

QUEER



On Thursday the 16th of February I was invited by a friend to an open mic night at *Beckett Locke*. I had no idea what to expect. All I knew was it was a queer open mic night that hadn't been on my radar. The night was called **Sam's Collective** presented by Sam In The City (they/she). From the moment I arrived at *Beckett Locke*, a venue I knew as a luxury hotel, bar and cafe, I felt welcomed. I was greeted by the friendliest bouncer, Sam's partner Gearon. The room was full of diverse people all smiling, chatting and bubbling with excitement.

We had a bit of time before the show started, and I instantly felt comfortable in the space. People connected with friendly hello's and gentle smiles. It was clear everybody felt safe in this space. Sam themselves kicked the night off. They took control of the room and made sure everyone was aware of "the rules" of the night. The rules were simple, no discrimination and no judgement. You could feel the whole room engaging in agreement and it allowed us all to settle in for a night that allowed for the vulnerability, support and encouragement that was to come.

The acts differed. There were poetry readings, live music, lip-syncing, dedications, a fabulous drag performance and more. The performers were at different stages in their chosen art forms and this made for a beautiful representation of the many stages of investing in an art form that you connect with. It struck me as a unique space where established artists mixed with artists exploring the early stages of their craft or people

trying something for the first time. No matter what stage the performer was presenting at, they were all met with a room full of cheers, claps and support, all led by hype man Carlos, who consistently kept the energy high and the performers and audience feeling included. The night was packed with talent and possibility, and I found myself feeling like I was sitting in a cosy room with friends sharing dreams, thoughts and stories. I got to meet Sam a couple of weeks after the Open Mic Night to learn a little bit more about Sam's Collective.



AT THE HEART OF SAM'S COLLECTIVE IS COMMUNITY

They told me they had only been back in Ireland a year after 4 years in New York. While in New York they had immersed themselves in the creative scene, discovering more about who they were. They felt being away from home allowed them not to worry about judgement whether from others or themselves. They sought out creative spaces where they could express parts of themselves and became a part of a community of like-minded friends. When they got back to Ireland, they were looking for similar spaces where they could continue to be experimental and expressive without judgement, but they hadn't been able to find a space that aligned with them. And so, they planned to set up a space which felt inclusive, non judgemental and somewhere people could have an opportunity to learn and share a little more about themselves.

Beckett Locke approached them to create a Pride event based on Sam's idea of an open mic night last June. Sam celebrated the inclusive and diverse energy they felt from the moment they started working with the venue. After the success of the night, *Beckett Locke* embraced the idea of the Queer Open Mic night and asked Sam if they would be interested in making it a regular night, continuing to uplift the focus on queerness and a safe space.

Sam's Collective has quietly gone from strength to strength since the first Pride event. They have set out to find a space where they could continue their own journey of discovery and as a result have created a space for others to have an opportunity to see what parts of themselves they haven't met yet. It is clear that at the heart of Sam's Collective is community. It was very evident on the night, but also when chatting with Sam, the sense of community came through as they celebrated the team that helped them bring Sam's Collective to the audiences.

Sam is proud of what they have created with the Open Mic Night, and plans to open up the space even further. They already have started a queer market under the Sam's Collective umbrella. They hope to continue to promote inclusivity, diversity and non-judgemental environments.

An intimate night of art and sharing, I will definitely be returning for Sam's Collective Open Mic night which regularly takes place at *Beckett Locke*, located at North Docks Point Square Village, Dublin 1.

Follow @samscollective to keep up to date on upcoming events.