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Jazz pianist and composer Abdullah Ibrahim in concert, April 21 in the Coolidge Auditorium.

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Juan Felipe Herrera with young poets Sarita Sol Gonzalez (left) and Elena Medina.

Herrera Named to Second Term As 21st U.S. Poet Laureate

By Mark Hartsell

Acting Librarian of Congress David S. Mao this week appointed Juan Felipe Herrera to a second term as U.S. poet laureate consultant in poetry – an appointment announced, then celebrated in the Coolidge Auditorium on Wednesday night with a little help from a few young friends.

"What a great joy, what a great joy this is," Herrera, the 21st laureate, told the audience. "How beautiful it is to be here. How beautiful the Library of Congress is. How fabulous are the materials – the archives, the manuscripts, the paintings, the prints.

"I've met so many good people – the division chiefs, the librarians at large. ...

It really is about being a community and being a family."

During his first term, Herrera launched "La Casa de Colores," a two-part online project that invited the public to contribute verse to an epic poem about the American experience ("La Familia") and chronicled his own experiences exploring the Library's collections ("El Jardín").

In his new term, which begins Sept. 1, Herrera will follow the precedent of previous multiyear laureates such as Billy Collins, Ted Kooser, Kay Ryan and Natasha Trethewey and develop a new project. Details about his second-term project will be announced this summer.

"In his first term as laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera traveled the country cham-

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pioning poetry; he also launched an ambitious project on the Library's website," Mao said in announcing the appointment. "We look forward to seeing what Herrera will accomplish in his second term, and we know he will continue to inspire and educate with his warmth, enthusiasm and creative genius."

Herrera was born in 1948 to migrant farm workers in California, moving from town to town, often living in trailers and tents along the road – experiences that later would influence his work.

He graduated from UCLA with a degree in social anthropology, then earned a master's degree from Stanford in the same field and a master's in fine arts from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. He taught at California State University in Fresno and the University of California at Riverside and later served as California's poet laureate.

Herrera has authored some 30 books of poetry, novels for young adults and collections for children – most recently, "Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes."

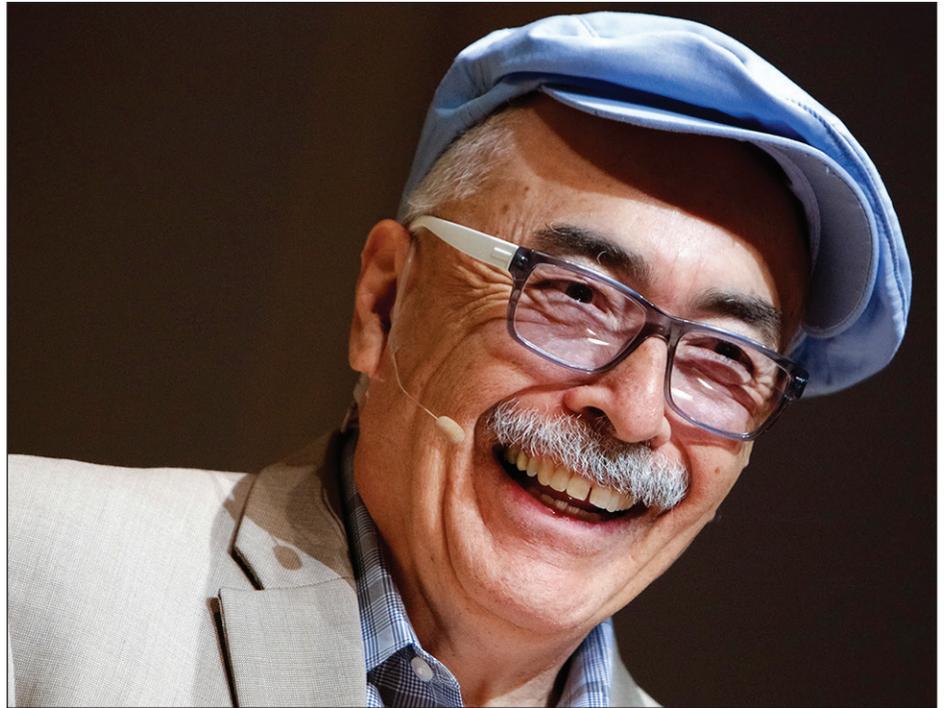
On Wednesday in the Coolidge, making what had been billed as his final appearance as laureate, Herrera reflected on life, family and the poets who have inspired him in a presentation he called "Pioneers of Flower and Song."

With images of family members and poets flashing on a screen behind him, Herrera discussed the lives and work of favorite Chicana and Chicano poets such as Francisco X. Alarcón, Alurista, Gloria Anzeldua, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Victor Martinez, José Montoya and Raúl Salinas.

"They were my mentors in many ways," he said, before reading a work by Alarcón:

*every cloud
a prayer
every raindrop
a miracle
every body
a seashore
a memory
at once lost
and found*

"I'm so glad we had the chance to say hi and to meet them and see them and hear a few of their works and notice that



Shawn Miller

Juan Felipe Herrera onstage at the Coolidge Auditorium on Wednesday.

they were great pioneers, speaking at a time when it was difficult to speak," Herrera said. "Many forces working against us and them. And yet they continued and forged ahead and became big changers. With words, with beautiful poetry, with art and stories and a deep, compassionate art."

Following his presentation, Herrera welcomed to the stage two "poet laureate chicas": 11-year-old Sarita Sol Gonzalez and 12-year-old Elena Medina, young poets he met in New Mexico and California during his travels as laureate.

"I want to introduce you to the new pioneers of flower and song," Herrera quipped.

Sarita recited two of her own poems – "I Remember" and "Mentors" – and Elena performed her "One Day," a song/poem that drew a standing ovation.

They closed as a trio, reciting a poem composed as a group by Herrera and his two new colleagues.

"We sort of did an 'Exquisite Corpse,' by email," Sarita said.

*They tell me I'm here for a reason
a reason that will take the people in a
different direction
a direction that will build brighter
futures with bridges, not borders
and live the dreams we can only imagine.* ♦

Wednesday's event was presented by the Library's Hispanic Division and Poetry and Literature Center in conjunction with Split This Rock. More information about Split This Rock is available at www.splitthisrock.org. More information the poet laureate is available at www.loc.gov/poetry/.

Employee Assistance Program Can Help

Looking for strategies for coping with a difficult co-worker? The Library's Employee Assistance Program can help. All Library employees and benefit-eligible dependents may contact on-site counselor Susan Diamond at 7-6389 or sdia@loc.gov. They also may call 1-888-290-4327 or go to www.guidanceresources.com at any hour of any day of the week to receive up to three sessions at no charge for off-site counseling close to home or work.