

The Opening of The Back Yard

report by
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The Back Yard is a newly established artistic space constructed in the back garden of Nu Century Arts Offices at Henderson House on Hamstead Road in Handsworth. The unveiling of the new venue took place on the 7th September 2013 and demonstrated the versatility of this exciting space open to artists, local businesses and residents from the local community and further afield.

As with other successful Nu Century Arts ventures such as the Livebox event and the Flyover show, the Back Yard is a space for showcasing newly emerging talent as well as internationally acclaimed artists. The venture is supported by Black Mental Health Organisation COPE who are keen to highlight the outdoor area as ideal not only for artistic ventures but which could be used at other times as a therapeutic local retreat.

Local MP for Perry Barr, Khalid Mahmood opened the launch and congratulated the organisers on a successful venue which would serve as a form of 'support for those people that need it' as well as a place 'to bring people closer together'.

Shared enriching experiences through music, theatre and education have long been core strands of the company which has been going strong since the year 2000. Attendees at the launch were treated to all of these strands through some dynamic performances and lively discussions.

Local musicians such as artist Louise from So Sick Entertainment UK with a rendition of Etta James' 'At last' and a duo with two boys took advantage of the open mic slot available on the day. Birmingham local Ruvimbo who pens her own lyrics and who emerged as part of the Livebox is an artist who returned to

the launch to perform alongside the David Grey Quartet. The quartet also performed a set featuring music composed by Birmingham Conservatoire graduate David Grey. During his highly anticipated set, multi-award winning artist Soweto Kinch treated the audience to music from his latest album 'The Legend of Mike Smith.' which has been turned into a stage play and is playing at the Birmingham REP until the 28th September 2013. Jonzi D, Artistic Director of Breakin' Convention and Jonzi D Project is the Director and choreographer of the show and both artists engaged the audience in a lively interactive freestyle performance.

Esteemed Actress Doreen Blackstock, featured as Miss Mercle, emerging in role from the seating area and engaged the audience with a humorous yet heartfelt solo performance. Also taking on a different persona was Man Booker Prize nominee Yvette Edwards in the voice of her character Jinx with a reading from her debut novel 'A cupboard full of coats'. Nu Century Arts Youth group Aesop's Kids courageously performed to a full audience and were later asked by Anna Edwards a retired health practitioner to plant seedlings of the moringa 'tree of life'. Her mini-presentation of the plant was followed by a lively question and answer session with the audience who were intrigued to learn more about this versatile tree, native to parts of Africa and Asia. Continuing along the education strand, local photographer Anthony McFarlane's work was exhibited on the day as well as a display of artistic work from the local Summerfield and 610 youth Group.

For the most part the launch was blessed with sunshine and during the brief but heavy showers, attendees took shelter in the ground floor of the building. After some high

spirited acapella singing, the skies cleared and the busy team of volunteers had got the venue ready once again for the audience and performers to continue to enjoy their day.

As with other events such as Nu Century Arts Supper Club in collaboration with Perry Barr Local Arts Forum, the event allowed for casual networking with attendees working in the arts, media and local businesses as well as students and retired locals. Among the crowd, Ben, a representative from Changemakers, an organisation which supported the Back yard project with funding and a series of skills workshops for the young people involved, commented on how impressed he was with the high quality result. Some of these young people included local footballer Mensah Kinch and aspiring Costume Designer Rose Magia who were heavily involved in managing the project. A local catering business attracted many to their food stall featuring items such as barbecued corn on the cob, curried mutton, chicken, and rice and peas on the menu.

If passers-by had not been affronted by the sounds and smells ascending from the event, there was also a very bold visual sign above the side entrance to the garden space. The sign remains as an invitation along with the Back Yard idea 'Ask for the Key' where community members are invited to take part in scheduled activities ranging from performances to varied workshops as well as initiating new projects and taking the lead in delivering sessions.

Back yard promotional t-shirts displayed a message which sums up how the community can continue to support its continued success, 'Help us turn the back yard into an orchard. Give what you can. Time, money, good vibes'



BBC's Midlands Today Arts reporter Satnam Rana (left) came to interview the events organiser, Don Kinch (below centre) who directs Nu Century Arts, together with other artists as they rehearsed the day before the launch in the Back Yard of Henderson House, before an appreciative audience of supporters and helpers. View news clip at



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