

Kathleen Morris

Using Art to Speak

It was another great night at The Bing Arts Center this past week. There were plenty of new faces to see the twelve acts that performed that night, including Springfield's first ever Poet Laureate, Maria Luisa Arroyo.

The performances were amazing to watch. A young girl named Keila Matos was the first to go on, reciting an original poem of hers. She said her reason for doing so was because she'd attended the Igl!te the M!c last month and was very inspired. She added, "It reminded me how I was happy when I was making art with Teatro V!da. It helped me realize it was time to focus on myself."

Vincent Magnani, a past performer at Igl!te, performed another poem from his new upcoming book. Following his performance was an original rap song done by a local high school student named Kenny Roche, who also recently made a music video promoting the need to stop violence. When asked about the video (which has garnered nearly one million views on Facebook) he explained, "I was helping Restorative Justice, a youth leadership program at my high school, and they were doing a week long event which was meant to bring attention to anti-violence." They had asked him to create a video to promote non-violence so he decided to create a music video, adding, "I've been a dancer ever since I was six so naturally music and rhythm has been in my blood. Creating it just came as I grew older and began to experiment."

Mina Atif, another past performer, read a poem she'd written that dealt with the hardships that come with being a woman. Andrew Torres, one of the MCs of the night, read a poem from his own personal book that was a tribute to a young woman named Natalee Holloway. She disappeared in Aruba in 2005 and was declared dead in 2012. Her killer still has not been brought to justice. The poem was told from the victim's point of view, showing itself to be an extremely unique piece.

A young poet named Melany Rivera-Sandoval read a very powerful poem she'd written that, in the words of them poem itself, was "an anthem." After her performance Torres came to the stage and spoke about the importance of spaces like The Bing Arts Center, emphasizing how spaces like these have always been places where people go to let their voices be heard during times of oppression. He referred to the Civil Rights movement, then saying that today we're facing a "a new lucha, a new fight."

I went up next, performing a comedy skit that mainly talked about how overrated it is to get older, along with touching on the ever-controversial issue of who gets to use the N-word. Another comic named Gabriel Cifuentes (an alum of Teatro V!da) went up after me, telling entertaining jokes about hipsters and Communism. Roche performed again as well, this time taking a song he'd written about social media and performing it as a poem. Emani McDowell, a student from Springfield College, went on stage a sang an amazing mashup of the songs Unsteady by the X Ambassadors and Rise Up by Andra Day.

Tom Roche came on stage to perform another comedy skit, actually improvising throughout. He openly admitted that he'd been faced with writer's block, and spun that around to create a hilarious dialogue with members of the audience, offering up suggestions for their different homework/project assignments.

Finally, Poet Laureate of Springfield Maria Luisa Arroyo performed two poems from her book *Flight*, ending the night on a great note.