A founding father of the Beat Generation who rolled with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Diane di Prima. A friend to The Doors’ Jim Morrison and Ray Manzarek, having played 200 gigs with the latter. An animal lover who gave poetry readings to lions, deer and tree kangaroos. A poet, novelist and playwright who reported for *Vanity Fair* and *Rolling Stone*. This is Michael McClure, a legendary wordsmith who continues to inspire.

Endless stories, creativity and spunk still flow from his 83-year-old hands. Experience the intention and raw emotion of his words this weekend at his poetry reading and writer’s workshop. McClure will read from *Of Indigo and Saffron* and *Ghost Tantras*. He’s currently writing three other collections and is heading to New York after his Vegas gig, so howl with the master of beast language and soulful words while he’s here.

**What will your poetry workshop entail?** Secrets in the creation of inspiring and imaginative poetry. I’ve written this workshop especially for Las Vegas thinking that it will be larger than what I’m used to doing, which is usually 15 to 30 people. I’ll use a lot of techniques from Kerouac, Charles Olson and Ginsberg to put something together in a completely creative way.
Who do you think was the most influential Beat poet? Ginsberg. Because after that night that we all read together [at the Six Gallery reading in San Francisco], poetry was never the same again. People were listening. The whole world was listening.

You’ve written so many books, so much poetry. How do you do it? You get up every morning and wait for the muse. If you sit long enough, she’ll be there. Early, early in the morning is good for me.

Are your new books the same style of poetry that you’ve always done, or are they something new? My style is changing all the time. It’s good for me to help me figure out what’s going on with myself and what’s going on with others. “A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.” [Walt Whitman] A poem is like a mouse. A poem can do a great deal, particularly to help you discover your inspiration.

You toured with Ray Manzarek, The Doors’ keyboardist. How did you first get to know the band? Jim’s wife’s sister knew my agent, and he wanted to meet me. We met at an Irish bar. We took one look at each other, and we didn’t like each other. He had long hair, and I had long hair. He had leather pants, and I had leather pants. But over drinks, we started talking. We became close friends. I inspired him to publish his poetry books.

Later, we went to England to try to do a film. We got a contract for an original film based on a novel of mine. We adapted my novel and added everything you’d ever want to see in it … It looked like a redwood tree. Jim cut it down to the size of a script and freed us from it. We had been working on it for eight or nine hours a day for a month.

Do you think a film will ever be made from it? No. It was like turning a redwood tree into a toothpick. It doesn’t work. Although some people now would consider it a treasure.

What about Janis Joplin? How did you come to write the song “Mercedes Benz” for her? Well, the song is not the same. Hers is a sweet lullaby, fairy-tale piece of songwriting. My original was pretty political, pretty outrageous. I was practicing [with other musicians], making it up at night. One of them was a sitar player and one a harmonica player. We’d sit on the floor playing and making up songs. People would gather around just to watch. The song changed every night.
Janis picked up the song from a mutual friend, and she started singing her version of it. She called me up one day and asked if it was alright with me if she used it … She liked her version better, and I liked my version better ... But I wasn’t worried about legalities.

**What do you think is the tie that binds poetry so closely to music?** It’s only bound closely if the poet listens to the musician, and the musician listens to the poet. They need to have a deep interest in what the other is doing, and they need to hear each other clearly.

**How do you feel about today’s poetry?** I see nothing wrong with it. I think some of it seems too easy to write, but it opens the door for [poets] to mature. They just need to keep doing what they’re doing.

**What was it like to read to the lions at the San Francisco Zoo?** Who could be more bored than someone in jail, or at a lion house? We were singing together. They wanted more. National public television wanted to know if I would do it again … I’ve done it with tree kangaroos, deer; a lot of different animals. It’s a way of being honest with them. I think that’s one thing that critters appreciate.

**Michael McClure Poetry Reading** *April 30, 7 p.m., free, Winchester Cultural Center, 3130 McLeod Drive, 702-455-7340*

**Writer’s Workshop** *May 1, 2 p.m., free, Clark County Library, 1401 E. Flamingo Road, 702-507-3400.*