

Women Hold Up More Than Half the Sky Within Hip Hop

Written by Davey D ID3389

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Women's Hip Hop Panel-Seattle - Long Live Our Queens – By Davey D and Breakdown FM

There's definitely a revolution of sorts going on as Hip Hop purges itself from the negativity and the all too often, over the top minstrel-like stereotypes that have plagued it for the past few years. Leading the charge are women. Last week during a Hip Hop panel discussion at UCLA in Los Angeles, the panel which included everyone from West Coast pioneers like Alonzo of the World Class Wrecking Crew and Arabian Prince of NWA on down to new comers like Brother Los of Company of Prophets to academics like Professor Sam Aleen to B-girls like Zulu Queen LA Nivens, the question was asked about women in Hip Hop.

Everyone on the panel noted that what will save Hip Hop if it needs to be saved, are strong women who are committed to making sure their voices are heard and that respect is given. Brother Los noted that he had noticed that more and more women have been stepping up and taking charge in the reshaping of Hip Hop. Alonzo said that female energy would be a welcome change and that there was too much male testosterone. Everyone else chimed in with similar sentiments with the underlying theme being change is needed and women can make it happen in a big way.

These words ring true as you look around the country and see all sorts of women making moves. In the words of the late great freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer sistas have just grown tired of being tired with putting up with the bullshit the industry is offering and as a result they are making moves.

It could be in the form of woman like Pittsburgh native Kellee Maize releasing her incredible album "Age of Feminine" which has an anthem type song called "Marchin'" (for the Revolution) featuring fellow Pittsburgh, PA spitter Emprez or Portland's Queen Nasim who puts the fun and old school back into Hip Hop with her new album FRESH. In the Bay Area we have women like Jennifer Johns blowing up the spot while down in LA women like Medusa and B-Girl Asia One still reign supreme. In New York we have emcees like Rha Goddess and J-Love who just released a book focusing on women empowerment called "We Got Issues". (www.wegotissues.org)

We haven't even begun to scratch the surface as we can also focus on all the women who have been in the forefront of the media justice/ reform movements, Shout out to women like Rosa

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Clemente, April Silver, Christie Z Pabon and J-Love to name a few in the REACH Coalition in NY that took on Hot 97, or women like Lisa Fager of www.Industryyears.com or women promoters and B-girls like DJ Earth One and DJ Soyo who hold it down in Washington DC. In a recent conversation with DJ Soyo, she noted that she was recently named a commissioner on the Sojourner Truth Project where they are organizing and fighting to have the statue of this pioneering woman of the Suffrage and Abolitionist movements returned to the Capitol. Years ago her statue was removed from the halls of the Capitol because she was Black and offended white folks running things at the time. For more info contact soyodj@aol.com . This is in addition to the pair constantly fighting to create more space and find homes for conscious Hip Hop.

Of course we gotta show love to the local homegirls like spoken word artist Malkia Cyril and Jen Serramento over at Youth Media Council in Oakland which took on Clear Channel and continue to fight for Media Justice. I could go on and on dropping names, but there's just way too many women making great moves and its starting to have impact.

What makes this current wave of energy so inspiring is that many of these women are doing more then just rapping. They are organizing and attaching their work and collective efforts to community groups. That includes women doing their own artist show cases, starting their own production and management companies, setting up their own record labels and as is the case in Boston with Girls Radio or in Seattle with producer B-Girl Chillz "B-Girl Radio" setting up their own online radio stations. They personify the dead prez adage "It's Bigger than Hip Hop". By connecting to community they ensure that there will be a fundamental shift in the way things are done.

Last week in Seattle, during the 206 Zulu Anniversary an all women's Hip Hop panel with local artists and activists was held. The panel included radio hosts E Mandisa and Sacha Star, Emcee and Spoken word artists like Laura "Piece" Kelly and Onion and Ms Kitty Wu of Cool Out TV. It was moderated by Professor Mako Fitts. All these women in addition to being practioners of Hip Hop are well heeled organizers. Instead of entertaining the usual banter about men in Hip Hop calling women bitches, these sisters who are doing big things up north, focused on the topics like the importance of creating spaces for women to nurture and heal, holding down multiple roles, overcoming obstacles and most important motherhood within Hip Hop. The discussion was enlightening and is included at the end of this article.

This weekend (Friday Night march 2) Seattle will host its third all female Hip Hop showcase at University of Washing in the Basement Hub. The last one I went to was superpacked with woman after woman getting up on stage and simply killing it. This week many of the women

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who rocked the first two return to the fold, including Canarysing, Julie C, GiGi, Pinay Sa Seattle and Melissa Noel Green to name a few. If that's not enough Seattle follows up with another women's showcase the next night with poet Ursula Rucker at the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center. Big shout out to sisters like Heidi Jackson for producing this event.

Meanwhile closer to home in the Bay Area, the sisterhood vibe is alive and well with the upcoming release of the Queendom Compilation album. Peep the article below by Eric Arnold. Local activist and TV talk show host Maleena Lawrence who is pictured on the Women Hold Up More Than Half the Sky flier has just launched a new Hip Hop series on Comcast Channel 26 called Ladies First which spotlights women in Hip Hop. Lawrence said she had grown frustrated with asking the question "where are my sisters at?". As a result she decided to flip her popular weekly talk show and give it new direction to create space for Women Hip Hop artists up and down the west coast. If anyone is interested in getting down get at her by dropping her an email at themlshow@gmail.com or hit up her www.myspace.com/maleena8

Like I said I could go on and on talking about all the people doing things. The bottom line is this. Like it or not change is in the wind with women leading the charge. This is a good thing for Hip Hop and society in general. Enjoy the panel discussion included below...

*Also please check out the following article - Compilation spotlights women rocking hip-hop mikes, battling "vixen" stereotypes by Eric K. Arnold, Special to The Chronicle

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