Spoken Power to Cherish—VOICES II: Mirrors and Windows

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By
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On February 25th, the CCA Campus Gallery was bustling with energy as the room was filled with vibrant music and energy to preface the event of the night, “VOICES II: Mirrors and Windows.” As I ventured into the warm and welcoming venue, I was met with beautiful sounds of Black vocal artists being injected through the speakers. Sounds of Tems, Brent Faiyaz, SZA, Kendrick Lamar, and so many more spread the vivacity that the night would bring. I had the pleasure of first speaking to one of the event organizers, Isaiah Diaz-Mays (MFA Writing 2026), who greeted me with an intro to the night, describing what to expect. Isaiah informed everyone that there was pizza and snacks available to us for the night’s grub, encouraging us to fellowship together and settle in for a night of powerful literature.

Alyssa Bardge (BA Writing and Literature 2026), started off the open mic night by introducing herself to us. She had the wonderful opportunity to co-create this evening’s event with Isaiah, both of them having had experience organizing successful slam poetry events with a focus on uplifting the community. Alyssa, as if flipping a switch, introduced us to the expectation of the night: expression. Alyssa asked us to all get comfortable in our seats, then she proceeded to ask us to snap with her. The room filled with snaps as she furthered the idea of expression. Alyssa encouraged audience members to “ooh” and “mmm” as the poets flowed through their pieces. And so, the night of open mic poetry began.

Audience at the VOICES II: Mirrors and Windows event, Photographed by Cynara Danaye

Speakers at the VOICES II: Mirrors and Windows event, Photographed by Cynara Danaye

From 7:15-8:30 PM, students across disciplines gathered to relish in the presence of community. The spoken writing pieces ranged from topics of black childhood, the fondness of a mother in comparison to the scent of citrus, the romantic passion between one Black woman and another, to the detailed experience of finally meeting your father for the first time. One of the works read at the event was by a writer of the name Tara (MFA Creative Writing 2026). Tara wrote a piece named “Portraits of My Mother,” focusing on the fond memories of a mother’s tender love and care. This brought the room together, as if every race and nationality found something within Tara’s poem to relate to.

Isaiah and Alyssa, as co-organizers, collaborated on this event as a way for students to celebrate Black History Month meaningfully at CCA. In putting this event on during BHM, Isaiah and Alyssa honored the voices of CCA’s Black community, providing insight into the feelings and experiences of students. In the process, both organizers emphasized that our school is an environment keen on allowing its students to combine education, culture, and communal reflection.

I had the lovely opportunity to speak privately with Alyssa after the event’s close, though there was still incessant chatter and mingling amongst the gallery. Interested in the origin of this event, I asked Alyssa how this VOICES series

came to fruition. “I held one [open mic night] in November and that one just went too beautifully. And there was a following open mic held by Isaiah and we both were like, ‘we should collaborate.’ I have roots in open mic and roots in just sharing what you’ve got. I think just seeing everybody come together and being so engaged, I loved it. I think that just made me so happy, just to see the folks that came through.”

My last conversation of the night was with one of the stand up speakers who brought one of her own poems to the night, Ines, who said she had the opportunity to speak at the first iteration of VOICES in the Fall. Ines explained that, “It was really amazing, we had a lot less people honestly, but I’m very grateful that today it was more crowded and the vibes are definitely here. I see a lot of hugs going on, a lot of tearing up, a lot of joy, just a lot of good community. I was so honored to be a part of tonight.”

VOICES II: Mirrors and Windows was so much more than just another institutional CCA event. It was a night of celebration and identity. We heard voices and stories of power, resilience and so much more. The performances not only highlighted the success and creativity of the Black community at CCA, but were also a testament to the strength in coming together and allowing one another to be heard and uplifted. The night was filled with poems that evoked feelings of empowerment and nostalgia; poets poured out their minds, hearts, and souls.

Cynara Danaye (BFA Film 2028) is a filmmaker and writer. Having been involved with playwriting and theater directing in the past, journalism is a second nature to them. Cynara is passionate about the opportunities different arts and interests have to offer. She is excited to share her thoughts and experiences.

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