



PRESS RELEASE:

Nottingham Sound Systems... Back in Da Day

24 September 2015

From dressing-up to dancehalls, *Rockers, Soulheads & Lovers: Sound Systems Back in Da Day* explores the golden era of African-Caribbean sound systems from the 1950s to the early 1980s in Nottingham. Told from the perspective of local people, this vibrant exhibition curated by Michael McMillan, takes the form of an atmospheric audio-visual installation, conjuring a Blues party environment within the galleries. It brings to life an important cultural history, explored through a display of historical objects, personal accounts, film footage and photographs, reflecting upon how these dynamic cultural practices have had a significant impact on British music and dance ever since.

Sound systems refer to custom-made high-powered mobile hi fi's, and the equally important collective of 'box boys', engineers, 'selectors', 'toasters' and DJs/MCs who play the music. As Caribbean migrants were often not welcome in pubs and clubs in the UK they created Shebeens, Blues and house parties in their homes where they could socialise in a racially mixed environment. Although sound systems originated in Jamaica, it would form its own expression and identity in Britain and with reggae as its cultural foundation it has since absorbed other music genres. The title, *Rockers, Soulheads & Lovers*, represents the diversity of subcultures within sound system culture during the 1970s, from reggae to soul and funk, to Lovers Rock, popular amongst women. Its distinctive British style, therefore, tells a unique story of migration, settlement and identity.

Alongside London, Bristol, Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham amongst others, Nottingham emerged as a leading city for sound systems. The exhibition narrative explores the story of Nottingham's important sound system scene, including V-Rocket, Doctor, Sir Clifton, Quattro, Success, Top Notch amongst many others. Their memories and experiences are collated and presented through audio-video material, historical and current. The exhibition functions as a local community-led archive, with photographs from personal collections, and objects and furniture of the moment, which come alive in the gallery.

Melanie Kidd, Director of Programmes at New Art Exchange describes the importance of Nottingham in sound system history:

Nottingham, and Hyson Green in particular, where NAE is located, was home to a vibrant sound system scene and produced some fantastic acts – many are still playing today. They brought new sounds to the UK from Jamaica which in turn contributed to the evolution of popular music as we know it today. We wanted to create an exhibition that revealed Nottingham's sound systems and celebrated their contribution to this important cultural moment.

Through sound systems, the exhibition explores underlying social and cultural histories and practices. Predominantly blues parties were male dominated, fuelled by competition and rivalry that perpetuated the myths and personas of sound system collectives. Yet, female-led sound systems were also popular, characterised as musically eclectic. Central to these social gatherings was the desire to impress, recreated in the exhibition through a built domestic setting, complete with wallpaper, an authentic dressing table, a 'Blue spot' radiogram and cocktail bar. Equipment on display includes wardrobe speakers, valve amps, turntables, and vinyl records. A soundtrack created by Gary Stewart and Trevor Mathison of Dubmorphology creatively combines and mutates signature tunes from local sound systems, interwoven

with oral histories.

The exhibition and accompanying season of events launches with a Blues party at New Art Exchange on 10 October, with a special late night opening featuring a line-up of local DJs and sound systems. The exhibition coincides with Black History Month events including a gallery tour on 24 October with curator Michael McMillan. On 28 November, a panel discussion explores the challenges women face working within the music industry, including Lady V of the renowned V Rocket sound system. On 3 December, another panel discussion entitled Black Heritage and the Archive considers the importance of archive in forming histories and identities, as well as the lack of accurate documentation surrounding black communities in Britain.

Rockers, Soulheads & Lovers: Sound Systems Back in Da Day will be at New Art Exchange from Sunday 11 October and will run until 3 January 2015.

Launch event details

What: Launch of *Rockers, Soulheads & Lovers*

Where: New Art Exchange, 39-41 Gregory Boulevard, Nottingham NG7 6BE

When: 11 October 2015, 7pm – 12am

Admission: FREE

Editor's notes

For images and to arrange interviews/photo opportunities contact Laura-Jade Klee: laurajade@nae.org.uk
A selection of images can be downloaded from Dropbox: <http://bit.ly/1JrQOYf>

Michael McMillan

Michael McMillan is a British born writer, dramatist, curator/artist and scholar of Vincentian migrant heritage. He is best known for *The West Indian Front Room* (Geffrye Museum 2005-06). Current work includes: *No Colour Bar: Black British Art in Action 1960-1990* (Guildhall Art Gallery, July 2015 – Jan. 2016) and *Doing Nothing is Not an Option* (Peckham Platform, Sept. – Nov. 2015).

With special thanks to SKN Heritage Museum, a museum without walls dedicated to commemorating and celebrating the Caribbean contribution to life in Nottingham and the UK.

About New Art Exchange

New Art Exchange is a contemporary art space committed to stimulating new perspectives on the value of diversity within art and society. A RIBA award winning building, New Art Exchange is the largest space in the UK dedicated to culturally diverse contemporary visual arts, and is rooted in the community with a strong history of working with minority communities. NAE presents major international exhibitions and every season presents work from the highest quality, renowned artists. NAE partners locally, nationally and internationally, connecting audiences and artists with new and innovative collaborations and opportunities. Past exhibitors have included: Zarina Bhimji, John Akomfrah, Rashid Rana, Zineb Sedira, Hurvin Anderson, Nari Ward, Christian Marclay and Elizabeth Price (British Art Show 7), Leo Asemota, Raghu Rai, Tanya Habjouqa, Okhai Ojeikere and Hetain Patel.

NAE's mission is to raise the impact, profile and development of culturally diverse contemporary visual arts and artists in a global context by: nurturing and promoting creative talent locally and worldwide, creating thriving creative businesses, and engaging minority ethnic communities as audiences and patrons of art.