

Introducing...YUMI [York Unifying and Multicultural Initiative] and Expressions!, its multicultural food and arts festival which takes place this weekend

YORK has a predilection for celebrating the dead – the Romans, the Vikings and early classical music – in its festivals. However, in York's Year of the Festival, the latest addition champions the vivacity of an increasingly diverse city. Expressions! is a two-day multicultural event in Parliament Street to highlight the food, music, crafts and arts of the variety of ethnic cultures in York. CHARLES HUTCHINSON meets YUMI project co-ordinator Sasiki Hubberstey, Malaysian-born cook Jennie Cook and French Caribbean story gatherer Jenny Zobel.

What is YUMI, Sasiki, and what are its aims?

"YUMI stands for York Unifying and Multicultural Initiative, but it's also YUMI as in You and Me, and it's also a Zen word: in Japanese it's the bow of Zen archer. In York, it's a local initiative aimed at creating a permanent multicultural centre that reflects the variety of cultures – in the widest and deepest sense of the word – who live and work here; a place that reflects the way that York is changing; a place that works through collaboration, sharing and learning together; a place which states, 'These are our people and we're proud of them'."

What role will the Expressions! festival play in YUMI's progress?

"This festival is a visible expression of what we're trying to achieve, and it's just one of several ventures YUMI is undertaking and supporting to make this idea more known to the public, with support from City of York Council, the Arts Council, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Trust.

"These initiatives include intimate, local events in people's homes and through venues in town, and now this larger, public event. We believe it may be the first of its kind in York, and we hope it will become a yearly festival to create a focus event for ethnic groups in York.

"The difference between this festival and others held in the city is that all those involved are York people and it's not commercial."

What sparked you into establishing YUMI, Sasiki?

"York is changing – there are now more than 40 ethnic cultures in the city – and the idea behind establishing the centre is to reflect

Malaysian-born Jennie Cook



NEW FLAVOUR

those changes, and as more changes occur, so the centre would reflect them too.

"We started the initiative last autumn, when we decided the next stage – and the most visible face for the initiative – would be a festival, because a festival can bring people together and give them confidence and, at the same time, it supports intimate ways of people expressing themselves.

That great bonding agent, food, will play a prominent part in the festival, Sasiki.

"People from 14 different ethnic groups – mostly non-professionals – who are passionate about cooking and are trained to national health and hygiene standards, will cook and serve a range of exotic foods and drinks from their cultures, including Mongolia, Malaysia, Bolivia, Germany, Korea, Mexico, Sri Lanka and Germany."

Jennie, you are co-ordinating the cookery. What does that involve?

"Sasiki asked me if I would help the cooks with setting up their stalls and doing their demonstrations, and of course I said I would. I never say I come to teach, I come to share. I'm sharing my common

sense with them and giving them advice and, as a seasoned demonstrator, you try to give them the confidence to enjoy doing it. The kind of thing that people want to know about is how much to serve and charge on their stalls.

"We've held a training day at Sasiki's house, and we've had two parties where I've provided support and the cooks have got to know each other and found they're not alone. With cookery demonstrations I always say if you make a mistake, just laugh at it!"

What crafts will be on show, Sasiki?

"We'll have several craft stalls with ethically sourced/fairly traded goods from their cultures, such as cloths, felts, slippers, hats, jewellery, rugs, bags – all from the ethnic groups who live and work here, including Bolivia, Mongolia and Thailand.

"A Fair Trade stall will be there too, along with an exhibition of a community art project on multicultural York led by artist Michelle Galloway."

What musical performances are lined up?

"There'll be a small range of

dynamic performances to represent the different cultures.

Transglobals will do their Ghanaian hand-drumming; there are about 20 of them aged 14 to 18; they started about three years ago and went to Ghana to study music and dancing, and they now meet every week with teacher Jon Ward.

"Soundsphere are four women who have been singing together for several years, singing a cappella Eastern European music and music from around the world.

"Steve Hill will be in charge of community drumming, bringing along instruments and getting people to play them on the street. That should be fun."

The Finding A Voice project will be exhibiting at the festival with Jenny 'JZ' Zobel in charge. What is this project, Jenny?

"I started a pilot project in the front room of my house for people from minority groups to share their personal stories of coming to live and work in York, and we've had ten people taking part. My background is in lecturing and broadcasting; I'm from the French Caribbean with African origins and I came to York two years ago, from

Wales, and I wanted to find out what had been the experience of people who came to live here from far-flung parts of the world – and I wanted them to say it for themselves, rather than have someone say it for them.

"I wanted them to have the confidence to develop their stories on a one-to-one basis with me, and then work in a group, exchanging stories together, with each of them telling a five-minute story. The idea is that they develop a number of stories of their experiences of living in York.

"On June 10 we had a special evening at York St John College where they shared their stories with an audience and we're now in the process of recording those stories for the Express York website, and the Yorkshire Film Archive is interested in putting together a film record because they don't have any film material of people who have come to live here from all over the world."

YUMI presents Expressions!, the York Multicultural Food and Arts Festival, in Parliament Street, York, tomorrow, 10am to 4.30pm, and Sunday, 10.30am to 4.30pm; admission free.