

Year of Change: Ujima Radio – much more than just a station A letter from Ujima Radio Executive Chair, Roger Griffith

Bristol's community arts project Ujima Radio celebrates its tenth birthday next year. As Bristol Post Editor Mike Norton revealed last week, The Post will join forces with Ujima Radio and Bristol Old Vic to turn that anniversary year in to a Year of Change for the city. The Year of Change initiative was conceived by Ujima's Executive Chair Roger Griffith and launched by Bristol Old Vic's creative director Tom Morris last week as part of the theatre's programme for 2018. In the first of a series of articles, Mr Griffith sets out the vision behind the Year of Change and describes future work with a range of cultural partners.

Ujima is much more than a radio station. At the heart of our vision is the ambition to bring the community together and find ways to collaborate and support each other.

That's what our name Ujima, given to us by our founding Director Kevin Philemon, means. It is a Swahili word, which translates as "Collective Work and Responsibility", the third of the seven Kwanza principles.

Keeping that principle at the heart of our purpose, we have been on an evolving journey from our origins as a positive action project to become a leading Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic [BAME] led arts and media organisation embedded into Bristol's wider cultural ecology.

In the article "Why Bristol needs to face up to its past before it can enjoy its future" the Bristol Post announced plans to work in partnership with Ujima and Bristol Old Vic on a series of City Conversations to progress how Bristol as a city reflects on its relationship with the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and to close some of the divides in Bristol.

Because, unfortunately, divides still exist.

Operation Black Vote recently published a report called The Colour of Power which showed that the UK's media and arts is led by a white elite. This follows several studies and reports on the issues of inequality in Britain and Bristol, including one from the Runnymede Trust titled Bristol: A city divided?

As the Creative Producer and Chair of Ujima Radio, and as a Black man who has fought against racism all my life, this story is as familiar as it is depressing.

Not one single black person is the managing director of a major TV broadcaster. Not one is the editor of national newspaper. Nor is there one CEO at any of the top 20 arts and culture organisations in Britain.

And yet black culture is at the forefront of music, arts, fashion, film and culture and the media – a sector which presents itself as being more forward-looking.

Added to this are inclusion gaps with discrimination against women, LGBTQ+, people of faith, those with disabilities, key age groups, and those who are financially or socially excluded because they come from lower income backgrounds.

Ujima Radio will celebrate its birthday alongside a number of global landmark anniversaries. These include the 50th commemoration of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King, 100 years of the women's right to vote and the 50th anniversary of St Pauls Carnival in Bristol.

We also want to significantly herald our black elders by celebrating the 70th anniversary of ss Empire Windrush's journey to Tilbury Docks from Jamaica, whose symbolic arrival heralded the influx of Caribbean migrants.

Those who came here helped to rebuild the country after World War II. But they did more than that. They changed Britain's culture, its sport, its politics and its music.

We aim to mark these occasions by working in partnership with cultural and community organisations and businesses to influence and act as a catalyst for change.

We will continue to work with our artistic partners Bristol Old Vic and embark on a new relationship with the Bristol Post.

We wish to transform the way race and inequality is viewed in Bristol and beyond. This will be a bold way of moving the conversation forward to a series of actions that provide solutions. We not only want to celebrate the achievement of ten years of broadcasting with a social purpose but also share our stories and provide a meaningful series of debates, discussions and events that lead to action which inspires, engages, empowers and stimulates long-term change.

An Arts Council England investment has allowed us to begin to build an infrastructure at Ujima, develop and support artistic talent, put on a range of events from Sisters with Voices with St George's Bristol to a family arts and culture fun day with Circomedia.

This way of working brings new audiences and community members to Bristol's institutions including Watershed and Spike Island. This supports our ambitions to be more than a radio station. Our social action projects create employment and training for UWE Bristol students. And our Green and Black projects with the University of Bristol and Bristol Green Capital Partnerships have provided a different way to involve communities.

All of this has Ujima's principles at its core; working in partnership to create opportunities. Our work as an associate company of Bristol Old Vic has led us to visioning 2018 - our 10th anniversary year - as a Year of Change for them.

In return, they have created new initiatives and dialogues which have included the Bristol Post editor Mike Norton and from his article you can see the impact of those conversations and partnership working.

Ujima and I are keen to engage many voices in the Kwanza principles of collective responsibility and challenge Bristol's institutions to make real changes - and to include Bristol's wonderful diverse communities in changing Bristol.

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