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Women seen, heard and lots more at festival

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"Meet somebody you don't know," emcee Nyrobi Moss instructed like a bossy big sister from the stage, her extended fingernails, bathed in white polish, prisms in the light.

"Say hi to somebody you don't know," she challenged friendly-like, with a nod and raised brow. "What good is sitting in your own social circle? That's no risk, and we like risk!"



[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Alison Hastings (from left), Stacy Melich and John Benzinger perform in 'Medusa,' a drama by Atlanta playwright Steve Yockey, one of the many pieces staged at the Seen + Heard Festival 2004.

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FESTIVAL REVIEW

Seen + Heard Festival 2004

A five-night event celebrating woman-positive arts and artists. Ended Sunday.

The verdict: Smart and heartfelt. Mark your calendar for 2005.

Such was the mix-it-up vibe at Seen + Heard, this weekend's woman-positive blend of theater, dance, visual art, spoken-word and performance art, a convivially convened frolic along an incongruent slice of industrial space in Atlanta's West End.

Free valet parking and a koi pond greeted all visitors, estrogen and testosterone dominant. A MARTA train, running at a frustratingly regular clip, provided counterpoint to the acts onstage.

Their scene: the B-Complex, a raw, 8,000-square-foot, brick-and-window warehouse transformed by volunteers into a combination community corner, living room, art gallery, bar and theater with something for everyone and a whole lot of drama, pathos and humanity.

Moss, an actress, vocalist, spoken-word artist and health educator for Sister Love Inc. (www.sisterlove.org), kept Saturday's action pulsating with her sass and warmth: "I want you guys to give a wonderful 2004 Seen + Heard welcome to . . ." she'd say, bringing to the stage musician Sonia Tetlow or Ras Benzo (both of Atlanta); performance artist Kt Kilborn (Atlanta) or Michael Burke (New York); spoken-word artist Anna Camilleri (Toronto) or Queen Sheba (Norfolk, Va.); or the cast of "Babes in Croneland," doing a theater piece about self-image and ageism.

Camilleri — tough, visceral, funny — shook back her shoulder-length chestnut curls, settled herself on her hips and began a piece about a late-night walk home from work, a guy named Dick and how Mom was right about not talking to strangers.

The moms, dads, husbands, lovers and girlfriends on hand leaned in from 50 or so casually placed folding chairs. They and the dozens scattered around

them swallowed hard, smiled and pierced the air with pumping fists as Camilleri wrapped her tale in triumph.

Kilborn, playing Pied Piper, split "Debutante Balls," her witty transgender-identity piece, into three and led the audience on a journey through the space and her life as a "tranny-boi lesbian" making a social bow at age 21: the encounter with a brusque concierge in a Greenville, S.C., hotel; the panicked trip to a CVS drugstore makeup counter; her "transformation" via barrettes and a leopard-pattern dress.

This festival's strengths, and it had many, were its spoken-word sirens — especially the fierce Ami Mattison, an Atlantan, mewling like a motherless child in the frozen-food aisle of a grocery store; the fearless Adriana Chiknas, also an Atlantan, rhythmically linking sexual abuse and unfillable hunger; and the courageous Queen Sheba, rallying for choice but accepting the cost of aborting her own not-to-be babies.

This S + H was Atlanta's second; a smaller, inaugural fest was held in 2001. Organizers now hope to make it annual. The event — co-produced by Kilborn and Martha Donovan — is the handiwork of EstroFest Productions (www.astrofest.org), a nonprofit organization focused on woman-positive arts and activism.

The festival was themed by topic, with all art forms addressing violence one night, for example, politics the next, then sex and gender, and finally spirituality. It worked wonderfully, with cross-pollination happening all over the place in a fun, messy, provocative way.

As Donovan, an English and modern dance teacher at Druid Hills High School, put it so well: "What it becomes in the end is an event about *conscious* art."