

# Meltdown builds artistic growth

By Karen O'Shea  
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As a Park Slope arts group prepares to celebrate its tenth anniversary, its founders find themselves reflecting proudly on both grassroots, community work and national accomplishments in the field of experimental art.

"Meltdown" founders Rick Russo and Bronwin Rucker said they have been reaching out to underserved populations, bringing avant-garde art to local senior citizens and young people while working with a national community of artists over the years.

While its name may conjure up images of uniformity, Russo and Rucker insist that the purpose of Meltdown is to maintain individu-

ality while working together to produce experimental art.

And, in fact, a typical Meltdown production might include some atypical combinations of artists and productions. Russo said several dancers, musicians, painters, poetry readers or writers may work independently of each other during a show.

The organization is loosely structured, with performers including theater artists, dancers, choreographers, painters and writers flowing in and out of the group, Russo said.

Meltdown does not claim a home except for the drama group they run for young people out of the Park Slope Neighborhood Center, Rucker added.

*Continued on page 5*

*Continued from page 1*

The two admit there is risk in a "meltdown" — the fusion of artistic works — but they said the possibilities are infinite when people work together.

"Some amazing things have come out of them, spontaneous events that are complementary to other things. Unforeseen electric moments that seemed planned or rehearsed have actually been produced spontaneously," Russo said.

Rucker, who runs the drama workshop, said her work with youth has encouraged her to go back to school to get her master's degree in social work.

"When I started working with kids I was worried about teen suicide. I know when I was young and had very little money and low self-esteem my art kept me from jumping off bridges. I just want to show them there is a place for their anger and frustration,"

The two have performed for senior citizen groups and have taken their act to the streets many times. Both are in charge of creative performances at the yearly Atlantic Antic festival. Russo is director of the regrant program for the Brooklyn Arts Council and development director for parade entertainment of the Atlantic Avenue Local Development Corporation.

"I think it is so important for an artist today to get the work out there, to just do the work and share the work with the public. It's important to let people know that arts are necessary for survival and not just a luxury," Rucker said.

In 1986, Meltdown hosted a concert in Coney Island with renowned experimental composer, the late John Cage.

Rucker said she met Russo when she was looking for new music for a production she was working on. She said Russo's "left of left of left" style was what she found and they decided to join forces.