By KevinMichael Key — On October 22nd and 23rd members of our LA Poverty Department began gathering at the corner of 6th and Stanford for our 7th Annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists. It looked like it was going to be a bright sunny day, perfect for an outdoor artistic event. I smiled as I watched folks buzzing around, Crushow Herring hanging our big banner, Walter and folks setting up the stage, our new soundman Jake checking the sound system and Hayk and volunteers decorating Gladys Park. We definitely had all the logistics down pat. Now, were we going to be able to create our best Festival ever?

The Los Angeles Poverty Department is a special arts group, we work to change the narrative about Skid Row and its residents, to create community and express the realities, hopes, dreams and rights of our people. A really good Festival has a vibe, a Spirit of giving and receiving, of being a part of… that’s what we were looking to make happen. And that spirit was alive when Randy Belfield – who was back with his group Passion - closed out the 1st day. Randy has a long connection with Skid Row. He was the music director for the Salvation Army Skid Row choir and still works with many musicians and community groups in our neighborhood. He put together a diverse set with something for everyone from uptempo R&B to slow Blues. Randy likes everyone to have a good time and see happy faces! It was the 6th festival for Franc Foster who sang on the set and got his Melting Pot together for the last act the next day. Unfortunately the rain started to come down just before they went up. Still, the Melting Pot spirit prevailed as the artists, creators and especially the audience were working together on something much, much, bigger.

For 7 years I have been MC of this event and this time we really rocked. I watched with excitement and joy as things began falling into place. Skid Row started jamming and rocking the park. At one point I swear everyone was moving to the same rhythm and beat, things were more cohesive and easy. From center stage I saw what was once a whisper turn into a shout. I saw people grasp an artistic thread to create the joyful bond of community. This was our park, these are our artists, “That was my story”. I belong no other place than right here, right now. From my vantage point as Festival MC I saw with new eyes the maturation of our vision. I realized that my being MC wasn’t so that I could give orders and bark directions, “pick that trash up”, “no drinking in the park”, I was there to help push us higher. Maybe that part of me had stood in the way of our growth as a Festival. I joined in with all of our amazing artists, drummers, activists, neighbors and performers to enjoy just jamming in our little park. And a fun thing happened, folks picked up their trash and few, if any, were drinking. It was a GREAT Festival, our best yet. We know Skid Row has volumes of creativity and talent, this year we merged our creativity and talents with a spirit of familiarity and peace.
**The Artists:**

**GREY BROWN**
I participated at all 7 festivals because of the homeless issue, because for a long time there was nothing to do here. We started and the people who are sleeping on the streets, they jumped up with life and doing stuff that got them off the streets. ... I put a little Blues in it. I mixed it up with Jazz and Reggae. I like to enjoy myself and I hope I’ll be back here next year.

**JOLI**
I sang an old, old jazz song: Summertime. It was fun, I’m glad I did it. I ask my mom and she’ll tell you I’ve been singing from the time I could manage. My mom is a Positive Sound, was like, ‘hey, let’s support another artist of ours who was singing here. And then they asked me to sing at the open mic. I have to see a whole community of artists just doing their own thing in unity, it’s fun! My CD Portraits is on CDBaby.com and my website is www.reverbnation.com/Jolisings

**NORMAL TIDE**
I did a song called Run. It was a song off my album “Daniel Syn-dromes 2.” It’s a nice little rap song, no cursing, probably 3 verses: a full-length song. I posted it on Facebook, search under Norman Tate and it will pop right up for you guys. I performed a song called Heart last time when I was here. I know that you guys give out the DVDs. That’s a good type of thing. I’m glad with the whole festival, I’m enjoying it. That’s what’s up.

**LINDY HAMILON**
This is my first festival. I live in the Weingart. My friend Juan told me about the festival. He has a table and he’s doing his thing over there and he said, ‘hey, you’ve got this down here. I know that you guys give out the DVDs. That’s a good type of thing. I’m glad with the whole festival, I’m enjoying it. That’s what’s up.

**CRISTY STEMBRY**
I’ve been in the streets since I was 12 years old with no parents. I ventured and I found Skid Row. Downtown is where my homes are, that’s Skid Row. I’ve been down here since 1986 and I love it down here. I have Skid Row auntie and Skid Row uncle and Skid Row sisters and brothers. I started with the Man in the Mirror by Michael Jackson because I have to take it all my way that we can make a change one day at a time. I’m with Lamp. I’ve been doing artwork for over 10 years. Through my creativity I express myself and get out the things I’ve been suffering from.

**HOUSTON - THE NU-BLUEZ OLOGY**
I just met a brilliant guitar player named Brandon. And I said, ‘you should play behind me and we can make up some old fashioned Blues and I’m gonna like talk-sing.’ I met my favorite poet Roccarlo at the Skid Row History Museum at a Jazz party and I thought that’s a good place for the Bluez Ologist because it’s about picking yourself up no matter what life throws at you. It’s using your creativity and your love to create a consciousness. I am here because I have love for people in Skid Row.

**ROGER MILLER**
I have been doing the festival for 5 years. Skid Row is my heart. I’ve been downtown for 7 years, coming back and forth every day. This is where I’m doing something: at the Downtown Women Center. I wanna thank them for providing my clothes. I thank God for the opportunity to do something. I wanna thank Kevin/Michael for doing this festival. He is a great man, he does a lot for this community. And I just thank you all. I just sang, Take Me Back. That’s one of my 20 songs on youtube. I made that my major song, Google Rosa Miller and all my songs are in a yellow box that says Rosa Miller Gospel.

**RONALD TROY COLLINS**
Last year I performed at the Skid Row show. I was on crack, really bad and what got me here this time is my manager. In May I was sleeping in a cardboard box. I used to sing on the streets for food every day and all these beautiful individuals, Amen School, William Barney and Jerry and they see something in me and they took in me. They paid for rehab and they are making a documentary called Mighty Ground. Google it. It’s gonna be an awesome documentary about how I moved from being on the streets that are college now. In a rehab facility. Being clean and sober 90 days. It’s gonna be 6 months. This is the way we are going back to the community because this is the community where I came from. Everything that you are going through in your life is to prepare you for what God has for you in the future. When the door opens, when there is an opportunity to go to a rehab facility, when there is an opportunity for someone to help you; when that door opens; walk through it. Take advantage of it because you might not get that opportunity again. I know a lot of people when they get off drugs, they feel hopeless, like there is no way out, like nobody loves or cares about them. For every wicked thing that goes on, there are 100 things that are good. You‘ve got a lot of good people that’s down here that are willing to help. But you’ve got to make yourself available and be able to accept it.

**JOANNE KERMAN**
I was invited by Austin to partake in this festival. I had no idea what it was, except that it was a Skid Row festival and I said, “That sounds great.” I did a couple of songs that I wrote. The first song was about, just feeling good and the feeling that I had when I wrote it was just... I had so much joy, yeah, I went to a festival like this and I felt so good and I went home and wrote that song. The second one was ‘There’s a gold that hunts the Pissleuds Light house’ and it’s been a legend for a lot of years. I have a friend that lives up there. We wrote a song about it that’s called Long White Gown. And the guys were playing percussion behind me, it was really fun. It was a wonderful festival. I’ve been here before but I’ve never parked and come into Skid Row. This is great. I have 30 years of sobriety. And if it wasn’t for the grace of God, I wouldn’t be alive, it’s a miracle that I’m here. What saved me was AA and God, but it was in that order ‘cause I had let go of God and AA hooked me back up. Like a conduit and then I found him again.

**PETER ASSEMING**
I am a friend of Mr. Randy, the bass player who’s coming later on and he’s a regular musician with Rosalie Brooks who was a Jimmie Hendrix’s co-writer. I started playing in 1974 and I have been pursuing a career as a professional musician since then. I have encountered tremendous obstacles, but I’m still here fighting the battle. I have lived around here. I didn’t know about this festival and I’m fascinated by the fact that I’m here. It has a great vibe, wonderful energy, and the people are just incredible. They bring the best out of me. It’s an honor for me to be here frankly. I think this is an area that may have the potential to change the entire city. We need the attention of the people that have the power of the politicians. This is America and nobody is exempt from giving to their own homeland. We’re here to fight together and to find a better situation for every single person around here. Like John Kennedy said, ‘Don’t ask your country what they can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.’ Everybody’s got a want to make money, but I think people come first.

Without disrespect, I hope that Hip Hop producers will try to share more with the acoustic community, with old and new. I think we need to inject Hip Hop with new blood. It’s not just about killing your broth... Every-thing’s on my mind about making money, but I think people come first.

Ghetto Heat

Yeh man! We are a political acoustic, melodic Hip Hop band based out of Los Angeles. This guy is from Skid Row. I am originally from Detroit but I’m from the bay area. We do a lot of music on social issues with the groove and funk aspect of it. You know, you gotta speak on these issues and bring it to fight. We got Ghetto Heat starting up last year for the sole purpose of making music and art that is about uplifting our communities and fighting against gentrification and political brutality and all sorts of New Age oppression. We have a bunch of friends that are based out here in Skid Row, like our friend Walton Jordan and our friend Elki Ring who used to be out here. So if you’re ever looking for people from Skid Row because they are free of all the other errors that you find in Los Angeles. They can be true artists. Our album is called Don’t Sell The Hood, our website GhettoHeat.bandcamp.com
NEW VOICES IN SKID ROW

DAMITRI TAYLOR

I've come several times. However, I didn't have the courage to sign up. Today I felt that it was necessary to sing the song that I did, which was Marvin Gaye's, What's Going On. There's a lot of atrocities that are being done to everyday people. It's not a black thing; it's a people, humanity. I'm ready to have all of the murders stopped that's happening in the United States. I feel exhilarated having participated. I feel like I have done more of my duty as being a part of this community. It is to tap into a rich art, and I feel really good about being a part of today as well as yesterday, when I sang with the choir.

I have been a member of the community since 2000. I lived here homeless twice, in 2000. I had three girls with me. I was crying so hard, because I did not want to come down here, but when I came down I found such a different picture than what had been painted in my head about what is down here. I found that this is a city within its own city. This is a city rich in culture, rich in art, rich with lives. These are people that have come upon hard times. There are people who have mental health. There are people who just want to be treated as other people to see their lives and there being hope. I volunteered and I'm still a part of The Downtown Women's Center. This is the only center downtown that services women. They have very many resources there.

I want to thank the community for embracing my family and keeping us grounded and welcoming us. It has been a very good learning lesson; it has expanded the thinking that I have about human beings as a whole. I learn more every day about the vastness of the richness of this beautiful city within itself. There is no city that is like this. It is a wonderful city.

Instead of scratching the surface; come, dive in and come see what beauty that lies here.

CARDBOARD ORIGAMI

TIKE ROUSEDIN: I'm the founder and inventor of Cardboard Origami, which is a portable shelter that you can open and close with no assembly required and provides instant shelter for people.

SAFETY ZONE & TENT & CREATIVITY STATIONS

The Skid Row Design Collective had their Safety Zone on display and Faith Purvey added her Safety Fort and asked people to write what makes them feel safe on it.

WORDS WE HAVE LEARNEP SINCE 9-11

Artist Clayton Campbell conducted a workshop as part of his exhibit which was on display at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive. He invited participants to identify words they have learned or that have gained new meaning since 9-11 and then photographed the people holding their words and installed the pictures in the exhibition at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive.

YOGA WITH "I AM WELLBEING CENTER"

Each day Freddel Kushman and Wuracio Timone gave Yoga exercises to everyone who needed them.
Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) creates performances and multi-disciplinary artworks that connect the experience of people living in poverty to the social forces that shape their lives and communities. LAPD’s works express the realities, hopes, dreams and rights of people who live and work in L.A.’s Skid Row.

LAPD’s Mission:
LAPD’s mission is to create a community of compassion, change individual lives and inspire the next generation of artists.

LAPD’s History:
The Los Angeles Poverty Department has been working in LA’s Skid Row since 1985, hosting free performance workshops and creating art. LAPD was the first theater company run for and by homeless people in the nation, as well as the first arts program of any kind for homeless people in Los Angeles.

Our original goals remain the same: to create community in Skid Row and to amplify the voices of the people who live in Skid Row, in order to share the lived experience of our company and community members with the larger city of Los Angeles and the nation.

Call or Write Us!
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ABOUT LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT

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Enormous Thanks to...

Our community partners: Lamp Arts Project and UCEPP. Alex Market helped pay for our lunches. Council District 14 provided tables and chairs, Love Nail Tree designed and printed our shirts, which were provided at cost by Jacob at the Fabric Planet and DLANC provided our sound equipment and technician Jake Kelley. Our “house band” the Skidroplayaz synced our heart beats


And the artists who facilitated the creativity station: Kathy and Young Mi, Paper Mache Bowls: Garrison Alexander, The Big Draw LA, Poemas & Cartas - Poemas & Cartas: Jen Hofer and Jessica Ceballos, Hair & More: La Ronda Hartfield, Skid Row Community Clean Up: Coach Ron, Give Away: Tracie W., Doctor Sawney shares the magic of reading! Sacred Children’s Photo Shoot: Michael Blazer, JoJo & Mark Montue, Words We Learned Since 9-11: Clayton Campbell, Yoga: Freidel Kushman and Marno Tiana, Cardboard Origami: Alex Varjancan and Tina Hoveyapan, Skid Row Design Collective and Faith Purvey with the Safety Fort and the HIV Mobil testing unit of the AIDS Health Care Foundation in the Public Health Division was able to reach out to 34 people. Quoc Quan Le filmed and edited the DVD of the festival.

Get ready for Los Angeles Poverty Department’s

8th Annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists

Coming up Saturday & Sunday October 21 & 22, 2017

The Festival is 2 afternoons of non-stop performances created and performed by Skid Row talents. We’re talking about performance of all kinds: music, dance, more music, spoken word, theater and yes even more music. Skid Row visual artists will display their work and we’ll have arts workshops going on, so anyone can make some work on the spot. If you want to perform or exhibit your work, contact us anytime before now and October and get a spot at the festival.

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Los Angeles Poverty Department's Crew and Staff:

Austin Hines, Henriette Brouwers, Kevin Michael Key, Walter Fears, RCB, John Malpede, Austin Hines, Henriette Brouwers, Camila Arevalo.

Photos: Austin Hines, Henriette Brouwers, Camila Arevalo.

Los Angeles Poverty Department

7th Festival for All Skid Row Artists is produced by Los Angeles Poverty Department with help from community partners Lamp Arts Center’s Arts Programs and United Coalition of Prevention Projects, Love Nail Tree, Alex Market and Fabric Planet. This year’s festival is made possible by the support of California Arts Council’s Local Impact program – CAC’s Local Impact program is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Department of Cultural Affairs of the city of Los Angeles, L.A. County Arts Commission, Department of Rec and Parks and the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council.

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