

News

Rallying to save 'centre of musical excellence'

MEMBERS of the Maker Music and Arts community are hoping to meet up with development company Evolving Places in order to attempt to turn conflict to conciliation.

Bailiffs were sent to the Maker Heights site, on the Rame Peninsula in South East Cornwall, in an attempt to board up key buildings the Random Arms and Energy Room.

Three years ago the historical buildings and prime parts of the surrounding land were purchased by the development company, who stated that the intention was to create a place for the arts 'of national importance and international interest'.

The buildings are in need of restoration but have until now been the home of a grassroots music venue and bar run by the local community.

Two years ago Evolving Places unveiled plans to build in the region of 30 residential units atop the heritage site, which has been designated an area of outstanding natural beauty, but many complained that it is an unsuitable area for that kind of development.

Will Rogers, co-director of Maker Music and Arts, said: "I hope that Evolving Places can see that we have a centre of musical excellence here."

"We would like them to work with us so we can draw from the very best of what we treasure here and all have a positive future at Maker."

Music has played an essential part in music-based youth and community development at Maker over the past two decades.

The Saturday before last a

As creative meeting places at Maker Heights face an uncertain future, music writer CLARE ROBINSON talks to those who value the community resource and music venue

candlelit event in the Energy Room venue, featuring Haunt the Woods and Elani Evangelou, was the perfect example of the musical excellence that has been nurtured at Maker.

The band, which more than hold their own when up against national acts, consists of local youngsters from the immediate community, fronted by Jonathan a former 'lost soul' who, aged ten, 'found' music at Livewire, with help from mentors Andy Rance and Will Rogers.

"Livewire was great but it's a youth community project for under 18s," says frontman Jonathan Stafford, "so being able to progress music at Maker after 18 meant everything."

"Four years later, as a result, we have played Glastonbury festival, have supported artists like KT Tunstall and have a sell-out show at Carnglaze Caverns."

For Phoenix Elleschild, also a member of Haunt the Woods, Maker has been an integral part of his life since early childhood.

He said: "It is the most important place in my life," he says. "I couldn't bear to think about what the next generation would do without it."

In the crowd on Saturday was top Hollywood actor Art Malik, whose son-in-law manages the band.

A regular visitor to Plymouth – he



married a local girl – he is a passionate live music fan and was upset about the proposed redevelopment of the Cooperage, a venue he frequented in the past.

He was completely blown away at Maker: "The energy in that room was incredible, just brilliant," he enthused. "If you were to put that venue in central London or New York people would absolutely love it. And it's essential to the local community, I really, really hope it continues."

Another regular at Haunt the Woods gigs is Mark Bignell of Hamoaze House (Plymouth drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre) whose son Olly plays drums in the band: "Maker is an invaluable community resource," says Mark. "At a time when more young people are suffering with low level mental health issues, this is the perfect supportive environment where problems can be discussed, and you

don't need to have lots of money to go there."

Mark's wife Dawn French also attended a candlelit event in the Energy Rooms and tweeted: it "would be a massive tragedy to lose this remarkable venue, vital for live music in Cornwall."

The Maker Memories project – supported by The Box (previously Plymouth Museum) and set to be the first community exhibition there when it reopens in 2020 – has interviewed people to find out what Maker means to them.

Voluntary coordinator of the project, Dr Lyvinia Elleschild, Sociology lecturer at Plymouth University, said: "The Random Arms and Energy Rooms are far more than a venue and pub – they are seen as an important social and cultural hub that has created a strong community of belonging."

"Young people have told us they would have left the area had it not been for the 'social glue' and a

strong sense of belonging that they feel here. Rural-coastal areas are at risk of experiencing a type of 'youth drought' because housing is expensive and hard to find, and there are very few jobs, so they migrate to cities to find work, creativity and live music."

"Maker is important to many young people so they stay living here, or come back frequently, and because of this, our area is an amazing place to live."

"Another key finding is the importance of inter-generationality. We have a very strong mix of all ages at our community events. I cannot overstate the socio-cultural value and intense sense of belonging that Maker has for people."

Simon Dobson, conductor and composer, who won two British Composer of the Year awards (awarded by BASCA) in 2012, also a member of Bad Core Horns and Antimattador, is a resident of Millbrook and calls Maker his home. He is passionate about retaining the Energy Rooms at Maker: "There's a really warm positive momentum up at Maker – lots of musicians recording and making music and loads of brilliant artists... it's the centre of our creative lives."

Musician Elani continues, "It doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, where you come from, if you're a professional musician who works loads or if you've only played the guitar once in your life. If you've got good things to bring people you're welcome at Maker. I can't think of anywhere more creatively charged and more welcoming for



The scene at Maker Heights in the Random Arms, below left, Pete Dunstone

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*This claim is based on the fact that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than smoking says report. **The NHS website (nhs.uk/smoking) says report.

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