Celebrating integration and stories of migration through music and dance

Curating the main stage for the Yorkshire Integration Festival 2022

On Saturday 24th September 2022 Millennium Square in Leeds was filled with community spirit – music, dance, food, film and family activities celebrating the many ways our diverse region of Yorkshire and Humber has been enriched over the years through stories of migration - the Yorkshire Integration Festival 2022.

In April, my colleague Annie Lancashire and I took on the exciting but slightly daunting task of curating the main stage acts for the day. How on earth would we be able to choose a handful of performers to capture the wide variety of cultures, histories and communities that make up our region? After much thought, we agreed to represent these differing stories of migration through the main stage acts, to bring the region together to celebrate integration in Yorkshire and Humber.

Image

Dvi Doli performing on the main stage

Given the current situation in Ukraine we decided it would be fitting to start the day with a spotlight on Ukraine. We felt it was important to make clear from the start of the Festival that some people need to come to our region due to forced displacement and that Yorkshire and Humber is proud to welcome people seeking safety and sanctuary. We also wanted to pay tribute to the strength and resilience so often shown by those who have fled, and to recognise the wealth of culture, traditions, talents and skills they bring. We were delighted to be able to book Dvi Doli, a classical Ukrainian duo now based in the UK, who play the beautiful traditional Bandura instrument. Dvi Doli were followed by Podilya, a young Ukrainian dance troupe who wowed the

crowd with their folk dancing and incredibly athletic Cossack

Podilya performing on the main stage

Next, in recognition of all people seeking sanctuary in our region from countries and conflicts around the world including Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Iran and Democratic Republic of Congo, we booked Harmony Choir from Leeds and Sheffield One World Choir. These community choirs count refugees and asylum seekers from a wide range of backgrounds amongst their valued members and the crowd were visibly moved by their songs of hope and friendship. We then invited Commoners Choir to join the refugee choirs on stage in unity, solidarity and defiance,

representing the allyship with refugees and asylum seekers shown by so many people here in our region. Hearing over 100 voices and the crowd all singing ‘You are more than welcome here’ in the final song, ‘Citizen’s Shanty’, was a special Festival

Harmony Choir, Sheffield One World Choir and Commoners Choir singing the Citizen's Shanty

After lunch we explored more stories of migration – starting with a focus on people from Europe who have made Yorkshire and Humber their home from countries such as Poland, Romania, Italy and Ireland, coming here to work or study, to build a better life for themselves and their families. Some may have arrived in

the past 20 years, especially during the period of freedom of movement, but we also remembered older generations who settled here during the post-war period or even earlier, making Yorkshire and Humber their home for over 50 years now. These migration stories have all added to our Yorkshire and Humber community of today and we celebrated them on the main stage with Leeds-based band, 'From East to East', who got the crowd

From East to East performing on the main stage

The penultimate main stage act shone a light on post-war migration to our region from outside of Europe and from the Commonwealth - mainly from the Caribbean and South-East

Asia. For example, migration during the 1950s-1970s from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, with people coming to work in the local textiles industry. These stories again highlight journeys that brought people to our region to work or study, to build a better life for themselves and their families; migration is nothing new, it has been happening for centuries. Migrants have contributed in so many ways to the development of Yorkshire and Humber over the years and second or third generations now hold these stories as part of their family histories; but these stories are also woven into our wider shared history, as a region. Punjabi Roots Academy from Bradford captured this story of migration and integration over a number of generations perfectly with their blend of traditional Indian Dhol drumming and Bhangra dancing fused with a modern British Asian MC show. Audience participation was absolutely essential for this performance! As I glanced across the crowd at families, young and old, friends, colleagues and even security guards all dancing and singing and celebrating together, this was a true moment of joy for me and made all the hard work over the past six months worthwhile – a snapshot of what integration looks like and who we are as a region, at our best.

Image

Punjabi Roots Academy performing on the main stage

Finally, ten Leeds College of Music alumni, fresh from performing at Glastonbury Festival, joined us to showcase young British talent from our region. TC and the Groove Family (featuring Franz Von) gave us Afrobeat, breakbeat, jungle, jazz and good vibrations celebrating the coming together of cultures, and the unity that music can provide for all.

Image

TC and the Groove Family (featuring Franz Von) performing on the main stage

And no, in the end Annie and I couldn’t find a way for every single community from our richly diverse region to have a slot on the main stage, despite our best efforts! However, all the main stage acts helped ensure the Yorkshire Integration Festival paid tribute to the many different stories of migration we have here, showcasing through music and dance some of the many ways migration has enriched our region and reinforcing why integration is something worth celebrating.

Liz Maddocks

Source URL:

https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/blog/celebrating-integration-and-stories-migration-through-music-and-dance