

## Music and Art Express Our Voices: Chinatown's "Double Standard" Lunar New Year Festival By Trinh Le

I attended the third annual “Double Standard” Lunar New Year Festival in Chinatown put on by Asiatic Empire. There were spoken word performances, hip hop, bands, comedy, and live art, as well as the opportunity go to dancing at the Grand Star Jazz Club, with a portion of proceeds benefiting aid to Sri Lankan tsunami victims and workers’ struggles for justice. I myself saw Invid (band), Lyrical Virus (hip hop), Elements of the Outer Realm (band), Thomas’s Apartment (band), and D’Lo (spoken word) perform. It was a gathering of many API musicians and artists, as well fans and music lovers and community, to come together to celebrate the Lunar New Year together as well as fundraise for a worthy cause.

I learned a lot about what the underground musician/artist circle is like for API’s. It’s a struggle for many to get their name out there, and so by coming together all at once to celebrate and perform, they are working together to further the image of the API artist/musician. People who come to these things are people who hear about a band/performer from word of mouth, and that is why it is considered “underground,” because these musicians/artists are people you don’t see in the mainstream, but rather only hear about them through word of mouth. That is how they get their support, their fan base, their connections.

In terms of issues facing people in communities, I learned that often, music and art is an outlet for people to express oppression and address certain issues pertaining to their respective communities. I also learned that it is very hard to “make it” for people of color as a musician / artist / performer, which is an issue in itself. A lot of these people, I would have never known or heard before had I not been involved with API activist organizations.

In terms of ways to learning and teaching in a non-classroom setting, I learned that learning can happen while you’re at a performance. Event organizers “taught” participants through music, through spoken word, through art. It is through their words, their sounds, their melodies and rhythms that they taught us what they wanted to teach us. And even if their goal was not to teach us, they made us feel something, whether it be compassion or anger or something else. They made us think. They made us connect with them through their music and art. It is these connections that can build an entire community.

Methods similarly used in university classrooms include the fact that it was not very interactive, because the performances usually entail having a performer and an audience. However, there were on occasion times when a performer would ask for audience participation, in which makes the performance more memorable.

Methods used differently than university classrooms would be the style of teaching. Rather than lecturing, it is performing. Rather than long drawn-out complex topics, the performances are short but still deep; complex topics but done in a simplistic way so that everyone can understand and follow. Rather than being fed information, we are fed with entertainment that makes us feel and think and learn.

In attending this event, I did not do anything new since I have attended events like this before. These events I enjoy a lot, which is why I keep on coming back. I didn't really prepare for attending this community event, because I didn't really know how to. In addition, there was a wide range of topics that were covered by the performing artists, and there was no way for me to know ahead of time to really research. I could have prepared better by researching about all the different artists/musicians/performers before coming to the event, so that I knew more about their background before they performed onstage. By knowing their background, you better understand where they are coming from, which would explain the type of musical expression they used or the topics of their performances.

There are some new ideas that I gained for expanding ways that Asian American Studies can be learned and taught. Besides classrooms, picket lines, etc... one can also learn about Asian American Studies through music and art... not only admiring and looking at other people's music and art, but also creating your own. Through spoken word performances, theater productions, open mic nights, media arts... there are many different types of art in which one can express, teach, and learn about Asian American Studies. By engaging in creating your own art work, you learn how to connect yourself to Asian American Studies... you have to feel something before you can express it. To actively express Asian American Studies through the arts, you essentially become a voice for the community.