

“(The event) was a lovely afternoon and a chance to catch up with old friends” – Jackie Smallridge	Poet	Participant in workshop #1 and performer at the event
“Thoroughly enjoyed it , I think I have my musical mojo back!” – John Van Ryan	Poet/saxophonist	Participant at both workshops and performer at the event
“Great night . . . loved it” – Mahandra Patel	Percussionist	Workshop #1 leader
“I had such a great time, thanks to all the artists.” – E. Kemp	Poet	Audience member
“It was a great event. Thanks to all!” – Barry Patterson	Poet/musician	Participant in workshop #1 and performer at the event
“Great time... thank you to all who took time and effort putting this together.” – L. Smith	Poet	Audience member
“Thanks for all your efforts to give us these opportunities to share. Great event!” – Amy Rugg	Poet	Participant in workshop #2 and performer at the event
“Very creative and pleasant evening.” – Ras Emmanuelle	Spoken word artist	Participant in workshop #1 and performer at the event
“I will look forward to more events like this in 2022.”	General public	Audience member
“The performers all did themselves proud!”	General public	Audience member
“This was something really different happening in Cov, glad I dropped by!”	General public	Audience member
“I would love it if there was a way to attend via Zoom, am currently having to isolate.”	General public	On social media, commenting on shared photos
“Wouldn’t it be great if music met poetry AND visual arts...? An idea for 2022.”	Artist	On social media, commenting on shared photos
<p>“The process of developing and producing these workshops has been really enlightening, not only as a workshop leader but as a creative and collaborator.</p> <p>There has been space made here for a really important symbiosis between professional artists and non-professional creatives, which is often under explored, and has vast potential in terms of building frameworks for community expression and representation, and allowing pro artists to develop creative relationships with the communities they exist in, and to develop and explore their practice outside the box of industry expectations and limitations.</p> <p>I think Raef and the team have achieved a fantastic success and an example of a very potent well of potential for Coventry's creative minds.</p> <p>I really appreciate how accommodating you've been through a tricky process of getting the workshops and events up and running, especially throughout the trials of this past year or two. I'm so glad they turned out well and it paid off.</p> <p>I feel like there was a lot to be mined from the process and hopefully there is the potential to do more. I've been thinking a lot since about the potency of the improvised and workshopped collabs between musicians and poets, and I keep wondering if there's a space to explore further – maybe even with a small group of musicians who are comfortable with collective improv...</p> <p>Thanks for thinking of me for the process, it's been a really fascinating whirlwind, and great to work with John Bernard too.” – Amy Kakoura</p>	Musician/lyricist	Workshop #2 leader

Workshop #1 – 08.11.21 (6-7.30PM)

No. of participants: 6

Workshop leaders: Andrea Mbarushimana and Mahandra Patel

Set-up: We were allowed access to the venue an hour early, to settle in. Some tables and chairs, classroom-style, by the stage in the main room of The Box. Speakers set up for instruments to be plugged in if required. Did not request a PA system and mics for this session. Andrea and Mahandra put out some instruments on the stage, including tambourine, maracas and a small rainmaker. No FarGo venues were open for hot beverages. Water, pop and cups were purchased from nearby corner shop.

Participants had been advised to bring a poem/piece of spoken word or instrument with them. Two poets attended in the role of musicians: John Van Ryan with saxophone and Barry Patterson with xaphoon (plus Mahandra on drums and Andrea on guitar).

Andrea and Mahandra spoke about times in the past when they had collaborated as musician and poet. They performed a short, unrehearsed piece to demonstrate and encourage everyone, then split the group into pairs of poet plus musician. Two pairs went into The Box foyer, and the other two moved to opposite ends of the main room. They practised getting to know each other and ways of putting the poetry together with music for about 25 minutes. Everybody then reunited in the main room and took turns sharing their performance, with feedback from Andrea and Mahandra and the group as a whole re: what worked well and what might help enhance the performance. For example, Ann was encouraged to try tapping a beat for herself on the tambourine while she read her poem with Barry's xaphoon-playing. The discussions were productive, with participants discovering new ways to respond to each other's performance, e.g. who should start and when the other person should come in.

Participants were invited to be part of the event on the 21st, and encouraged to stay in touch with their partners if they wanted to, to rehearse in the meantime. Mahandra took recordings of the performances and offered to share these around, to refresh people's memories. (These audio files were shared with the group on 19th November, as nobody requested it until a few days before the event.)

Monta from FarGo came in partway through the session, to do some work at the back of the room, and she said it was a lot of fun to watch and hear the performances.

Things taken on board:

A PA system would be useful in the workshops, as it was too easy for musicians to accidentally drown out the poets when performing if the instruments had no volume control. Monta had offered to set the PA up, but said it would take about 20 mins so I'd declined it.

Use of separate rooms was useful, as otherwise performers would be disrupted by each other's noise.

To promote workshop #2 using Eventbrite, with a limited number of tickets – registration encourages people to attend instead of saying they will but forgetting. It would also enable us to promote the event widely without worrying too many people might turn up (instead of very few people turning up).

Workshop #1 – 16.11.21 (6-7.30PM)

No. of participants: 10

Workshop leaders: John Bernard and Amy Kakoura

Set-up: We were allowed access to the venue an hour early, to settle in. When we first arrived, there was no electricity working in either room of The Box. But Monta called someone out and had it sorted by 6PM. The PA system had to go in the main room, so we moved everything in there. No FarGo venues were open for hot beverages. Monta helped us set up the PA system and a mic. Amy had her keyboard, music loop pedal and other instruments (such as a mini organ, woodblocks, cajon box drum and flute). John had his laptop. Chairs for participants were set up in a loose circle. Water and pop was purchased from nearby corner shop. I provided pens and paper (most people used their phones, but some needed paper).

John and Amy spoke a little about their experiences of musical performance. John played a YouTube video of a spoken word film he'd done with music, to demonstrate. He then gave participants the theme of 'love' and asked them to write a poem that they felt would work with music, while Amy played a melody for inspiration. Amy then spoke to participants about ways to expand their vocabulary and ability to communicate with musicians about what type of ambiance/effects they would like (things like layers, tempo, mood). Each participant was invited up to the mic to read the poem they'd written during the session while Amy adapted her tune on the keyboard to work best with their words and style of delivery. Then people experimented with using the different instruments and playing them into the mic, and Amy looped each sound so that the group had created a collaborative piece of music.

Participants were invited to be part of the event on the 21st, and encouraged to come a bit earlier than the start time to practice with musicians if they wanted to.

Things taken on board:

The workshop needed to be a bit longer, as we ran short of time at the end.

Poets had been encouraged to bring a piece of spoken word they'd started working on, but this didn't come into play. It might have saved a bit of time, but was nice to have them write to music. A few people struggled to produce something on the spot. We perhaps should have made it clearer that they didn't have to perform the 'love' free-write, as fewer people from this workshop participated in the event than from workshop #1, where they worked with previously written poems.

Amy's "glossary" was a really valuable thing to teach participants, something any writer interested in spoken word and collaborations would potentially benefit from hearing.

Performance event – 21.11.21 (6-7.30PM)

No. of performers: Eight from workshop #1, three from workshop #2

Approx audience: 35

Set up: The event was held in the Foyer of The Box. PA system and 3 mics, set up for us by Hannah (FarGo duty manager). We had to borrow an extension lead from FarGo, as the PA system used up the plug sockets and the next nearest was too far away for Amy's keyboard. Twisted Barrel/CommonGround/The Factory were open when the event started, but closed by the interval. We'd been told to direct people to buy beverages from nearby venues but The Factory had stopped serving tea & coffee.

The event was split into two halves, arranged so we had a variety of different poets and instruments. However, for the convenience of not needing to swap around wires and seating, etc., some performers did two of their pieces in a row – consequently, the second half was less varied and ended much sooner than planned! Some of the poets stepped in and performed additional poetry without music; we then used the extra time as a networking opportunity, for people to talk to each other about writing and music and collaborative creativity.

You wouldn't have guessed how little rehearsal time there had been for most people – the poets and musicians all engaged really well and confidently. Amy, Mahandra and Barry did a great job of spontaneously providing music for performances on request, beyond what had been rehearsed in the workshops. The audience seemed keen for other events like this one and were excited to hear Positive Images had more workshops and performances planned for 2022.