



## Paul Zarzyski

Paul Zarzyski, the recipient of the 2005 Governor's Arts Award for Literature, has been spurring the words wild across the open range of the page and calling it *Poetry* for 35 years. In the early '70s, he heeded Horace Greeley's "go west young man, go west" and received his Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from The University of Montana, where he studied with Richard Hugo. In the same breath, he took up a second "lucrative" vocation – bareback bronc riding. He rode both the amateur and the ProRodeo circuits, hung his hooks up in his late 30s, then cracked back out, after turning 40, for a couple more years on the senior circuit or, as Paul prefers to call it, *The Masters*. On the lee side of his rodeo roughstock years, these days he "makes his living" (to borrow the title of a James Dickey essay) BARNSTORMING FOR POETRY.

Paul has been a featured performer at the Elko Cowboy Poetry Gathering for the last 22 years, has toured Australia and England, and has recited at the National Book, Folk, and Storytelling Festivals, The Santa Clarita and Monterey Cowboy Poetry and Music Festivals, The ProRodeo Hall of Fame, The Library of Congress, and with the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra. He was also featured, in June 1999, on Garrison Keillor's *A Prairie Home Companion*, aired from The Mother Lode Theater in Butte, Montana.

Recently, Paul and Wiley & the Wild West shared the stage at the 2008 National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. Their collaborative efforts brought the Elko audience to their feet, cheering wildly for the duo's *Spur Wild* show that celebrated "all things horses." With such a declaration of enthusiasm, the artists have now produced what was meant to be a single performance into the [Spur Wild! Tour](#) booked through Code of the West Entertainment.

With little time to spare between performances throughout the United States, Paul – the master craftsman of words – carves out time each day to write new poems and lyrics that stretch beyond themes of cowboys, roughstock, and the ways of the West. His recent work includes two CDs, *COLLISIONS OF RECKLESS LOVE* and *ROCK 'N' ROWEL* (Open Path Music, 2007), received a celebratory review from William C. Reynolds, in the October 2007 issue of *Cowboys & Indians*.

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Paul's other publications include *WOLF TRACKS ON THE WELCOME MAT* (OreanaBooks, 2003), winner of The Spur Award from the Western Writers of America, *BLUE-COLLAR LIGHT* (Red Wing Press, 1998) and *ALL THIS WAY FOR THE SHORT RIDE* (Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), which received The Western Heritage Award for Poetry from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. Two recordings – *WORDS GROWING WILD* (1998) and *THE GLORIOUS COMMOTION OF IT ALL* (2004) – both produced by Jim Rooney in Nashville, offer poems with accompaniment by Duane Eddy, John Hartford, Rich O'Brien, and other fine musicians.

Paul also has collaborated on song lyrics with Ian Tyson, (*Rodeo Road* and *Jerry Ambler*), Tom Russell (*Bucking Horse Moon* and *All This Way For The Short Ride*), David Wilkie of Cowboy Celtic (*Black Upon Tan* and *Flying, Not Falling, In Love With You*), Don Edwards (*West of the Round Corral*), Wylie Gustafson (*Hang-n-Rattle!*, *Saddle Broncs And Sagebrush* and *Rodeo to the Bone*), and Betsy Hagar (*Hope Chest*, *The Christmas Saguaro Soiree*, *Star Light Star Bright*, and others).

Born and raised in Hurley Wisconsin, Paul has called Montana "home" since 1973.

### Review Excerpts

Paul Zarzyski – poet, lyricist, and the "Yoda" of the West – translating cowboy lingo into the jive of Americana! Here's what Zarzyski contemporaries say about the "master" of words.

Time stops for that short moment when a great magician tells his tale. There are fourteen poems on ***Collisions***, fifteen on ***Rock 'n' Rowel***, and this is not just "spoken word." There is great textured musical backing on most pieces. This is "Jazz-Blues-Folk-Americana-World-Word Music." Art-Rock and Roll. [Buy these records.](#) Zarzo has won the **Governor's Award** in Montana as well as numerous other awards, and has appeared on TV and NPR radio. But you don't need to hear that sort of hype. Try this: He's a wop, ex- high school football player out of Wisconsin, with a lit degree from Montana, who rode bareback broncs and owns a massive collection of Western Ties. How more American can you get? This man would never lie to you. That fact is a small revolution in itself. He will entertain you. Then, when your heart is melting, he will tear it out, take a chaw out of it and hand it back to you in a popcorn box. You'll leave the theater

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changed. Smiling. Moved. Gracias, Saint Pablo.  
(Tom Russell – Songwriter, Singer)

"Any reading of Zarzyski's complex rhymed and free verse, chocked to the brim, bottom, and edges with mind-racing, overlapping images, is going to tell you that this is a cowboy poet with a whole new approach to poetry."  
(Dale L. Walker--The Rocky Mountain News)

"In the new poetry, the ballad line, if heard at all, is only one ingredient of prosody. The Montana poet and bronc-rider Paul Zarzyski's diction is as rich as his internal rhymes and alliteration are extravagant...."  
(Thomas West--The Washington Post, "Book World")

"If pit bulls were poets, they'd write like Paul Zarzyski. Tenacious, he shakes the hell out of personal experience and spits out bits of bone and flesh...."  
(Gennie Nord--The Missoulian)

"Roughstock Sonnets is the best book on rodeo since the invention of horseback."  
(William Kittredge--Author of *Hole In The Sky*)

"In prose literature there are labels such as "Kafka-esque" and "Hemingway-esque." In cowboy poetry there is, or ought to be, "Zarzyski-esque." No other "-esques" come close."  
(Jesse Mullins--American Cowboy magazine)

"There are lots of good rodeo hands in this old world and a fair number of good poets. To find a man who is both is as rare as a wet summer in eastern Montana. Paul Zarzyski knows the jerk of the bareback riggin' and the surge and flow of classic narrative poetry in the Masefield tradition. He is a rare talent...."  
(Ian Tyson--Cowboy Song Writer and Singer)

"Paul Zarzyski is a man of many hats--fisherman, bronc rider, son, worker, lover. From the white heat of his rodeo arenas to the calm lakes and clear streams of all our lives, this poet captures experience the way a bear goes after salmon--with confidence and patience, with intensity and purpose. But don't be fooled. The Make-Up Of Ice is a celebration of men and women, a moving

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chronicle of the human spirit. Zarzyski is a serious poet whose unique world becomes our world. It's a good clean ride."

(James Welch--Author of *Fools Crow*)

"Alive to all the senses, these richly textured poems pulse with a force that is at once muscular and tender, urgent and timeless. Paul Zarzyski listens to the heartbeat of creation. What he hears, in the rhythm of the land, the wonder and pain of human experience, is the 'sweet music' of all our lives. Imbued with wisdom, wit, humanity, and grace, *Wolf Tracks on the Welcome Mat* is a moving paean to 'the glorious commotion of it all.'"

(Anne Heath Widmark--Author of *Between Earth & Sky, Poets of the Cowboy West*)

"Paul Zarzyski's poems will break your heart--and then turn right around and mend it. He looks pain squarely in the eye, takes its measure, and counters it with tenderness and wisdom, all in language that should be set to music. Books like this are the reason poetry exists."

(Ed McClanahan--Author of *The Natural Man*)

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