

Art and Creativity in Kenosha

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Poets, And Painters And Musicians—Oh My! An Evening At BONK! IV . . .

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[Nick Demske](#), [Nick Ravnika](#) and [Matt Specht](#), have created an amazing entity. “Thing” doesn’t fit; “event” seems too dull. Entity is the only word I come up with to describe this spirited gathering of some of the best and brightest talent in the area. Yes, this is technically a Racine event. But one’s enjoyment of amazing art shouldn’t have borders or boundaries placed upon it. So put aside any feelings of “us vs. them”; [BONK!](#) showcases four artists each month, and the mix of what they have to offer the audience is varied and exciting. Film, music, poetry, dance...even a singing accordion player! Lest you think that’s all [BONK!](#) is about, I’ve heard that there are many more surprises and unique experiences in store for the future. Which leads me to my next point: Matt and “the Nicks” know how to pull an audience in and keep them coming, sly dogs that they are. I attended the first-ever [BONK!](#) and was hooked. When January’s installment was announced, I knew where I’d be spending that Saturday night.

My friend Jenny, another convert, met me at Blueberries Cafe, [BONK!](#) show headquarters. Jenny hails from England, so this seems to be a major coup for the organizers—BONK! isn’t just local, my friends, it’s going international! She’d managed to get us seats near the front, a “luxury” I hadn’t had at any of the previous installments. I have to admit, I was really excited. Not only because we had primo seats, not only because I was in the midst of a rare evening out, and not just because I had a delightfully hot cup of coffee in my hand. I had seen a [clip of Katie](#)

[LaFond](#) (performing that night) here on ExposeKenosha, and figured that if all of the line up was of the same caliber, we were in for a huge treat.

As it turned out, [Katie](#) was up first. Wow—do the powers of BONK! know how to set a tone! Katie is fifteen years old and has only played guitar for about two years, but she blew me away with her set. Her humble and upbeat demeanor concealed the sheer power of the talent that lies beneath. Since the BONK! venue shares space with a restaurant, outside noise has sometimes been distracting for me at other shows. That night though, I found myself tuning it all out, focused solely on Katie's playing and singing. Her original lyrics were phenomenal, and even when she launched into a cover of Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine", I was still beyond impressed. It was recognizable, but Katie gave it a unique flair; to me, a good balance when tackling a cover song. I was disappointed when her time was up. I gladly would've kept on listening.

Oyetunji Harrison Idowu was the next artist featured. I worked with Harrison for a short time many years ago, so seeing his paintings and hearing his poetry was a pleasant surprise for me. Coming from Nigeria, he draws from his cultural background to weave a rich storytelling element into his work. His booming voice was full of emotion while he read, pulling the audience into his poems. While use of one's hands can sometimes be distracting to a listener, Harrison's sweeping movements and other gestures did more to enhance his work, not detract. He explained that nature plays a big role in his work, and with his beautiful use of imagery, it was easy to envision glimpses of it.

The more serious mood Harrison had set was lightened by Angela Malone. Angela's a 911 dispatcher by day, and as far as I could tell, someone that has you rolling on the floor by night. Her first piece had me experiencing a "why didn't I think of that?" moment. She had taken lines from real Christmas cards and letters from family and friends and pieced them together into a poem. How did that work out for her, you might ask? Fabulously! I think that I laughed the entire time, and it's very possible that I did so even when it wasn't entirely appropriate. Her delivery of the material was awesome; it had an accessible feel that, like Harrison, drew you in. Angela's last piece, "Outline" had me tearing up from laughing so much. Someone in the audience asked if she'd be on stage at any future performances. I certainly hope so.

The last performer of the evening was [David Tomaloff](#). He's written and published a volume of poetry, released a CD, and is working on completing more. I quickly learned that he's the type of whirlwind talent that puts folks like me to shame. Most nights, I'm struggling to write one poem; he's already got CDs and books under his belt. I couldn't hold a grudge once he started his set though. He began with some poetry, the imagery of which was so hard-hitting and sharp that for the second time that night, I was envisioning the scenarios he was creating. As he moved on to playing a few of his songs, the storytelling element of his poetry took shape in his music and expanded. During his introduction of David, Matt had shared that he was really eager to have him perform at BONK!. No wonder; it was easy now to see why.

When all was said and done and Jenny and I were putting on our coats, I had the same feeling I always experience as a great vacation ends. There's a twinge of disappointment that the magic's been shattered, and the inevitable knowledge that it's time to step back into reality comes barging in. Thank goodness BONK! happens every month; I'll just have to sit tight until February.