



CoolTan Arts & Creekside Artists at The Alternative Fringe

By Martin Walsh

... a vast range of intimate and touching poems mixed with wild and frenzied performance

Poets.

Tonight hidden away in the Seven Dials Cafe in Central London I was lucky enough to be invited to a rare gem of an evening hosted by CoolTan Arts and Creekside Artists and presented by The Alternative Fringe. The venue was well hung with colourful paintings created by Creekside Artists; showing off fantastic scenes of vibrant rain forests. The room itself was full with a healthy looking audience interspersed with some intriguingly dressed performers and sober looking poets, the latter only given way by the pages lying

prostrate before them.

They're a strange old breed of fish, bought out of their dens and hovels by the lure of open mic nights, slam competitions, literature workshops and any other well hidden and quietly promoted event which might give them their catalyst and their well earned release. Tonight is such a night, poets have gathered and tonight they will stand, expertly mixing nerves with passionate confidence, in front of a black microphone stand plastered in gaffa tape and a battered looking microphone. In this they put their trust. Their approach

can vary, some hold their poems in their hands, which is fine as long as the audience can't hear it rustling or see it shaking, as if the poets were trying to throw the words from the page and up into their own mouths. Others recite from memory. And there are some who make it up. There is no right way and reassuringly there seems to be no resentment between the three camps.

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So, the show... the setting... the stage... and then the curse of a faulty microphone during the first poets first page. The night came quickly to a halt, tension rose while the young night juddered and whimpered under the weight of failed and broken technology. A false start, but no matter it seems, for by the time the replacement microphone had been set up the poets had already cast the idea of electrical amplification aside. From poem to poem the poets audience fell into a deeper and deeper hush. A calm hypnotic trance fell over the room, baited and hooked, priming all of our concentration towards the words spoken by The Mighty Poet. Tonight the poem was incarnate and the poet offered them to us naked and hungrily we took them in.

The first poets to grace the stage were from CoolTan Arts and took the responsibility for breaking the ice and warming the crowd. Well, the ice was smashed, put onto boil, and served out for the lay. What a great serving of heart warming soul stew!

From the death of pets and the wrath of worms, to God and to loneliness, the CoolTan Arts performance poets held back no energy and left no stone unturned.

The featured CoolTan poets were Gary Stephens, Sasha Dee, Emile Sercombe, William Ball, Charles Brown and Peter Cox. The poets were reading in promotion of their book launch on the 4th September at Liberty Festival, which celebrates the contribution of Deaf and disabled people to London's culture. The book, titled *Anthropology*, was put together by CoolTan Arts for the benefit and showcase of the poets who have found the medium of poetry a stabilising balance in their lives.

Anthropology comes very well recommended, I watched as copies of the book changed hands and sold, quite literally, like hot cakes. Compiling and publishing *Anthropology* has been a serious feat of work and it is brilliant to see it being so appreciated and enjoyed. I opened to a few random pages and each poem held it's own charm on their own beautiful pages.

After the CoolTan Arts poets had closed and left their stage and applause the event was broken in half by an enchanting Balkan Trio, who's words, although I couldn't understand them, had me falling desperately in love an

unhealthy amount of times during their performance!

And breath...

The Creekside Artists came to take the mantle and maintained the energy raised by CoolTan Arts. They brought playfully teasing poems about the love of smoking, more dead pets, loved wives, loved husbands, loved cats and the origin of cockney rhyming slang. There was an impromptu duet and a crash course into the working mind of a slam poet. Great stuff! Each poem was superbly crafted and performed with such wit and intensity that by the end of the night I was left buzzing and amazing that I had been lucky enough to listen to so many talented poets for absolutely nothing.

For more information about the work CoolTan Arts do within their community for people who experience mental distress and for more information on their poetry collection *Anthropology* please visit www.cooltanarts.org.uk

“It was a fantastic opportunity to co-host the poetry & spoken word night with Creekside artists ... It was a huge achievement for CoolTan poets to read their own poetry in such a nice venue. Being able to participate in such events shows the quality and success of CoolTan's work.”

Kathrin Kirmann

For more information on CoolTan Arts visit their website at www.cooltanarts.org.uk or pop in to see them at their HQ in Elephant and Castle at:

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