aim for a rounded look at poet-performers from four Chicago-area schools, but their sympathies are clearly with the underdog poetry crew at Southside's Steinmetz High School, since that's frankly where the drama is. Surprise winners in 2007, the "Steinmenauts" are as bonded as a family, but coach James Sloan has to apply all of his patience to keep the sometimes unruly teens on track. His faceoff with the three stars of the group -- Lamar Jordan, Kevin Harris and Charles Smith -- swings the team from near-catastrophe to reinvigorated unity.

Equally affecting are two of Steinmetz's most serious challengers: Nova Venerable from Oak Park/River Forest High School, and Nate Marshall from Whitney Young Magnet High School. Venerable's poetry is beautifully crafted but raw autobiography, containing observations about her impossible father and special-needs younger brother that are almost pointillist in their detail. Marshall displays prodigious talent, whipping out wordplay the way other kids punch out cell-phone texts, and doing it with a keen sense of wit.

None of this prepares the viewer for the bomb that is Adam Gottlieb (from tony Northside College Prep), whose first reading at the 20-minute mark, of a poem celebrating poetry, announces a promising new American talent. It's difficult to resist the comparison to Allen Ginsberg in Gottlieb's nearly breathless recitation, his use of incantation and rhythmic attack, and the sense of an epic unfolding before our ears. His subsequent reading, on his Jewish roots in Chicago, is pitched in an entirely different register and suggests a novelistic sensibility.

With characters like these, the contest may seem an afterthought. But Jacobs and Siskel (Gene Siskel's nephew) invigorate what has become a cliché of American docs by cleverly constructing the film's second half so that it climaxes at an unexpected point, as the Steinmenauts wage a come-from-behind push in an attempt to reach the contest finals.

Understated in "Louder Than a Bomb" is how the teen poetry slam brings the city's typically segregated neighborhoods together, as the elevation of language to the level of art serves as a unifying force. To put it mildly, by the time this is over, the adults are suitably impressed.

Camera coverage of many key moments, including shooting of some stunning readings, is key to the film's vitality, along with John Farbrother's sharp editing. Music supervision is uncredited, but the co-directors presumably oversaw an impressive selection of songs that are laid into the soundtrack as if they were an original score.

Camera (color, HD), Stephan Mazurek; editor, John Farbrother; sound (stereo), John Mathie; re-recording mixer, Robert Marshall. Reviewed on DVD, Los Angeles, July 30, 2010. (In DocuWeeks.) Running time: 100 MIN.

Surprising Poetry Doc Highlights DocuWeeks' Round 2

"Louder than a Bomb" uses familiar ingredients, but it's fresh and vital and exhilarating.

By Steve Pond

Published: August 06, 2010

The second week of the International Documentary Association's DocuWeeks showcase at the Arclight in Hollywood takes viewers around the world, with films set in Russia, Finland, Tibet, New Zealand and South America.

But I want to talk about the film that's set closer to home, on the north side of Chicago.

"Louder than a Bomb" is, in many ways, the kind of documentary we've seen frequently over the past few years. It's a teenagers-preparing-for-a-big-competition doc, similar in some ways to movies like "Spellbound" and "Mad Hot Ballroom."

"This is a film with very familiar ingredients," co-producer/co-director Greg Jacobs tells theWrap. "But you can use the same ingredients and make a very different cake."

In the film, Jacobs and Jon Siskel twist the genre in surprising ways – and, crucially, in the cast of largely urban kids preparing for a high school poetry competition, they showcase an energy, vitality, eloquence and charisma that make it one of the most inspiring and exhilarating documentaries in months, or maybe years.

The movie doesn't have theatrical distribution yet, and it may not be Serious and Important enough to figure in the awards picture – but now that it has qualified for the Oscar via the DocuWeeks showings, I find it

impossible to rule out a film this vibrant and this moving.

It's no surprise that Jacobs and Siskel (nephew of the late critic Gene Siskel) know what they're doing – they won the Emmy for the 9/11 documentary “102 Minutes that Changed America” in 2009. But “Louder than a Bomb” tackles a subject that might seem old hat, using a format that could appear played out, and does so with remarkable freshness and vitality.

It's not groundbreaking or monumental on the scale of that other Chicago-set high school documentary, “Hoop Dreams,” but “Louder than a Bomb” is surprising and seductive, an all-but-guaranteed crowd-pleaser from a pair of filmmakers who stumbled on their subject matter by accident.

“I happened to be driving near Wrigley Field, past a club called the Metro,” says Jacobs. “On the marquee it said ‘LOUDER THAN A BOMB HIGH SCHOOL POETRY FINALS, TONIGHT,’ and there was a line of kids of all races and colors and shapes and sizes down the block. And I thought, that's a strange thing to see on the North Side of Chicago on a Saturday night. It seemed interesting, so we decided we'd take a look.

“And every step of the way, you're waiting for this thing that tells you this isn't a good idea, but it never happened.”

The film follows three individual poets, and one team, on their inevitable march toward the “Louder than a Bomb” poetry finals. But toward the end, things suddenly change, courtesy of an event that Jacobs initially thought doomed the movie. It didn't; instead, it made the film richer, less predictable and more moving.

(And for traditionalists, keep your eyes open during the credits and you'll get the answer you're looking for.)

Jacobs and Siskel showed the film at the finale of this year's “Louder than a Bomb” poetry competition, and have since screened it at festivals to an enthusiastic response. Variety's Robert Koehler called it “an affecting and superbly paced celebration of American youth at their creative best.”

“Our ambition from the beginning was to make an entertaining movie first, and one that had broad appeal,” says Jacobs, who is looking for theatrical distribution. “And I think what we're finding as we go around to the festivals is that the diversity of the appeal, and the intensity of the reaction, is astounding.”

MORE RAVES & REVIEWS

ROGER EBERT, *CHICAGO SUN-TIMES*

"Louder Than a Bomb" (USA). Siskel and Jacobs focus on the performances, which are inspiring and electrifying. Their film left me wondering why American television must be so gutless and shallow. If these kids and others like them were programmed against "American Idol" or "Dancing with the Stars", the shabbiness of those shows would be placed in dramatic contrast. Here are real performers with real feelings and important things to say.

I hesitate to hint about the outcome of the contest, nor to steal some of the thunder and surprises from the performers. I'll end on this. After "Louder Than a Bomb" plays theatrically, it will air on the Oprah Winfrey Network. Why doesn't Oprah consider it a pilot for a series? America's Got Talent, all right, but maybe we've been looking for it in the wrong places. 3 ½ stars (out of four). **February 2, 2011**

ELIZABETH WEITZMAN, *NY DAILY NEWS*

Having a bad day? They get yourself to Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel's life-affirming documentary, immediately.

There can never be too many stories of human grace and perseverance like those of Nova, or Nate, or Adam, all teens who've been encouraged to channel their resentments and desires into art. As they overcome odds to compete in a city-wide poetry slam, you'll be awed by their talents, their energy and most of all their passion. But the best moment comes when the movie ends and you find out where in the world their words have taken them. Four stars. **May 20, 2011**

LOGAN HILL, *NEW YORK MAGAZINE*

These teens are sharp, honest about their lives, and crowd-

pleasing in a genuine way....the competition — which aggressively encourages its young poets to figure out what makes their voices unique — obviously inspires them, bolsters their self-confidence, and focuses their energy. Considering the emotional wallop the film packs, they are doing plenty right. **May 10, 2011**

NOEL MURRAY, *ONION A/V CLUB*

Brimming with life and hope instead of social-climbing, bullying, and furtive first kisses. It should hit home with anyone whose experience of adolescence involved creativity, intellectual exploration, and getting to know and love people outside their immediate social circles...It's about how an amazing program has helped bring the best out of these kids, and how these kids have shown the ability to amaze right back. A- **May 19, 2011**

NEIL GENZLINGER, *NEW YORK TIMES*

The film follows four of the dozens of teams as they prepare for the 2008 event. One is the Steinmenauts, the previous year's winner, and the other three are each built around one startlingly mature, confident poet...When the filmmakers occasionally let an entire piece be heard, the results are stirring. A poem by a young man named Adam Gottlieb, a blizzard of words and emotion and family history, is simply breathtaking. **May 17, 2011**

MICHAEL PHILLIPS, *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

A genuinely stirring hometown chronicle, this propulsive documentary by Jacobs and Siskel (nephew of Gene, the longtime Tribune film critic) follows a familiar competitive framework, as four teams representing four very different area high schools compete in the annual "Louder Than a Bomb" teen poetry slam. The filmmakers take just enough time to heighten the personal stories of a few key talents, among them the spectacularly gifted Nova Venerable from Oak Park/River Forest High School, whose poetry cuts like a knife on the subject of errant fathers and a

special-needs brother; Nate Marshall, a spoken-word guru from Whitney Young High School; and Adam Gottlieb, the wizard of Northside College Prep, dealing with poetry itself and his Jewish heritage. As these and other writer/performers collaborate with their colleagues, mentors and notebooks en route to the competition, "Louder Than a Bomb" becomes an ode to Chicago's diverse voices. Irresistible. 3 ½ stars (out of four). **October 12, 2010**

SUSAN KING, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel, nephew of the late film critic Gene Siskel, produced and directed this fascinating look at the world's largest youth poetry slam in Chicago. The directors hone in on four high school students, including one young woman who writes about her father's abandonment. Their poetry is inspiring, as are their performances. **July 30, 2010**

LIZ PLOSSER, *TIMEOUT CHICAGO*

Four Chicago high-school poetry teams dazzle, inspire and kick serious ass with words as they prep for the world's biggest youth poetry slam. Thankfully their journey is never saccharine. What it is: powerful and exhilarating. **October 7-13, 2010**

MARSHALL FINE, *HUFFINGTON POST*

Louder Than a Bomb knocks you out with its passion and strength, even as it leaves you feeling hopeful about a younger generation that, from all media depictions, is obsessed with Internet first-person-shooter video games, YouTube, and celebrity news. Oh yeah, and it's a movie about poetry. **May 19, 2011**

MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN, *WASHINGTON POST*

The film is powered by the steam — and the enormous appeal — of its young, hyper-verbal and multiracial protagonists, who

include two African American boys; a half-Indian, half-African American girl; and a Jewish boy with a ponytail halfway down his back. They're charmers, all of them. And at times they'll blow you away with their dedication to their art form. **June 10, 2011**

TIM BASHAM, *PASTE MAGAZINE*

"The Twenty Best Documentaries of 2010"

It's impossible to be unmoved by these school kids, some from badly broken homes, who eloquently reveal their inner emotions on stage with "poetry slam". The spoken-word competition climaxes with the largest high-school slam in the world, with competitors from clubs around the country. It's a get-up-and-clap kind of movie. **December 23, 2010**

ERNEST HARDY, *THE VILLAGE VOICE*

Fast-moving, visually polished... The movie floats to another realm entirely when the cameras go into the home of Nova Venerable, a smart, eloquent, gorgeous girl...With an eye for detail and a willingness to speak softly, she steals the movie. **May 18, 2011**

MATT SINGER, *IFC*

If this movie can win *me* over, it can win anyone over. This movie won me over...

I don't know how they found this topic or selected their subjects, but they did a phenomenal job. These kids are brilliant, charming wordsmiths, passionate performers and wise beyond their years. My favorite was Nate Marshall...I've got maybe a dozen years on this kid and sat watching him in this film, jaw dropped, eyes moist, thinking to myself, "I want to be Nate Marshall when I grow up."

May 17, 2011

TY BURR, *BOSTON GLOBE*

The high school kids in "Louder Than a Bomb" wield words like weapons of mutual salvation and they're all in it together: pairs

of friends, groups of teammates, a city of teenagers jostling with possibilities...Think of it as 'Glee' without music. Without a net, too....Louder Than a Bomb'' is about the doors that language opens....and it's especially about the joy that comes from stepping through that door to find a crowd of empathetic new companions. If you're not paying attention you may miss who actually won the 2008 competition, but it's not really the point. Neither is the poetry. The point is where the poetry takes you.

June 3, 2011

TRISTA DEVRIES, TORONTO FILM SCENE

This film is a purely emotional journey. Sometimes it fills you with joy, gives you goosebumps, and instills you with the desire to leap up and cheer. Sometimes it touches you, sending your heart go out to the kids on the screen, while they struggle against the cards life dealt them and to learn lessons - however hard - that will actually make them better later in life. What's genuinely incredible about Louder Than a Bomb is that it never once makes the viewer feel manipulated, which is a startling achievement for a documentary packed with so many poignant issues. **April 14, 2011**

SETH KUBERSKY, ORLANDO WEEKLY

What 2002's hit *Spellbound* did for spelling bees, this inspiring documentary does doubly well for high school spoken-word poetry slams. The ending isn't as neatly uplifting as you might expect, but you'll be riveted until the final explosive verse. **April 9, 2011**

DAYNA PAPALEO, ROCHESTER CITY NEWSPAPER

This probably isn't the most criticky way to start a review, but I love this movie so much. Louder Than a Bomb sets itself both apart and above due to its treasure trove of brilliantly spirited kids, so-called opponents who are also each other's biggest fans.

April 20, 2011

GERALD PEARY, *BOSTON PHOENIX*

The formula is reinvigorated, as the competition gets undeniably exciting. That's because the kids whom Jacobs and Siskel have chosen for us to watch are so enthralling, with such remarkable life stories, that their autobiographical poems have actual power. Especially compelling is the story of the inner city team from Steinmetz Academic Center: undisciplined, unruly, and strikingly talented. A long scene in which three kids beg not to be thrown off the team for being disrespectful to their teachers is an astonishingly moving episode of classic cinema vérité. **June 1, 2011**

NYLONMAG.COM

Awesome...Equally parts heartbreaking and inspirational, this film is a reminder that even Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs had to start somewhere....so why shouldn't it be at a local high school? **May 10, 2011**

BRAD KEEFE, *COLUMBUS ALIVE*

A joyful and affirming affair, celebrating poetry as an outlet for the pains of youth. In the end, it's those breathless and exhilarating performances that make this a must-see doc. **May 12, 2011**

JAMES VERNIERE, *BOSTON HERALD*

Louder Than a Bomb packs a greater emotional wallop than any film in current release. Set within the world of high school "poetry slams," events featuring spoken-word competitions, the film is an engrossing and deeply humane look at how its young people transform the stuff of life, good, bad and horrific, into art. It's deeply moving to see the film's protagonists, members of four Chicago-area poetry-slam teams, learn the value of hard work and success and find their own voices, some of them haunting and unforgettable. **June 3, 2011**

ALEX WILGUS, *FILMSPOTTING*

I loved "Louder Than a Bomb." Siskel and Jacobs' calm resistance of melodrama is fertile soil for these youngsters. The inherent value of filming the poetry slam, as opposed to the other competitions documented by previous kiddie docs is that these kids aren't pouring their energies into learning arbitrary parlor tricks. These teenagers bring only their stories and their creative energy into an event that ends up feeling more like a party than a tournament. The competitive spirit courses through "Louder Than A Bomb," but it never comes at the expense of positivity.

May 20, 2011

RAY PRIDE, *NEW CITY*

Jacobs and Siskel's filmmaking has an urgency that makes it suggest we're watching the most important, most momentous thing on earth. The virtue of that? It's just how these kids *feel* across the months of being observed in 2007 and 2008. "Be here now" and all of that: it's on screen. "Poet breathe now," star poet says his dog told him. And breathe and exhale and expel they do, and words tumble, ramshackle, run amok, rhythmic, contentious, clattering, rising, rhyming, running, aloft on concerted adrenaline. **May 18, 2011**

RICHARD ADES, *THE OTHER PAPER*

Filled with so many surprising and inspiring revelations that the outcome is almost beside the point. For starters, there's the revelation that high school students are passionately devoted to poetry. There's also the revelation that much of the poetry is jaw-droppingly good. I won't give away the ending except to say that, on the way there, you'll be moved, amazed and royally entertained. Four Stars. **May 11, 2011**

TOM KEOGH, *SEATTLE TIMES*

A moving and exciting documentary...As we get to know these kids, it's clear how profoundly fortunate they were that poetry

gave them a voice and identity. While LTAB competition is real and intense, the way teams from different schools are there for each other—for the greater glory of verse—is powerful. *Louder Than a Bomb* is a good reminder that students need a variety of opportunities to excel. **May 5, 2011**

JESSE SCHWARTZ, *DIG BOSTON*

[Inspiring](#) is a word I don't care for. It's too sentimental, too sweeping. But this film *earns* it. In terms of finding the right subjects, Jacobs and Siskel are without a doubt two of the world's luckiest documentary filmmakers. You can only laugh, sometimes even cry at how strong, bright, and remarkable the young people in this film are....a film so rich with emotion, it's almost embarrassing. **June 6, 2011**

TOM HORGAN, *MINNEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE*

This vibrant documentary follows several Chicago high school students as they navigate the country's largest teen slam, aptly titled *Louder Than a Bomb*. On stage, their self-reflective poems paint stunning portraits of inner-city struggles and a turbulent school life where going to class means walking through metal detectors. The fast-paced filmmaking captures the comedy, drama and heartbreak of young people simply trying to find a voice.

STAN HALL, *THE OREGONIAN*

Only those possessing hearts of stone will remain unmoved by the raw adolescent emotion, passion and verbal jousting that make [Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel's documentary](#) so poignant and enjoyable. The film smartly focuses on the kids, who continually stimulate brains, break hearts and make us care what happens to them. **June 9, 2011**

TIM MILLER, *CAPECODONLINE.COM*

What bowls you over in this film is the depth and intelligence and passion of these young poets, how they throw themselves so

completely into this form of expression, not only in the way they perform (explosively ... louder than a bomb) but in how they open up about their lives (an absent father, caring for a mentally and physically impaired brother, coming to terms with what it means to be Jewish) and create something of extraordinary beauty. I can't imagine someone watching this film and not getting choked up. It's inspiring and life-affirming. **August 9, 2010**

STEVE PROKOPY, GAPERSBLOCK.COM

This film is a rousing crowd pleaser of the highest order. You don't have to like rap music or kids or poetry to come away from *Bomb* with a great feeling. You just have to have a working heart and a love of words. **February 4, 2011**

W.S. MERWIN, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Louder than a Bomb is an exhilarating film, presenting a great range of talents. There are poems and performances here that are funny, others moving, and the whole of the film is brimming with vitality. Many of these poems took me by surprise. I think all kinds of poetry can do that when we're lucky.

Poetry is inseparable from the spoken word, the living, spoken language—and its roots in speech are older and deeper than its allegiance to written literature. The love for one kind of poetry leads to loving poems in other forms as well—and today these different kinds of poetry are keeping poetry alive.

LTAB AWARDS & FESTIVALS

AWARDS

Roxanne T. Mueller Audience Choice Award, Cleveland International Film Festival
Greg Gund Memorial Standing Up Film Competition, Cleveland International Film Festival
Best of the Fest Audience Award, Woods Hole Film Festival
Jury Award for Best Documentary, Woods Hole Film Festival
Audience Choice Award, Chicago International Film Festival
Special Jury Prize, Chicago International Film Festival
Audience Award, Philadelphia Film Festival
Jury Award for Best Documentary Feature, Austin Film Festival
Programmers' Award for Best Documentary, Virginia Film Festival
Audience Award, St. Louis International Film Festival
Audience Award, Palm Springs International Film Festival
Best New Directors, Portland International Film Festival
Audience Award, Salem Film Fest
Audience Award, Wisconsin Film Festival
Special Jury Mention, Ashland Independent Film Festival
Audience Award, Florida Film Festival
Winner, 2011 Humanitas Prize for documentaries
Audience Award, Milwaukee Film Festival

ADDITIONAL FESTIVALS

Official Selection, Hamptons International Film Festival
Official Selection, Little Rock Film Festival
Official Selection, Harlem International Film Festival
Official Selection, Carmel Art & Film Festival
Official Selection, Tallgrass Film Festival
Official Selection, Houston Cinema Arts Festival
Official Selection, Columbus Jewish Film Festival
Official Selection, Atlanta Jewish Film Festival
Official Selection, Providence Children's Film Festival
Official Selection, Sprockets TIFF for Youth
Official Selection, Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival
Official Selection, 360/365 George Eastman House Film Festival
Official Selection, Ebertfest (closing film)
Official Selection, DOXA Film Festival (opening film)
Official Selection, Showcomotion Young People's Film Festival (Sheffield, England)
Official Selection, Festival Silencio (Lisbon, Portugal)
Official Selection, ANDKids World Film Festival
Official Selection, Festival By the Sea (Vlissingen, The Netherlands)

Official Selection, Barrie Film Festival (Barrie, Ontario)

Official Selection, Discovery Film Festival (Dundee, Scotland)

Official Selection, Tulsa International Film Festival

Official Selection, Dutch Jewish Film Festival

FILM SHOWCASES

DocuWeeks 2010

American Documentary Showcase (Malawi, Zambia, Jordan, UAE, Angola)

South Arts Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers

THEATRICAL

Amherst, MA — Amherst Cinema

Boston — Coolidge Corner Theatre

Chicago — Gene Siskel Film Center

Columbus, OH — Drexel Theatre

Corvallis, OR — Darkside Cinema

Eugene, OR — Bijou Art Cinemas

Lake Worth, FL — Lake Worth Playhouse

New York City — IFC Center

Omaha, NE — Film Streams

Palm Springs, CA — Camelot Theaters

Portland, OR — Living Room Theatres

Salem, MA — CinemaSalem

Seattle — SIFF Center

Washington, D.C. — The West End Cinema

ADDITIONAL THEATRICAL SCREENINGS

Rockland, ME — Rockland Strand Theatre

Tulsa, OK — Circle Cinema

Sedona, AZ — Docs That Make a Difference

Nevada City, CA — Nevada Theatre

San Diego, CA — Cinema Society of San Diego

Cleveland, OH — Cleveland Museum of Art

Whitehorse, YT (Canada) — Available Light Monthly Cinema Series

Auburn, NY — Auburn Public Theater

Scottsdale, AZ — Cinema Society of Scottsdale

San Francisco, CA — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Washington, DC — National Gallery of Art

FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

As is the case with so many documentary subjects, we stumbled on Louder Than a Bomb completely by accident. One weekend, in March of 2005, Greg happened to drive by the Metro, a legendary Chicago music venue, and saw a line of kids that stretched down the block. What made the scene unusual wasn't just the crowd—it was what they were waiting for: the marquee read, "Louder Than a Bomb Youth Poetry Slam Finals." Teenagers, hundreds of them, of every shape, size, and color, lined up on a Saturday night to see poetry? In Chicago!? Whatever this thing is, it must be something interesting.

The more we saw, the more convinced we became that, in fact, it was. There was the LTAB community—a remarkable combination of democracy and meritocracy, where everyone's voice is respected, but the kids all know who can really bring it. There were the performances themselves—bold, brave, and often searingly memorable. And there were the coaches, teachers, and parents, whose tireless support would become a quietly inspiring thread throughout the production process.

But most of all, we were drawn to the kids. We chose to follow four of the forty-six teams that participated in Louder Than a Bomb during the 2007-08 school year. The ones we picked represented a racially, economically, and geographically diverse population of students. Each of them also had at least one star poet, a main character we could use as a window on the rest of the team. There was Nate, an African-American prodigy from the city's far South Side, whose parents are both recovering drug addicts; Nova, from suburban Oak Park, who serves as a second parent for her special needs younger brother; Adam, the disarmingly likable neo-hippie, whose generous soul and prodigious talent would make him the unlikely spirit of the competition; and Lamar, the hard-edged ex-football player from the West Side, whose journey over the course of the year would teach him a surprising and powerful lesson.

The kids whose lives we chose to chronicle are bright, talented, passionate, and occasionally frustrating—in short, typical teenagers. Yet at the same time, they all have complicated stories to tell, and they've dedicated themselves to telling those stories as powerfully, precisely, and beautifully as possible. In the end, while the topics they tackle are deeply personal, what they put into their poems—and what they get out of them—is universal: the defining work of finding one's voice. We feel strongly that when audiences finally do hear what "our kids" have to say (and how they say it), they will emerge, like us,

changed.

— **Greg Jacobs & Jon Siskel, co-Directors/co-Producers**

SJP BIO

SISKEL/JACOBS PRODUCTIONS is an award-winning Chicago-based television and documentary production company founded in 2005 by Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs.

Greg and Jon produced and directed the documentary feature *Louder Than a Bomb*, which follows four Chicago-area high school poetry teams as they prepare for and compete in the world's largest youth slam. Since its premiere at the Cleveland International Film Festival in March 2010, the film has won sixteen festival prizes, including ten audience awards, as well as the 2011 Humanitas Prize for documentaries. It was also selected for the 2011 American Documentary Showcase, a program created by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs "to cultivate greater understanding among people around the world." After a national theatrical rollout in the spring of 2011, *Louder Than a Bomb* will have its television premiere on the Oprah Winfrey Network as part of the OWN Documentary Club.

Prior to *Louder Than a Bomb*, SJP produced the Emmy-winning History Channel program *102 Minutes That Changed America*, which reconstructs—in real time—the events of 9/11 in New York City, using only sound and video from that morning. The two-hour special premiered without commercial interruption on September 11, 2008, followed by *I-Witness to 9/11*, a look at the stories behind the footage. More than five million viewers tuned in to the premiere, making it the second most-watched telecast in the network's history, and the program has now been seen by over twenty million viewers worldwide. One of the most acclaimed documentaries of recent years, *102 Minutes* won three Primetime Emmys, including Outstanding Nonfiction Special, as well as the Most Innovative Program Award at the 2009 History Makers International Summit, a CINE Masters Series Award, a Silver Telly, and a FOCAL International Award. The show was also named the Best Nonfiction TV Episode of 2008 by iTunes. Most importantly, *102 Minutes* has become standard viewing in high school and college classrooms across the country, a way for teachers to introduce their students to the emotional and historical impact of 9/11.

SJP is currently in production on additional episodes of its groundbreaking *Witness* series for the National Geographic Channel. The shows that have already aired include *Witness: Katrina*, which won the 2011 News and Documentary Emmy for historical documentaries, *Witness: D.C. 9/11*, *Witness: Disaster in Japan*, and *Witness: Tornado Swarm 2011*. SJP also produced *Head On*, a two-hour special about the obsessive subculture of "team demolition derby" in Joliet, Illinois, which aired on Discovery in December 2006. In March 2009, Siskel/Jacobs Productions was named to *Realscreen Magazine's* "Global 100"—its annual list of the world's most influential factual production companies.

SJP co-founder **GREG JACOBS** served as VP/Chief Creative Officer at Towers Productions, where he oversaw the content of more than two hundred documentaries on five different networks, including award-winning shows and series for A&E, History, Discovery, The Weather Channel, and CNN. A graduate of Yale University, Greg has a master's degree in history from Ohio State, and is the author of *Getting Around Brown: Desegregation, Development, and the Columbus Public Schools*.

SJP co-founder **JON SISKEL** was executive producer and co-creator of the series "Fake Out", which ran for two seasons on Court TV. He has also produced shows for the A&E series *American Justice*, *Investigative Reports*, and *Biography*, and his work has been shown on The Travel Channel, Discovery, and History. Jon serves on the board of directors of Free Spirit Media, a Chicago-based youth media organization, as well as the Gene Siskel Film Center.

Stephan Mazurek, Director of Photography: Stephan Mazurek served as Director of Photography on the SJP production *Head On*. As a cameraman, he has worked on shows ranging from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to *Ice Road Truckers*, for broadcasters that include ABC, NBC, PBS, TLC, A&E, VH1, and History. An accomplished playwright and director, Stephan recently directed *Goldbrick*, a theatrical adaptation of the music of Jon Langford (The Mekons, The Waco Brothers) for the Walkabout Theater Company in Chicago. He has also done lighting design and video projections for Chicago's world-famous Steppenwolf Theater.

John Farbrother, Editor: John Farbrother served as editor on SJP's Discovery Channel special *Head On*. Among his other credits are numerous documentaries, including the premiere episode of the History Channel's *Gangland* series, and short films, including *The 5:22*, which won the Prix Panavision Grand Prize for Best American Short Film at the 2007 Avignon Film Festival. John's feature film editing experience includes *Chicago Boricua*, which premiered at the 2004 Tribeca Film Festival and was released on home video by Screen Media/Universal. John has a BFA in painting and drawing from James Madison University in Virginia. In 2001, he received his MFA in film and video from Columbia College Chicago. ***Louder Than a Bomb*** is John's first feature documentary.

CREDITS

produced and directed by

Greg Jacobs & Jon Siskel

editor

John Farbrother

director of photography

Stephan Mazurek

special thanks to

Young Chicago Authors

Featuring

Oak Park and River Forest High School

OPRF Slam Team

Nova Venerable

Rocco Bulmer

Alicia Davis

Keenan Smith

Tabitha Watson

Coaches

Peter Kahn

Christina Santana

Northside College Prep

Northside Slam Team

Adam Gottlieb

Amaya Dimyen

Elisha Miles

Jessie Welch

Coach

Ebikepreye Porri

Whitney M. Young Magnet High School

Whitney Young Slam Team

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Gabriella Bonamici
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Jamal Sadrud-Din

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Elizabeth Graf

Steinmetz Academic Centre

The Steinmenauts

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Kevin "KVO" Harris
Lauren Iron
Jésus "L3" Lark
Lamar "Tha Truth" Jordan
She'Kira McKnight
Charles "Big C" Smith
Travell Williams

Coaches

James Sloan
John Hood

LTAB artistic director

Kevin Coval

LTAB festival director

Robbie Q. Telfer

MCs

Idris Goodwin
Billy Tuggle
Tim Stafford
Denise Jolly
Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz

DJ

Justin "Itch13" Dawson

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Greg Jacobs
Jon Siskel

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additional sound

Steve Black
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Pat Tillman
John Versical

Technical director
Ryan Schnizlein

Sound mixing
Another Country

Executive audio producer
Tim Konn

Sound mixing
Robert Marshall

Additional sound mixing
Zach Goheen

Audio assistant
Liam Connelly

titling and graphics
John Farbrother
Steve Juras

legal representation
Lisa Katz
Robert Labate
Holland & Knight LLP

fiscal sponsor
IFP Chicago

MUSIC

<p>ROCKIST PT. 1 Written By David Brewis Performed by School of from the album <i>Sea From Shore</i> courtesy Thrill Jockey Records</p>	<p>WHITE Written and performed by Tim Lincoln Courtesy of Music Dealers</p>
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c 2008 David Brewis	
<p>RIDERS ON THE STORM Written by Nate Marshall & Lamar J. Smith Performed by Daily Lyrical Product Produced by Shaun "SCP" Peace</p>	<p>POMPOUS Illuminate Mics Written and Performed by Nate Marshall Recorded by Lamar J. Smith Produced by Shaun "SCP" Peace Includes music from: "The Handclapping Song" Performed by The Meters Written by Joseph Modeliste, Arthur L. Neville, Leo Nocentelli, George Joseph Porter, Jr. "Work Song" Written by Nat Adderly Perfomed by the Cannonball Adderly Quintet</p>
<p>MAD WORLD Written by Roland Orzabal Performed by Michael Andrews, featuring Gary Juels</p>	<p>ST. THOMAS Written and Performed by Sonny Rollins Published by Parker Music Courtesy of Concord Music Group, Inc.</p>
<p>INTRODUCTION Written and performed by Michael Mazochi Courtesy of Music Dealers</p>	<p>HEAT Written by Nate Marshall Peformed by Daily Lyrical Product Recorded by Lamar J. Smith Additional Vocals by Jared "Jared F" Feldman Produced by Jared "Jared F" Feldman</p>
<p>TSUNAMI Written by Jeremy B. Sarkissian and Santi White Performed by Res</p>	<p>ALWAYS LOVE Written by Matthew Caws, Ira Elliot, and Daniel Lorca Performed by Nada Surf Courtesy of Barsuk Records By arrangement with Bank Robber Music</p>
<p>HI-TEK Written and performed by Bumpus Courtesy of Music Dealers</p>	<p>GET READY Written by Lamar J. Smith Performed by Jus Love</p>
<p>TREBLE THICKNESS Written by Erik Carlson</p>	<p>I LIKE WHAT YOU SAY Written by Matthew Caws, Ira Elliot, and Daniel</p>

Lorca

Performed by Area C (BMI)	Performed by Nada Surf Courtesy of Barsuk Records By arrangement with Bank Robber Music
BLACK TREE IN THE BEE YARD Written and Performed by The Sea and Cake From the album <i>The Fawn</i> courtesy Thrill Jockey records c 1997 The Sea and Cake Suite	ROCKIST PT. 2 Written By David Brewis Performed by School of Language from the album <i>Sea From Shore</i> courtesy Thrill Jockey Records c 2008 David Brewis
SMOOTH DAY Written by J. Bonilla and Ian Dalsemer Performed by The Elements (ASCAP)	ENCAPSULATION Written and performed by Diagram of Truth Courtesy of Music Dealers
VIKKA Written and performed by The Woo Courtesy of Music Dealers	SWEET DEVIL Written and performed by Bexar Bexar from the album <i>Tropism</i> by Bexar Bexar © 2007 Western Vinyl (ASCAP)
THE WORM IN THE APPLE Written by Ezra Furman Performed by Ezra Furman & the Harpoons Courtesy of Minty Fresh Records	KING Written by Nate Marshall & Lamar J. Smith Performed by Daily Lyrical Product Feat. Sima Cunningham

Louder Than a Bomb was made possible in part by grants from the following:
Chicago Instructional Technology Foundation, Inc.
The Comer Foundation
The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation
Mills Family Foundation
The Woods Fund of Chicago
The Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the
Illinois General Assembly