

EMERGE CULTURAL NETWORK (EMERGE) REPORT 2007

OVERVIEW

Presented and produced by Multicultural Arts Victoria, this dynamic arts festival celebrates Victoria's many diverse refugee and emerging cultures in a series of exciting events around Melbourne starting in Refugee Week in June through to July. From Africa to the Far East, from the emerging to the established, from the traditional to the contemporary, music, dance, theatre, visual arts, cultural foods, crafts and ceremonies – there is always something for everyone! Emerge Festival commemorates the United Nations World Refugee Day and this year will officially launched Refugee Week in Victoria on June 17th.

In 2007, Emerge Festival engaged over 200 artists from 36 different cultures including Afghan, Iranian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Gambian, Ghanaian, Senegalese, Guinean, Maltese, Haitian, Komoros Islander, Oromo, Burundian, Chinese, Kurdish, Australian, Sri Lankan, Turkish, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Cambodian, Laotian, Italian, Croatian, South African, Bosnian, Spanish, Greek, Indian, Mutti Mutti, Gurnaikurnai, Wonnarua, Tjapukai and Torres Strait Islander, Koori. The festival program included five events and attracted audiences exceeding 9000 people from all over Melbourne

EMERGE FESTIVAL EVENTS

Emerge Festival Main Event – Sunday June 17th 2007

A massive cultural celebration commemorating United Nations World Refugee Day and launching Refugee Week, that saw the magnificent Fitzroy Town Hall opens its doors and close off the street for 2 non stop stages of dazzling world music performances, a vibrant cultural marketplace, the aromas of an Ethiopian coffee ceremony, tasty authentic foods from all corners of the globe, creative kid's activities with Amanda King, photographic displays by Iranian artist Mitra Malekzadeh and Kristin Diemer, bellydance workshops with Underbelly, henna tattoos and much more. Beautiful performances were given by Jali Buba Kuyateh & Diyaa Looloo (Senegambia), Diafrix (afro hip hop), Dereb Desalegn & Lion of Judah (Ethiopia), South Sudan Musica and King Bell (Sudan/ Congo), Ajak Kwai (Sudan), Wang Zheng Ting & The Australian Chinese Music Ensemble (China), Emre Acar (Kurdistan), Sultan Miazoi (Afghanistan), Mehr Band (Iran), William Kadima (Congo), Shafi Ali (Oromo), Nazar Yusif (Sudan), Kinfe Teferi (Ethiopia) and Zaki Sharief (Sudan).

The event attracted over 5000 people throughout the day from diverse communities all over Melbourne – most notably African, Iranian, Afghani and wider community audiences. The festival engaged 107 artists and cultural groups specialising in music, dance, visual arts and cultural activities from over 20 different nationalities including Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Sri Lankan, Indian, Tibetan, Cambodian, Afghani, Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian, Komoros Islands, Haitian, Gambian, Senegalese, Ghanaian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Maltese, Oromo, Conoglese, Burundian and Australian.

The festival provides a platform for newly arrived artists and their communities to share their culture and arts with the wider community. For many it is the first time to showcase their work outside of their own community and to connect with wider Australian audiences. For many it is a regular yearly event that they now look forward to and work towards. The festival has assisted not only artists but also small businesses selling cultural foods and

crafts to promote themselves to the wider community. The festival is also a chance for the wider Australian community to experience the sights, sounds and flavours of Melbourne's newly arrived refugee communities all the way from Africa to the Far East.

Voodoo Vaudeville - Friday 29th and Saturday 30th June 2007

An afrocentric theatre experience melding hip hop and traditional African culture, story, song, dance created by some of Melbourne's most exciting up and coming young African and Aussie talent in a first time collaboration under the direction of Gorkem Acaroglu. Voodoo Vaudeville weaves tales of cultures new and old, lost and found, taken and given back and explores notions of cultural identity experienced by young African people who have left their homelands to grow up in a Western culture. Torn between traditional and contemporary cultures struggle to find where they fit in – how do they reconstruct their identity? How do they balance the social expectations of their Aussie peers and their traditionally minded parents and elders? Many want to reject their traditional culture and wholly embrace the ways of their new Western life... But then do they risk forgetting who they are? Just like the fifth generation Aussie who has little connection to her cultural roots and longs for a deep sense of history and ritual – one that is not tainted by the shame of colonization. Caught between worlds, how can we understand each other's cultures and move forward together, united and at peace ...?

With a bit romance, a lot of drama, and a good dose of comedy this inspiring and confronting piece features Synodos Theatre, members of Diafrix, Monkey Brigade, Nubian Knights, b-boy Milkyas Sereche and actor Sharief Serfonteyn.

Voodoo Vaudeville is a dynamic community arts project that engaged 16 emerging young artists from 9 nationalities to collectively develop a multi art form performance under the guidance of five professional artists. The show played for two nights only at Northcote Town Hall as part of the Emerge Festival and exceeded capacity audiences of 120 per night having to turn people away! Now due to the overwhelming positive response from both audience and participants, Voodoo Vaudeville will be remounted as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival in October

Most of the young artists are from various African backgrounds including one Ethiopian, one Eritrean, six Sudanese, one Komoros Islands, one South African, one Haitian as well as three Australian born artists. The rapport that developed between the participants during the five months that they worked together was remarkable. At the outset there seemed to be two distinct groups – the Sudanese, then everyone else. There was little sense of connection between the participants as they had all been 'thrown together' to create a show. As the development of show progressed however so did the connections, both artistic and social, between the young artists. Several have established very strong friendships with each other which are particularly important to them as they have no brothers and sisters or other family here in Australia. What was also notable was the sense of group identity that developed between the young African artists as being part of a whole, rather than several small separate communities. Another key outcome for many participants was the discovery and development of acting/ singing skills that they never knew they had. Many truly blossomed during the process and emerged with a new found confidence that was not previously evident. Some are talking now of further studies/ training in acting and singing, further collaborations with each, performing at each other's shows. The group is now meeting once a month for dinner and will be working towards another performance of the show in October.

the Arts Centre in association with Multicultural Arts Victoria presents as part of MIX IT UP
Visible – Sunday July 22nd 2007

Victoria hosts a wealth of undiscovered performers from all around the world telling their stories through music. This stunning concert celebrated and gave a voice to emerging and established African and Indigenous performers in a massive showcase featuring Kutcha Edwards, Jali Buba Kuyateh & Diyaa Looloo, Nadee, Koori Youth Will Shake Spears, Eritrean Star Band, William Kadima, Liz Cavanagh and Dereb Desalegn with Bomba. Several of the artists that featured in this special concert were nurtured through Multicultural Arts Victoria's innovative Visible arts mentorship program and have recorded songs for the annual Visible CD which was launched at the concert.

The day started at 3pm as Hamer Hall foyer came alive with a cultural marketplace and displays from local African and indigenous communities, Ethiopian coffee Ceremony, henna painting, hairbraiding, gum leaf workshops with Uncle Herb Patten, African drumming with Kojo Sam and indigenous dance with Brendan Marks.

The Visible concert is part of the Arts Centre's Mix It Up program – an initiative that celebrates Victoria's cultural diversity and shared heritage. This year the Visible concert engaged 56 artists from 8 African and 5 indigenous cultures to a culturally diverse audience of over 3000 people which doubled last year's attendance.

Music Deli Concert – From Fremantle to Fitzroy - Thursday June 14th 2007

Recorded live at the Iwaki Auditorium and hosted by ABC Music Deli's Paul Petran, this unique concert featured four outstanding culturally diverse performances from Australia's East and West Coasts!

Dya Singh –renowned world wide for their beautiful and uplifting repertoire that harmoniously blends Sikh spiritual music with jazz, blues and other Western styles.

Milica Ilic (WA) – hailed by critics as 'a fiery combination of virtuosic skill and originality', Bosnian born Milica is emerging as one of Australia's most gifted young musicians.

Desert Child (WA) – originating in the remote pearling town of Broome in WA, this inventive duo perform warm acoustic guitar grooves that blend classical, Latin, rock, folk and jazz.

Meltemi – exquisite strings and delicate percussion from Greece and Turkey come together in this dynamic ensemble featuring Melbourne's finest Mediterranean musical talents.

The Music Deli Concert engaged a total of fifteen artists from six nationalities including Indian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Bosnian and Australian. The concert was well attended by 200 music lovers and community members.

Beautiful Ethiopia Photographic Exhibition - Sunday June 3rd – Sunday June 17th 2007

A beautiful photographic display of Ethiopian people and culture both in Australia and Ethiopia. This exhibition featured the work of Ethiopian photographer Befekir Kebede and was part of the celebrations to mark the start of the Ethiopian New Millennium this year.

The exhibition received significant press coverage and over the two week period it is estimated that the exhibition was viewed by up to 500 people - largely including Ethiopian community members who were proud to see their people and culture portrayed so positively. The exhibition has given artist Befekir Kebede confidence and motivation to start facilitating community based arts projects that will continue to profile his people and culture. Since the exhibition he has connected with two other talented Ethiopian artists –

together they are preparing an exhibition for the 2008 Emerge Festival that will detail the migration and settlement of Ethiopian people in Melbourne.

ARTISTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

‘ If MAV could hold festivals like Emerge and Visible more often that would be great. It helps our people settle and gives a chance to the Australian people to know us. We need more of this.’ *Intesar Homid, Community Worker Jesuit Social Services.*

‘ Me and the boys look forward to the Emerge Festival every year. MAV has really helped us grow – actually I don’t think we would still be here if we didn’t have things like the festival to work towards – it gives us motivation..’ Simon Landid, South Sudan Musica Emerge Festival.

‘ It felt so good to perform on the street just like we do back home. Eventhough it was raining we went wild and people were loving it. “ King Marong, master percussionist (street performance with drum and dance group at Emerge Festival).

‘ The Monday after the show I didn’t know what to do with myself – no more Voodoo Vaudeville – I miss everyone so much... ’ Ezeldin Deng, actor Voodoo Vaudeville.

‘ I have only done two projects so far with MAV – Voodoo Vaudeville and New School Rulez. Both have been really organized and professional and I have had great opportunities to interact with professional hip hop artists and learn new things. I really look forward to doing more work with MAV in the future’ Metse Hagos, DJ/ Producer Voodoo Vaudeville.

‘ This has been just what I needed - it’s hard to find opportunities to work in this field let alone with a group of like minded people who understand what I’m about...I want more of this’ Sharief Serfonteyne, actor Voodoo Vaudeville.

‘ We have a real vibe together...we didn’t want to stop...what we did was something special. We were so good! ’ Claudia Sangiorgi Dalimore, dancer Voodoo Vaudeville.

‘ I feel it...everything in this play is real...all African kids in Australia should see this play and know that they’re not alone.’ Nassir Asfir, Ethiopian community member who attended Voodoo Vaudeville.

‘I guess one of the things I enjoyed the most was that everyone had an equal role. Some of you are better known than others but no one stood head and shoulders over the rest. This is a sign of a REAL community where everyone has an equal part to play and no one tries to steal the show....I also thought that Sarah’s piece was so brave and moving and reflected the thoughts that some of us oldies have had over the years trying to negotiate race minefields and political correctness. Your story is one that needs to be shared with the bigger community. You’re all excellent communicators and I could feel the warmth of the audience reaching you.’ Kate Welsman aka Systa BB, PBS Radio, Voodoo Vaudeville audience.

‘ Before I volunteered at the Emerge Festival I had never had the chance to even speak to an African person...I was curious but never had a way in...now I have African friends and

even play in a band with some Congolese guys – all they've ever shown me is love!' Alex Savage, musician/ Emerge Festival volunteer.

' Days like Visible are special because its about the music and helping people from indigenous cultures around the world come to an understanding that they are in the same boat...it's also about making people think and overcoming ignorance that has bred racism and persecution against indigenous peoples' Kutcha Edwards, Mutti Mutti song man, Visible artist.

' MAV is good for all artists...when I go touring people say that for African traditional culture Victoria is the place...and that is MAV' Jali Buba Kuyateh, Senegambian griot musician, Visible and Emerge Festival artist.