

## African Hip Hop Represent

Written by Greg Schick ID4251  
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On April 4th, 5th and 6th, 2008, Africa is in the house. Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, presents the 3rd annual Trinity International Hip-Hop Festival and – just like the first two – African hip hop is heavily represented among the performers.

The Trinity Festival was the brainchild of Trinity alum Magee McIlvaine, who blended international studies with hip hop and film. McIlvaine spent part of his undergraduate time studying in Senegal where he picked up an appreciation for the local hip hop flavor. Homegrown African artists often tend to speak on more political subjects and social injustice, while popular American artists continue to influence with their money, sex and violence ethos.

Chachi, an MC from the west African island nation of Cape Verde, describes hip hop in his homeland like this: “One of the biggest problems I see is identity crisis amongst youths and lack of proper role modeling. [T]he negative portrayal of hip hop culture and the over exposure of violence and materialism through media has a tremendous impact on society as a whole. The violence negatively inspires the youth to become overly aggressive and out of control. Cape Verde is traditionally a very respectful culture. The negative impact of gang culture and violently charged music is making the next generation of youth uncontrollable.”

McIlvaine decided to bring this “hip hop with a purpose” to American audiences in 2006. With fellow student Jason Azevedo and Ben Herson, owner of African hip hop label Nomadic Wax Records, and backing from Trinity College, they staged the first hip hop festival in America with an international focus.

In its first two years, the Trinity festival brought in performers hailing from Kenya, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Uganda and Ethiopia. In 2008, they will highlight performers from Zimbabwe, Cape Verde, Senegal, Uganda and Ethiopia.

One of the performance headliners is Zimbabwe Legit. Band members Dumi Right and Akim came to America from Zimbabwe in the early 1990s and released an internationally acclaimed EP on record label Hollywood Basic. They recorded a full album in 1992 with production help from DJ Shadow and Mr. Lawnge (of Black Sheep) but due to label issues it was not released for 13 years. The 2005 album was a throwback to the golden age of hip hop and the group built on their success and released House of Stone in 2007 to excellent reviews.

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Playing host of their year's performances – and also performing himself on Friday night – is Ghana-born Blitz the Ambassador. Now residing in Brooklyn, Blitz seeks to bring a conscious message to a mass audience. He has performed with Public Enemy, KRS-One, Rakim, Mos Def and Talib Kweli. He has been profiled in *The Source*, *Vibe* and named one of URB's "Next 1000". "Hip-Hop is political transformation by nature," Blitz has said. "We are all transformed by the power it has to uplift our intellect and educate us on basic human and civic rights."

A highlight of every festival has been the African Underground All-Stars. Nomadic Wax owner Ben Herson – also a producer, DJ and drummer – leads a live band that backs some of the most talented of African MCs. While the band remains mostly the same, African Underground performs shows with a variety of MCs from all over Africa. At the 2008 festival, African Underground will rock with Senegalese rappers Baye Musa and Azbac plus Krukid from Uganda. Krukid was part of 2007's Rawkus 50, an elite group of amazing underground hip hop artists promoted by the newly re-launched Rawkus Records.

Four MCs representing the West African island nation of Cape Verde will rock together on Friday night. The quartet comprised of Shokanti, Tem Blessed, Chachi and Dje Dje all share a common African heritage and skills on the mic. These guys are not just performers but activists. Shokanti is the Director of Community Cultural Development at The Arts Council of Greater New Haven, Connecticut. Tem Blessed speaks with youth groups about positive living. Chachi addresses the common struggles of Cape Verdian and American youth.

Finally, playing for his second year in a row is Ethiopian-born, Seattle resident Gabriel Teodros along with his Dominican-Haitian partner Khingz Makoma forming the group Abyssinian Creole. The name is a melding of both of their ethnicities to form a unit that exhibits every aspect of them as individuals within an African Diaspora. The duo are a perfect compliment, Teodros' spiritual approach to an often ugly world beside Khingz also spiritual, but more grimy street ethic.

The Trinity International Hip-Hop Festival will be held April 4, 5 and 6, 2008, at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Daytime events include panel discussions, films and workshops. The musical performances will be held Friday and Saturday night from 8 pm to 2 am in the Vernon Social Center on campus. Admission is free and open to the public. For more information, see [www.trinityhiphop.org](http://www.trinityhiphop.org)

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