

Women Hip Hop Step it Up in the Bay Area This Weekend

Written by Davey D ID3518
Friday, 30 March 2007 06:34 -

Women & Hip Hop Step it Up in the Bay Area This Weekend

These events are just the tip of the iceberg of what's out there and what is set to come.

"Ladies First: The Role of Women in Hip-Hop"

Panel organized by SFSU Assistant Professor Andreana Clay

Saturday, March 31

8:30 am - 10:00 am

Oakland Marriott City Center

Oakland, CA

Featuring: Stephanie D. Sears, USF: "Lil Mamas Dance: The Negotiation of Girlhood in Hip Hop Culture", J. Ayo Alabi, UCI: "Rethinking the Political: Objectification & Activism", Mako Fitts, Seattle Univ. & Julie Chang Schulman, Reclaim the Media, Seattle, WA: "'Doin It For the Love': Urban Arts & Activism in Seattle's Hip-Hop Communities"

April 3rd -UC Berkeley-Does Hip Hop Hate Women?

Tuesday April 3rd at 6:00 PM University of California, Berkeley MLK Jr. Student Union Building;

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Some of those who will be there to discuss 'Understanding the New Gender Politics are – Joan Morgan, Mark Anthony Neal, Davey D, and Yolanda Whitaker (aka – Yo Yo), Moderator will be Bakari Kitwana.

Women of hip-hop push back against the violence, misogyny By Davey D

There's definitely a revolution of sorts going on as hip-hop struggles to survive by purging itself of the negativity and commercial-driven, minstrel-like stereotypes that are plaguing it. Leading the charge are female artists and activists who, as of late, seem to be feeling like late civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer when she said she was "sick and tired of being sick and tired."

In this case, many have grown weary of the onslaught of misogynist-themed songs and videos green-lighted by the corporate media outlets that air them. As a result, we are seeing more and more women coming together, starting their own record labels, putting on their own events and concerts, forming their own artist collectives - basically demanding respect while creating space for themselves.

Erinn Ransom, a local activist and instructor at the University of California-Berkeley and Laney College in Oakland, explained that things are out of kilter and off balance. "People have been suffering from an estrogen deficiency even if they don't consciously know it. It's like your body is craving spinach or some other food to make up for being low in iron." Ransom added that all the hard-core hip-hop stuff was fun and had its place, but serious issues like ongoing wars, global warming and continued inner-city strife have people seeking a new direction. It comes as no surprise to her that women's voices are being sought out.

Leading the charge are popular artists like Queen Latifah, who has a new HBO movie "Life Support," which focuses on the impact of AIDS in the African-American community. Because of her acting prowess, many forget that Latifah has one of the oldest artists management companies (Flava Unit) within hip-hop. She expanded upon her business and has produced and directed her own films.

Latifah has set the bar and has been an inspiration to many, including her legendary contemporaries MC Lyte and Yo-Yo. They recently have combined efforts to put together a weeklong "Music Makers" camp where they will expose inner-city youth to industry experts to get an understanding of how things work behind the scenes.

In a recent interview, Yo-Yo said it's critical that she and other successful women guide young people - especially women - to determine their own destiny. The goal, she said, is to get young

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women into a mindset of wanting to start their own businesses, and at the very least become familiar with the internal operations of the institutions and businesses they are involved with. More importantly, she wants women to network and build community.

Ransom also pointed out that for years African-American women have been encouraged to be individuals, but so much so that a deficiency in community has been created. Now, she says, you find that being balanced as women artists create spaces for themselves.

Here in the Bay Area those spaces have come about thanks to strong-willed artists, dancers and DJs like Jennifer Johns, Aya De Leon, Tracey Bartlow, B-Girl Aiko, DJ Backside and Pam Tha Funkstress to name a few. Others include female artist collectives such as Sisterz of the Underground and Herstory, who have all done their own female-themed events, one-woman shows, artist showcases and concerts.

Also on point is Hip Hop Congress' Women's Project, where the 35-city Bay Area-based organization is working to put together a listing of women involved in hip-hop to be used for networking.

For more information, hit up

sarah@hiphopcongress.com or check www.hiphopcongress.org .

Another project of note has been developed by Stanford's HipHop Archive headed up by Marcyliena Morgan. In celebration of Women's International History Month, she and hip-hop scholar Dawn-Elissa Fischer are putting together a resource guide highlighting women in hip-hop at www.hiphoparchive.org/prep/women.html.

In recent days, Maleena Lawrence has expanded her talk show on Comcast 26 and launched a series called "Ladies First," which focuses on women in hip-hop. She said she had grown frustrated with asking, "Where are my sisters at?" every time she showed up at a hip-hop event.

Like Ransom, Lawrence has noticed a lack of community and has sought to change that, first with the all-female team she has working behind the scenes on her show, and now by creating "Ladies First," which she hopes will bring together the West Coast's women in hip-hop. If you're interested, drop her an e-mail at themlshow@gmail.com or check out www.myspace.com/maleena8 .

ROLL CALL: Here's a shout-out for the upcoming "Queendom Vol. 1" compilation album put together by a male Bay Area rapper named Oposit. The album features everyone from MC Lyte and Ladybug Mecca of Digable Planets to L.A.'s Medusa and DJ Kuttin Kandi, along with Bay Area artists the Conscious Daughters and Aya de Leon.

In Seattle, "Rise: Women Reshaping History Through Hip Hop" has put on three jam-packed all-women's showcases over the past six months with artists like Pinay Sa Seattle, Melissa Noel Green, CanarySing, Gigi, Julie C Choklat and Laura Piece Kelly.

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In Pittsburgh, women have rallied around a collective called Nakturnal, which has nurtured the burgeoning careers of award-winning artists like Vanessa German, Empress and Kellee Maize, who has generated a huge buzz with her new album, "The Age of Femine."

In Washington, D.C., there is a thriving community of women hip-hoppers with names like Noodles, Najiea, Mahogany Jones, MN8, DJ Soyo and DJ Earth1ne. Many of these artists have participated in the monthly women's showcase B-Girl Manifesto or the annual Can a Sista Rock a Mic festival.

In New York City, it was standing-room-only for the premiere of "Lady Beat Makers: Vol. 1," a new documentary on female hip-hop producers. The film was the brainchild of Tachelle "Shamash" Wilkes, who heads up the popular Web site www.femmixx.com, which spotlights women in hip-hop.

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