

MEDIA RELEASE

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Thamesmead's talented youth shone at the annual, community-powered festival

Dance, music, poetry, community stalls, family activities, food and drink and the annual dog show all featured at this year's Thamesmead Festival, which is organised by local residents and showcases talent from one of London's most creative neighbourhoods.

This year's celebration — which took place on Saturday 12 August — was expanded to spotlight young talent with the new Wanderlust Hill Stage, entirely programmed and coproduced by local youth collective The South East Way. Over six months, eleven 14-16 year-olds, brought together by community arts project Three Rivers, learned about every aspect of putting on a show, from prop making and set-building to DJing and programming the young local acts.

The stage was a major success on the day with acts including young talent Jabz, four-piece rockers Everything in Mono, alternative hip hop artist Lavs, singer-songwriter HURU, UK-based K-Pop dance group Paradox, soul songstress Taite Imogen and pop-punk band Breakup Haircut — all of whom performed against a beautiful, Alice in Wonderland-inspired backdrop, designed and created by the teenagers.

Speaking to ITV News on the day of the festival Everything in Mono who “play rock music loudly” and range in age from 15-18 said: “When we were growing up in the area there weren't opportunities to perform other than in the pub down the road. To get the opportunity to perform on a stage like this is a really big deal.”

Speaking with Robert Elms about the Wanderlust Hill Stage on BBC Radio London, South East Way member Lola Holdstock-Supersad said: “That's our bit. We're really proud of it. It's our stage. We've designed the stage, we've picked the acts. Thamesmead and Abbey Wood have a big youth culture. Wanderlust Hill is by the youth, for the youth.”

On the Park Stage the House Gospel Choir brought the festival to a soulful finale, with a rapturous repertoire of club anthems and gospel classics paired with uplifting vocals that filled Southmere Park with euphoric vibes.

Jerusha Ujanga of the Festival Production Group, made up of local residents, said "The festival is all about community involvement, community unity and diversity. We want everyone to come here and feel represented".

Funded by Peabody, which is putting culture at the heart of its long-term regeneration of Thamesmead, this free, family-friendly festival is co-produced by local residents in partnership with event producers Serious. The entire festival is programmed and led by the Festival Production Group, made up of 14 residents representative of Thamesmead's diverse cultures and neighbourhoods.

Other 2023 Park Stage acts included: retro soul and rock n roll from Logan J Parker; the return of festival favourite and local star J Cocoa with her sweet mix of jazz, soul and RnB; South London's favourite power trio MTPockets with their high energy covers of funk, soul, and rock & roll classics; Afro-infused energy of UNCSS; melodic quick-silver jazz guitar of Edison Herbert and his jazz quartet , plus an acoustic set by cajon drum and guitar musician Ronniiee.

Set in a grove of trees on top of a hill, The Unplugged Stage featured acoustic sets, magic and mindfulness. Audiences enjoyed socially conscious poetry from Sam Castell-Ward; a set from South London singer, rapper and The Voice contestant Redrum; poetry from Andrew Livingstone-Boyd; the sublime vocals of South London-based folk-pop sengersongwriter Sam Winston and Midori Jaeger's mix of indie vocals and cello. Audiences were invited to create their own "floating bed" at Kerry Ward's mindfulness session and took part in a singing and breathing technique session with Our Story Our Song.

Dance and performance is woven into the rhythm of life at Thamesmead, which is home to a number of dance companies including Greenwich Dance, The London College of Performing Arts and Dynamix Dance School. On the Southmere Stage dance performances included hip hop, Afrobeat and street dance from Dynamix; competitive cheerleading from Utopia Cheer; and Thamesmead-born TikTok dance sensation Dancer Ras. Performer and choreographer Melissa Rayne and her dancers invited audience members to join in with a creative dance workshop, and 14-year-old Ruky Star — whose debut single Watch Me Now was released to raise awareness about brittle bone disease — gave a special performance.

Community stalls run by local groups and charities provided information about the work they do. These included: London Early Years Foundation, Crossness River Action Group, UK Latin Community, The Collective Makers, Thamesmead & Abbeywood Royal British Legion, Lauriann's Stem Club, Prostate Warriors, Treasures Supplementary School with Culture Club, Royal Borough of Greenwich Councillors and Greenwich Domestic Abuse Service.

Lisa Drew, Peabody's Cultural Programme Manager said: "This year's festival definitely felt like the best one yet, with great young bands performing on our new Wanderlust Hill Stage, lots of local talent showing their work on and off stage and the House Gospel Choir finishing the day with a brilliant all-singing, all-dancing set! Putting this on is a real community effort and would not be

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possible without all the hard work from our local residents in the Festival Production Group, the South East Way and my colleagues at Peabody.”

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