

North Minneapolis performance artists at Capri theater open mic

Written by Lee-Hoon Benson, TC Daily Planet



The young woman sauntered onto the stage, cracked a half smile then pulled the mike almost to her lips. The lights dimmed, music piped in and the spotlight turned onto her. The smoky voice that emerged from this girl was surprising as was the melody. Here on the Capri Theater stage in North Minneapolis, an African American girl was singing a jazz song popularized by Billie Holiday, an American cultural icon of the 1940s. The audience of about 50 young students, teens and middle aged folks hooted and howled encouragement when this aspiring singer ended her rendition. She glowed with a big smile, waved, and bounded off into the wings.

This performance is typical of the monthly Open Mic sessions at the Capri Theater. Held on the first Monday evening, Freedom of Xpression (FOX) provides a free platform for emerging and amateur artists to test and hone their art form. Anyone who wishes an audience for her creative expressions has five minutes to unleash that talent at Capri's FOX Open Mic. Poets, rappers, dancers, singers, musicians have come on stage to get a no-risk and free opportunity to share their craft with a diverse audience. Any art form is allowed and the range of expressions is wide. Immediately following a hip-hop poet, a Hmong student played the qeej (traditional pan flute) and danced to rousing audience approval at a recent FOX Open Mic.

Poet Crystal "Azteca" Ruiz has hosted the Capri's FOX Open Mic since late 2009. This emcee role is a natural outgrowth from Ruiz's regular job as a student advisor at the alternative high school run by Plymouth Christian Youth Center (PCYC). Hosting the monthly FOX Open Mic also allows Ruiz to publicly share her creative impulses. Soft-spoken yet firm, Ruiz is passionate about giving young people a chance to develop their talents and test their alter egos on stage. Ruiz encourages the high school students at PCYC to perform at FOX Open Mic. She especially reaches out to female students. Many high schoolers have taken up Ruiz's offer; some for the first time, but many reprising or honing their earlier FOX Open Mic performances.

