

## **An environment for creativity and collaboration**

Creators Jam convener **Michael Bowie** tells journalist Lucy Chumbley how it all began

As it enters its third year, **Creators Jam** – an improvisational forum for creatives that brings musicians of all genres together – has become a fixture of the D.C. music scene, helping artists in the DMV area hone their original sound.

Launched by internationally recognized bassist, bandleader and music educator Michael Bowie in November 2021, just as the pandemic began to lift, it draws a diverse crowd of instrumentalists, electronic beat-makers and vocalists – singers and rappers.

Artists assemble at the Eaton Hotel on the first Tuesday of each month to improvise, backed and supported by a house band, throwing themselves into a soul-baring creative process Bowie describes as an act of supreme courage.

Stylistically, the Creators Jam leans R&B and Hip hop. But artists of all genres are encouraged to come out, Bowie stresses, noting that “the house band is so eclectic and so good we get into some quirky cross-genre stuff -- and that’s kind of the goal.”

## **Collaboration**

“Many people come to our sessions and say they haven’t experienced anything quite like this in their lives, and that experience is what I’m pushing,” Bowie says. “It’s so important to one’s growth and really goes to the essence of what an artist is.”

Whatever the medium, he says, an artist “seeks to learn, experience and grow.”

And that growth calls for collaboration.

“Unless you’re going to be a solo artist you’ve got to practice the craft of collaboration – and really has there ever been an artist who has not collaborated with someone else?” he asks. “There’s always some level of learning and collaboration that has to be done.”

The Creators Jam was conceived as a way to foster this kind of mutually supportive creative ecosystem. “It’s the creating of an environment vs a performance,” Bowie says.

Creators Jam itself has grown via word of mouth.

“We have a lot of return artists,” Bowie says. “Artists who come on a semi-regular basis. We’re still getting new faces, which is exactly what the goal is.”

## **Artistic growth**

“Some people come and say we’ll get up next time – it takes courage,” he says. “It’s like walking up to a stranger and introducing yourself.”

The collaborative process can be daunting, he acknowledges, akin to “baring your naked soul. Trying to get to your greatest essence as an artist. To reach deep and be OK enough with who you are to explore your artistry. And most of us have so many mental blocks to that. There’s a lot of layers you have to go through of your own personal psyche.”

“What’s missing from society and especially youth is the ability to exchange with one another,” he notes -- a state of being brought into sharp relief by the isolation of the pandemic, but that existed even before it, with online communication taking over from face-to-face interactions.

“That ability to interact is what the Creators Jam is all about,” Bowie says. “Not just do a cover but tell your story, what’s on your mind that you want someone to know.”

Even before the pandemic, “people were deeply entrenched in separatism – our own thing,” he adds. “We still need to wake up from this separatism we’ve all been in. We need to be with each other, and we need to learn what collaboration is.”

### **Giving back**

So how did it all begin? Bowie, a D.C.-area native who has played with some of the greats and whose own parents were musicians and educators, says he was inspired to launch the Creators Jam by his friends and out of a desire to develop and uplift the area’s musical talent.

He got the idea just before the pandemic after attending a weekly Producer Mondays jam session at the Nublu Club in New York’s East Village, an open forum for creatives that is spearheaded by musician, songwriter, arranger and producer Raymond Angry.

In New York, “the artistic community’s envelope is always being pushed,” Bowie says, driving creative development and growth. “Washington, D.C. doesn’t push in quite the same way at all.”

So when he was invited to put together a performance at the Eaton Hotel in November 2021, he saw his chance to change the paradigm in his hometown.

“I’ve performed enough, I wanted to do bigger things,” he says. “If I’m involved in something, it has to be beyond one night and one agreement, if I have a choice in the matter at all.”

“I immediately thought, how can I make this bigger, and so I immediately thought about the idea for the Creators Jam.”

As it enters its third year, the Creators Jam is gaining traction and drawing in new musicians, with a new artist support coordinator [Erin] hosting bi-monthly webinars for current and

prospective artists, and a December Talent Showcase at the Eaton Hotel leading up to the inaugural Creators SUPERJam at the Atlas Performing Arts Centre in January 2024.

Bowie says the Creators Jam will continue to grow, offering new opportunities to DMV artists.

“Wherever your home is I think it’s important to advance it in some small way,” he says.

“Because you can only take so much... you have to give it back.”

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