

LADIES ONLY
SEWING CIRCLE
FROM 7.30PM TONIGHT

**Ain Bailey and Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski
in conversation with Rosalie Doubal**

Sound artist and DJ Ain Bailey and artist, archivist and organiser Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski have DJed and organised in London together for the past two decades. Ahead of Ain Bailey's Congregation series at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the pair talk to curator Rosalie Doubal about solidarity, historic spaces of Black feminist organising and the disappearance of queer venues in London.

Rosalie: How did you meet and what were you working on?

Ego: Ain was part of a crew of Black women who used to come in and do yoga at the Ritz where I worked in the mid-90s. My first memory of Ain DJing was at Flowers at the Beehive, on Beehive Place in Brixton, with Michael Cadette. The flyer was pretty – small, blue with hand-drawn flowers.

Ain: That was pre-*wickers & bullers*, a magazine that I used to edit around 1995–1996. Its tagline was ‘an almost serious black lesbian and gay publication’, and it had great photography. The first four editions there were four of us editing: Trevor Hinds, Ajamu X and Michael Cadette. They were slim, but it was popular.

Ego: These publications were really before their time. In fact, they were made for this time. The content, history, fellowship and recognition of black queerness within them is unmatched. It was also funny. *wickers & bullers* was emotional and serious and a record of what was happening, but the humour in the writing was just beyond. Sometimes we need to pay attention to the people around us – this mag did that. There's work to be done on sharing this.

Ain: It is in the rukus! [[Black Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Cultural Archive](#), in the [London Metropolitan Archive \(LMA\)](#)]. We had off-shoots – we had a club night in Covent Garden, we were on Channel 4's series *Out* and we had it in a few radical bookshops, like the ICA's.

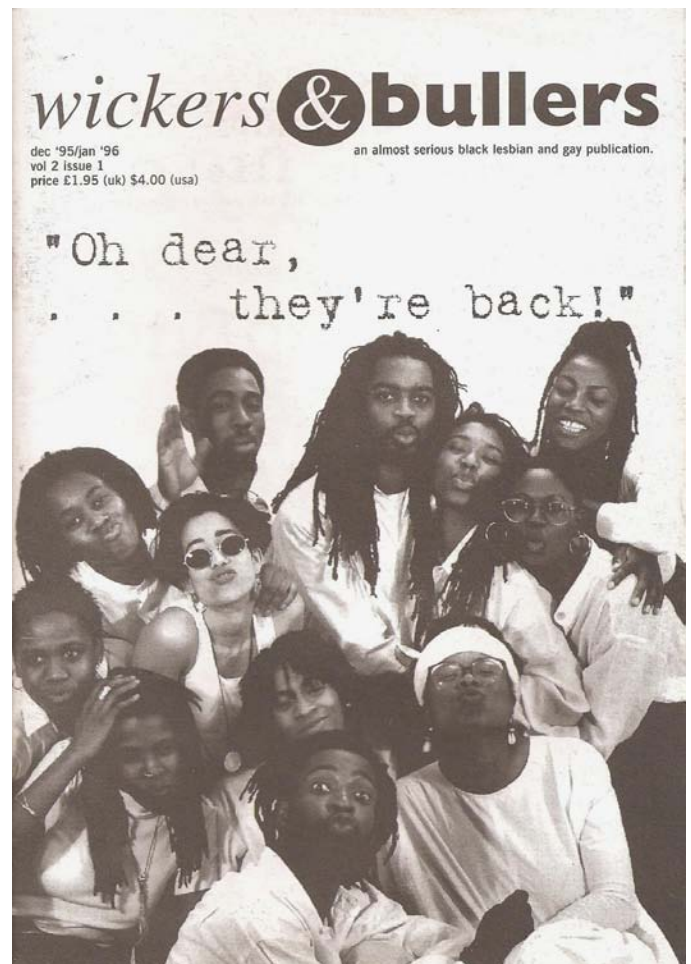
Rosalie: Are there equivalent publications now?

Ego: No. It was really serious: there were moments of memorial within there, but it's also a community magazine that was done with a lot of pride. From a perspective of Black queer gay culture, the mid-90s was a really unique moment in time and you captured a lot, Ain. Also, that mixed-media, 'doing it all' ability and way of presenting – with the publication, the night – is very much Black.

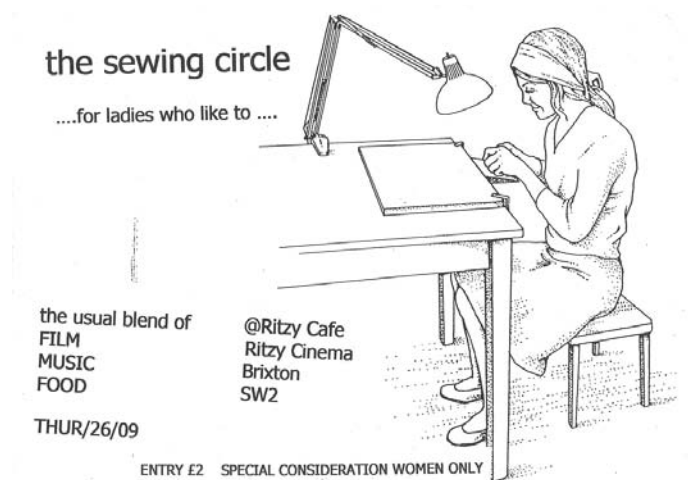
Ain: Also it was totally pre-internet, with actual graphic design – real paper and pen and cutting.

Rosalie: What was The Sewing Circle?

Ego: There was not much going on in South London for queer women so Emma Hedditch, Mystique Holloway and started a monthly women-only night in the café of the Ritz. We were all working at the Ritz, it was a creative space at that time. The Sewing Circle was a mixed-media night. We'd take over the space and have an assortment of DJs, and no music policy. Emma was connected to Cinenova film distribution and was doing her art and bringing her community together; I was finishing my



Cover of *wickers & bullers*, vol. 2 issue 1, Dec '95/Jan '96



Flyer from Sewing Circle, a monthly women-only night of experimental music, art, film and food at the Ritzy Café, Brixton, London, 1999–2002. Described as a 'soiree for ladies who lounge', Sewing Circle was run by Mystique Holloway, Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Panyin and Emma Hedditch, with films presented by the women who ran Observatory, the women-only cinema nights in Kings Cross. A typical night would feature music from DJs Miss Bailey, Nina Chakrabarti and Miss Tike, a showcase of new art and film, and food from caterers Ghana in the city.

studies at Goldsmiths and into finger-knitting; and Panyin was ahead of her time doing African food (Ghana in the City). We just brought all our communities together. It went for a few years 1998–2001 and most of the images for the flyers were from books from the Lambeth Women's Project [LWP]. It was just a whole load of autonomy.

Ain: This was the Ritzy pre-gentrification, it felt like a community cinema at the time. A very important space and a special time.

Ego: The Ritzy was a space, in those days, where you didn't have to qualify who you are in order to do something – and those kinds of spaces are rare.

Rosalie: Can you talk about Lambeth Women's Project?

Ego: It was a charity based in Stockwell from 1979 – 2012, an autonomous space, for women, by women. We're in a different climate and landscape now, with different language. It was a space where we could do what we want.

It was a three-floor building providing counselling and art. I was a keyholder, a specialist young women's worker and sat on the management committee. Now I would consider myself as curator of the space. I didn't have that language at the time, It unfortunately closed in 2012 [after being evicted by the school next door](#). The history has been preserved at the Lambeth Archives [catalogued by Ego] and with the blog with the British Library UK Web Archive project. It was just a space for women to be and to intersect. It was magic how we were able to cross over just by being in that space.

Ain: One of the reasons I think it's important, and this is why I invited Gail Lewis to take part in Congregation, was that Brixton Black Women's Group* used to meet in the LWP building– it has a long history. The Ritzy and the building of LWP are the two main structures that inform what we are trying to do with this Congregation series. I also met Jimmy Robert at the Ritzy. You can map many people back to these spaces.

Rosalie: What were the other nights that have come and gone?

Ain and Ego: Precious Brown; Shugs, organised by Pat Brown and named after the character in *The Color Purple*, a Sunday club that took place at the Brixtonian; Blessence, by Lorna Gee; Liberté, which was run by Nikki Lucas and Asha; Bootylicious, an institution that's not disappearing but it's been around a long time, run by Thomas Mrt and Kim Lucas; The Candy Bar; Sunday Happy Day, which is promoted by Yvonne Taylor. There was Sub Station South and the various nights there, Off the Hook, DPTM, Trade, Queer Nation, The Lowdown, Ace of Clubs in Piccadilly,

Ego: I think of highlighted hair.

Ain: And stonewashed denim.

Ain and Ego: The Glass Bar, Southopia [and] Lowrider, to name but a few.

Ain: It's connected to the literal disappearance of queer venues and spaces. There's nowhere for people to hang out – The Candy Bar; First Out; The Lesbian and Gay Centre in Clerkenwell; Peckham Black Women's Centre, I used to organise there with a group called B.L.I.S.S., Black



Flyer from Precious Brown, a club night run by Miss Bailey and DJ Marilyn at Candy Bar, London, 1998–2000. Candy Bar was a lesbian bar that was based in Carlisle Street in Soho. It was started in 1996 by Kim Lucas who decorated the interior pink and provided lap and pole dancing. Men were allowed into the bar if accompanied by a woman. The bar closed in January 2014 following an increase in rents.

Lesbians in Solidarity; Sauda at The London Women's Centre in Holborn, a seminal monthly black-women only performance night organised by Richelle, Skin, Yvonne Saunders and others; South London Women's Centre – they have all gone.

Rosalie: What protests have you shared?

Ego: The last big one was against the closure of the LWP. Sound is important here, as it's something that I use to reflect upon what solidarity actually means. Ain did a recording of the final [day] of seven days of pot-banging we did during the sit-in of the LWP in the final months. Ain [captured it on her iPhone](#), and [it] is a recording that I adore.

Ain: It was a real moment in time.

Ego: It captures Brixton. It's the sound of protest, it's the sound of our protest, it's the sound of us standing up for something that we care for. For the LWP, Ain was someone who was always there. Ain has a long history of being present and supporting and turning up. In a time where images speak so much that people want an image of themselves standing up and being present, you are not like that Ain.

Ain: What I liked about that recording was not only marking a political moment, but it was also the camaraderie, the humour. We were having fun even though we were protesting.

Ego: We've gone through hard times, but our laughter and ability to remain is because of music, sound and dancing. I'd go as far to say that this Congregation series is a public ritual of honouring and gratitude for the life and times that have brought us all to this point. Congregation is special because it is a culmination of all these moments that are not visible, are not necessarily tangible, are not going to be found on the internet, but absolutely exist because they are embodied in the archive of us.

Congregation is an important moment of recognition, not just about sound and audio, but of Ain's practice – she is a person who has always been present in the community and who is giving voice to the intangible here.

Ain: Congregation is a homage to community. It was how I was raised and it's important. We don't work in isolation.

Ego: We had spaces and now we don't, and Ain's act of bringing us together gives us an opportunity to remember. I see it as a gift.

*The Brixton Black Women's Group was founded by Olive Morris in 1973. The group emerged among women who had been active in the Black Power movement in London in the late 1960s and early 1970s

Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski is a Minneapolis-based, London-born, Nigerian mixed-media artist/designer, archivist and organiser who DJs under the moniker DJ Marlon aka The Church Lady. Her work and research explore the relationship between feminist, queer, decolonizing theories/spaces and organizational, curatorial, artistic (self-)archiving practices. Ain Bailey and Ego have DJed and organised together on many occasions.

Ain Bailey is a sound artist and DJ. Her current practice involves an exploration of sonic autobiographies, architectural acoustics, live performance, as well as collaborations with performance, visual and sonic artists. Among these is performance/visual artist Jimmy Robert, who commissioned Bailey to create a composition for his 2017 show European Portraits at PEER Gallery, London. Oh Adelaide (2010), her collaboration with the artist Sonia Boyce, has shown widely, including at Tate Britain; the Whitechapel Gallery; and The Kitchen, New York. In 2016, Bailey was commissioned by Art Basel Miami Beach to compose for the Soundscape Park. Bailey also devised a Study Week at Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, which considered the role of sound in the formation of identity. In addition, in 2017, Bailey collaborated with Gaylene Gould on the creation of a Sonic Trail for Tate Britain, London. She also performed at Guest, Ghost, Host: Machine!, the 2017 Serpentine Marathon. Bailey is a research student at Birkbeck, University of London (on a break in studies), and was guest professor in sound at Kunsthochschule Kassel for the winter semester 2017/2018. Following a commission by Serpentine Projects, Bailey is currently conducting sound workshops with LGBTI+ refugees and asylum seekers.

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/the-collections/Pages/rukus.aspx