

# Shane Koyczan



There are some artists who happen to be in the right place at the right time... that moment when the door is still slightly open and there's just enough space to sneak through.

Then there are those artists who find themselves standing in front of a closed door, but instead of waiting for it to open they kick it in to go through. In the rise of Spoken Word's popularity, that open door cannot be discussed without saying the name **Shane Koyczan**.

In 2010, the world caught a glimpse of Koyczan's prodigious talent with his presentation at the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. This stand-out performance helped shine a light on this street poet from Vancouver's downtown east side.

Shane had been an artist, inches away from living on the street, who even in those troubled times was putting out work like [To This Day](#), a video that's garnered 24 million views and is used worldwide in classrooms as a teaching tool, as well in speech and forensic competitions. His second book, [Stickboy](#), was adapted into an opera by Vancouver Opera. His voice has been sought after by luminaries like George Miller, who worked with Shane on *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Koyczan also created the piece, [Shoulders](#), which he toured with David Suzuki as part of [The Blue Dot Tour](#), a movement to enshrine environmental rights in the constitution.

A collaborator with artists such as [Ani DiFranco](#), [Dan Mangan](#), [Tanya Tagaq](#), and others, Koyczan has elevated the art form of Spoken Word from its humble beginnings in after-hour cafes to stages both grand and distant. Shane brings an authenticity to his work that connects with audiences, as evidenced by his fiercely honest [TED Talk](#), which highlights the kind of humanity he brings to each performance.

Not just a poet moving on from one subject to the next, Shane weaves his pieces together in a spellbinding narrative that show audiences themes that stretch over our lives. Koyczan continues to trek through the difficult parts of our existence with humour in heart, and a notepad in hand; he scribbles down the whispers inside us and uses laughter as a poultice to press against our wounds.

In 2017 Shane invited us deep into family trauma with the documentary “[Shut Up And Say Something](#)”, an emotional trip through his past as he comes to terms with his estranged father. The film went on to win Most Popular Documentary at Vancouver International Film Festival, moving audiences with its bravery and vulnerability.

After a number of critical successes in the book world, Shane chose to depart from convention and carve out his own path as an independent artist. Koyczan launched his own publishing house, Stickboy Press, whose first collection was brought to life by a [crowd funding campaign](#) in which 1,688 backers pledged \$91,154 to make [A Bruise On Light](#), a Guinness record holder as the most money raised through crowdfunding for a book of poetry.

Shane followed this success by publishing two graphic novels, [Silence Is A Song I Know All The Words To](#) and [Turn On A Light](#).

A self-motivating machine, Shane also recently released a new collection of poems called [The Basement In My Attic](#), and worked with Theytus Books to publish [Inconvenient Skin](#), a journey into Canada’s own troubled history with residential schools and the treatment of indigenous people.

It feels safe to say that there seems no territory beyond the reach of Koyczan’s pen or of his heart. An artist whose work has transgressed genres and given breath to a new generation of voices, Shane Koyczan wears the mantle of human and dares others to discover what that means.

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