

# Oddis (December 22, 1966 - January 25, 2003)

By JASON MICHAEL

**SOUTHFIELD** - Local activist, poet and performance artist Oddis, 36, died Saturday Jan. 25 at his home in Southfield following a brief battle with brain cancer.

Born Otis Mitchell in Detroit, it was by the stage name of Oddis that he came to be known. And, indeed, Oddis was always on stage and always in the eye of the spotlight.

A master wordsmith, Oddis performed locally for years and was a regular at the In The Life Poetry Series at 1515 Broadway during its five-year run. Oddis also helped the group Detroit Noir take first-place honors at the DC Black Gay Pride poetry slam in 1998, and performed as a guest of the group SistaFruit at both the University of Michigan and Wayne State University.

"I write my best poetry when I'm going through drama," Oddis once told Between The Lines. "Each piece that I've written is something that occurred in my life, and even if it's sad, or sexual or serious, I want the fusion of all those things in my poetry."

The combination of Oddis' powerful good looks and passionate delivery caught the eye of best-selling author E. Lynn Harris, who in-

vited him to Chicago in 1999 to perform at a party he was throwing for renowned poet Nikki Giovanni.

"Everyone at the party was very impressed, and Nikki was really pleased," recalled Harris. "The brief time I was around him I was impressed with his commitment to his craft of spreading joy through words."

Through the years, Oddis gave of his time and talents to such groups as Detroit Black Gay Pride and Karibu House. He was also a member for a time of Strongarm Productions and helped promote their Saturday night parties at Club One X.

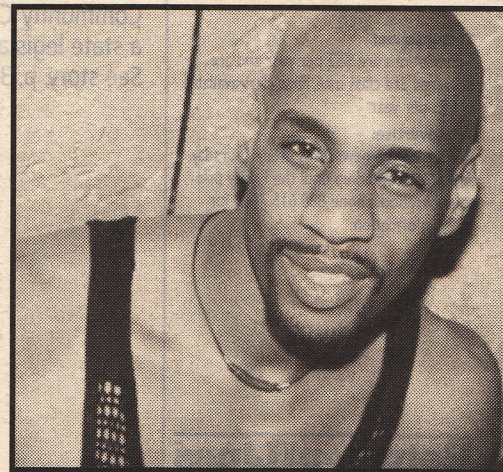
"He was very instrumental in helping making One X a great success," said Anthony Winn, Strongarm's president. "He had so much hype and so much energy. He was a vibrant part of the Strongarm enterprise and we actually lost a piece of ourselves when he moved on from the group."

Oddis also modeled on occasion and worked as a stylist for photographer Charzette Torrence of Big As Life Photos.

Several of Oddis' poems are scheduled for release in the upcoming anthology No Guest List from Grapevine Press. Prior to his death, Oddis completed work on his first novel, which Harris

is now trying to help see published.

There will be a memorial service for Oddis at 7 p.m., Friday, Jan. 31 at the Greater Philadelphia Church of God in Christ, 74 Kendall Street in



Oddis. BTL file photo: Jason Michael

Highland Park (between Oakman and Lincoln). Flowers for the service may be sent in care of Swanson Funeral Home, 14751 West McNichols in Detroit.