

WORD OF SOUTH



RAM, a Haitian band based in Port-au-Prince, will be performing with Bob Shacochis, whose "The Immaculate Invasion" centers on the occupation of the island nation. WORD OF SOUTH

The WORK of WORDS

Don't wait for inspiration says author
and Word of South speaker Bob Shacochis

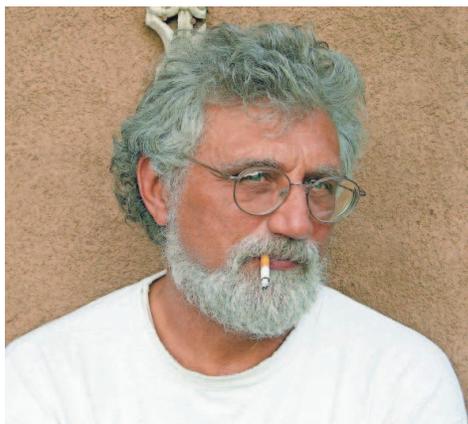
Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Truthfully, writer Bob Shacochis would rather be fishing, whether it's pattering out on Florida's Gulf or casting for rainbow trout up in the Rocky Mountains, dogs in tow.

Even with a writing career spanning decades in journalism and fiction, Shacochis says there is still no guarantee that he is even a writer, though he'll return as an author for this year's Word of South Festival.

"I sit down, turn on the computer, and maybe something comes and maybe something doesn't," says Shacochis. "It's like laying bricks and it shouldn't be any more glorified than that. Just do the work. If it needs to be better, then go back and make it better, but you can't just sit around and wait for inspiration."

Shacochis feels as if he lives in relative anonymity in spite of an illustrious career, and yet he writes. Publishing doesn't
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Novelist and FSU lecturer Bob Shacochis will speak at Word of South on Sunday, April 15. WORD OF SOUTH

If you go

What: Word of South Festival: Bob Shacochis & RAM Performance

When: 3:15 p.m., Sunday, April 15

Where: Capital City Amphitheater/ Cascades Park, 1001 South Gadsden Street

Cost: Free admission

Contact: For more information visit <https://www.wordofsouthfestival.com/>.

Inside

Storyteller and Word of South contributor Sean Dietrich spins stories of the capital city, **Page 7D**

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come as easy as it once did, and yet he writes. Unfurling thousand page novels gives him no satisfaction when he wishes he could churn out three 100-page books in the same amount of time, and yet he writes.

He writes in a style that is "maximalist, dense, lush, acrobatic, and gymnastic." He writes with a kind of "literary texture" that Shacochis says some find "delicious" while others find it "indigestible."

Yet, at odds with this apathy towards talking about himself as a writer, a quick Google search reveals he has written since elementary school, concocting and performing one-act plays. He attended the first high school to offer a creative writing course, worked at that school's newspaper, and was encouraged to continue writing after meeting Joseph Heller, author of "Catch-22," as a freshman in journalism at the University of Missouri.

Shacochis earned an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. His first short-story collection, "Easy in the Islands," received the National Book Award for First Fiction, and his second collection "The Next New World" was awarded the Prix de Rome from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Shacochis' most recent novel, "The Woman Who Lost Her Soul," won the 2014 Dayton Literary Peace Prize and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. As a journalist and war correspondent, Shacochis' bylines span national publi-

cations.

"[For journalism] I do a lot of fieldwork, investigating and interviewing people, and the parallel universe of that in fiction writing is the researching," remarks Shacochis on process. "In my last novel, for instance, there is an entire section set in Croatia in 1945. I wasn't alive in 1945 and I've never been in Croatia, but I had an enormously good time researching Croatia at the end of World War II reading book after book after book. It was marvelous."

His writing has been collected into non-fiction works such as "The Immaculate Invasion," and most recently "Kingdoms in the Air: Dispatches from the Far Away." Shacochis acted as contributing editor for "Outside" and "Harper's" maga-

zines, the latter of which placed him in Haiti during the uprising against the nation's first democratically elected president, Jen-Bertrand Aristide.

It's where he first saw RAM perform, the band who will take the stage in Tallahassee on Sunday, April 15, at Word of South after Shacochis reads excerpts from his book "The Immaculate Invasion." Having seen them live many times, he notes their dynamism, and the hypnotic and seductive dancing and drumming that create mesmerizing performances.

RAM is Haitian band based in Port-au-Prince, with initials standing for the band's founder, songwriter, and lead vocalist, Richard A. Morse. Shacochis' "The Immaculate Invasion" centers on the oc-

cupation of the island nation and begins with the story of the band as it illuminates and relates to the conflict. RAM is famous for their regular Thursday night performances at the capital's Hotel Oloffson and their song, "Fèy," which metaphorically alludes to the presidential coup d'état and put the band members' lives at risk.

"That song was forbidden to sing, so DJs who put it on their radio stations were killed," explains Shacochis. "If a policeman or army soldier heard you singing that song on the street you were killed. The only people who were allowed to sing that song because they had special protection from the American embassy was Richard A. Morse and his band, but they sang it at great dan-

ger to themselves."

As a senior lecturer in creative writing at Florida State University, he's kept an eye on the literary community in Tallahassee since 1988 and senses a shift in its magnitude given the advent of the Word of South Festival and the opening of the city's first independent bookstore. From his observations in the classroom, he's felt lucky to have students graduate with contracts from New York publishers, but is aware that it's not the most talented writer in the room that gets the gig.

For Shacochis, it's always an exercise in endurance, with the only difference between someone who has a book and someone who doesn't being that the first person sat down and actually did it. He states

authoritatively that "failure is the first step towards success," and though he's never let his failures out of the house without multiple edits and hard work, his greatest reward has been seeing years of labor tidied up, packaged, and placed on a shelf.

As far as wisdom outside the writing realm?

"Don't worry about making the world a better place," Shacochis said. "Worry about not making it a worse place. If everybody devoted themselves to making it not a worse place, the world would be a lot better."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

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