The Youth Empowerment and Poetry Night had its third annual performance on Sunday, July 31st. The event was held at Spotlighters Theatre, in downtown Baltimore, which has hosted the night of performances since they began in 2009. This year the event was co-organized by The Taylor-Wilks Group, a non-profit consulting firm specializing in health management, and The Den, an upcoming community center for LGBTQ youth.

The aim of the event was to empower young people to use their creative voices to address important issues, especially among queer youth. An implicit theme of the night was HIV and health, although the performances touched on a wide array of connected social issues such as: racism, homophobia, poverty, drug use, love, immigration, stereotypes, stigma, and more. These issues are very pertinent in the lives of queer youth of color, who often face discrimination from family, friends, employers, and healthcare providers, leaving them in vulnerable positions. This event was organized to create a safer space for young queer folks to be able to reflect on these issues in a creative way.

The Den, one of the co-sponsors of the event, has a goal of creating safe spaces for queer youth in Baltimore, even though they don’t yet have a physical space just yet. Lamont Bryant, chairperson for The Den, said, “The purpose of of the Youth Poetry and Performance night coincides with The Den's goal to provide creative and alternative outlets for youth to express
themselves in a safe and affirming environment. The performance night was open to all youth, and The Den places an emphasis on including LGBT youth performers in order to ensure inclusiveness to a population in great need of a voice.”

Harriet Smith, organizer of the event and Community Education Coordinator at The Taylor-Wilks Group, said the event was organized to highlight and celebrate the diversity of young people in Baltimore. That is why the event featured a mixture of performers, some of whom have many years of experience performing, and others for whom this was their first time performing in front of an audience. “The voices of these new young performers are just as important as those who have been doing it for ten years,” Smith said. “They have a lot to add to the dialogue.”

Image courtesy of Michael Quander [2].

Source URL: https://indyreader.org/content/youth-empowerment-and-poetry-night-features-diversity-local-talent

Links: