

# Art's special place in black history

## *2nd Annual Black History Month Tribute honors black artists*

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The Rev. Carl Kenney remarked in his keynote address that art was under attack. But on this evening in Joe's Diner, his words could not have met a more appreciative crowd.

On Sunday, Feb. 13, members of the community gathered for a second year to honor African-American art in recognition of Black History Month and the blossoming artistic culture of Northeast Central Durham.

Kenney summed up the critical importance of African-American art, hitting on the fundamental importance of holding the event, particularly during Black History month.

"We have moved from enslavement to freedom," he said. "Our art is a way of helping us understand critically what it means to be a witness to the change."

The 2nd Annual Black History Month Tribute, held in Joe's Diner on Angier Avenue, featured the work of four local visual artists, music by QSoul, two spoken word poets, and the evening's special guest — author, pastor and community activist Kenney.

Last year's inaugural event was organized by 30-year-old Derek Bryant, who teaches art classes at Durham Technical Community College, in an effort to bring the community together and gain self-perspective through art from within their own community, Bryant said.

This year, that goal was again realized.

Most of the artists were from Durham, with some exception, including spoken word artist Antwone Shufford, who is from Statesville.

Beneath portraits of monumental figures in African-American history, past and present, from Jimi Hendrix to Michelle Obama, the crowd sat mesmerized by both the art that hung on



Staff photo by Emma Witman

**Musical artists Bertron Curtis on the keyboard, Chris Ellis on the bass, and QSoul on the drums and vocals, perform for the audience at Joe's.**

the walls and the art that was performed live.

The evening began with a dinner. After a short introduction from Bryant, the first performance of the night featured three Raleigh musicians.

Led by the drumming and vocals of Quentin Jones, better known as QSoul, the group performed songs about love, social activism and unity. QSoul lauded the diversity of the crowd of about 30. Accompanying on the keyboard was QSoul's nephew, Bertron Curtis, along with bassist Chris Ellis.

Following QSoul's performance were two spoken-word poets.

Chad Moore delivered a moving performance about advice from his late grandmother in recognition and celebration of the role of strong women in the African-American community.

"Black history to me is my family," Moore said. "But my grandmother was a very important person to me."

Afterward, poet Shufford, aka Solow, delivered a high-energy performance also about an influential woman in

his life — his mother — titled "My Mother's Hands."

Not wanting to leave the men out, Shufford said, he then spoke about the importance, or lack thereof, of having the same DNA as a father figure, in a piece called "DNA."

"Should I stay or go run and see if I can find my tomorrow, because my yesterdays is messing with my today," he began. "The paper said you're not this child's father."

Kenney, the founding pastor of Compassion Ministries of Durham, delivered the evening's keynote speech, a rousing piece about the importance of art to humanity, and the importance of recognizing art and the creative mind.

"Art has a way of penetrating our very spirits," Kenney said. "Art makes us move from isolation to revelation."

In keeping with the theme of the night, Kenney emphasized the importance of art because of its place in preserving black history.

"Art holds the window into the souls of our collective history," he said.

*"We have moved from enslavement to freedom. Our art is a way of helping us understand critically what it means to be a witness to the change."*

**-The Rev. Carl Kenney**