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## Mama's Hip Hop Kitchen II: Finding Liberation and Spirituality in the Art of Hip Hop



By Robert Waddell, March 8, 2009

On Saturday March 7th at Hostos Community College a true celebration of women's history month took place. The passionate event was a combination teach-in bembé arriyto for social justice and women's issues like domestic violence, environmental racism, drugs and poverty, through the transformative power of spoken word poetry and hip hop.

For this second installment, Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen organizers focused on the merging power of art and transcendent spirituality. As 21st Century feminists celebrating the month of the woman, this free concert showcased the combined power of faith, feminism and hip hop creating a force for personal and community growth. The ideas that art and religion can uplift the soul and free the mind are not new however hip hop is the language at the start of a new century for these young urban women of color. Going back to indigenous women and African roots, this concert combined faith, liberation and music.



Jay Ford wrote in his essay "What is Hip Hop," that, "...Hip Hop has provided and continues to provide an avenue for oral expression and hope for a segment of society....following the beat of the master drum with an oral tradition on spiritual resurrection."

The entire 3-hour event showed respect for the sacred drum and the sacredness of hip hop artists, its listeners and the power within all peoples of color. Featuring nearly 25 acts, performers included La Bruja, Patty Dukes, Misnomer(s), Too Fly, Nene Ali, Bombayo, Bless Roxwell, Queen Gois, DJ Soyo and DJ Eternal.

These women, I believe, wanted to transform their lives while reclaiming and empowering themselves at this event through art, poetry, music, history and the majesty of being a woman. Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen II was forum for enlightened women of color to acknowledge and reclaim the inner strength women have always possessed to transform the world around them.

"Our response in faith," said Lah Tere of Rebel Diaz and one of the event's performers and organizers, "there's a lot of African influences in our religion and we don't really talk about it. People have altars in their homes and...it's almost taboo to be a Santera or Yoruba priestess. These are things that people keep really quiet."

Lah Tere said that this is Hip Hop's response to faith: "They are not afraid....We need to use our spirituality as a weapon."



She also said that the event was a response to traditional feminism, which has mostly catered to white women while excluding the needs of women of color. Also, women have been degraded in hip hop culture and lyrics, and corporations around the world continue to exploit women of color, said Lah Tere.

At the event, one performer said that Hip Hop was born in the Bronx and where did it go? The resounding response from the audience was "Everywhere."

"They'll exploit our talents," she said, "but when we get beat up like Rihanna, no one is backing us up."

Lah Tere was referring the domestic violence attack on singer Rihanna by Chris Brown.

With an over head projection of a woman with an Angela Davis style afro and wearing large hoop earrings painted in graffiti art, performers came onto center stage with a spot light. The jubilant full house at Hostos's theatre was filled with step dancing, bomba music, spoken word poetry, power, creativity for hip hop and an intense sense of history, integrity and an obligation of claiming equal rights for all women.

Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen II was one of those rare occasions or moments, as when lighting strikes, where a conflagration of intelligent, beautiful, committed, community minded artists and activists preach to the choir with grassroots gusto, poetry and hip hop. The free music concert was there to get audiences in but the loud and clear message exploded into grateful and receptive, diverse audience.

It is important to note, as a hip hop venue, no derogatory or violent language against women was used. In fact, the hip hop performed was forceful without the usual in-you-face attitude; this was all holistic and invigorating Bronx home grown. Eleven-year-old Ne Ne Ali said in one poem, "What does bling-bling mean in sing-sing?"



Daynara Marte was a combination MC and teacher between acts proclaiming the historical importance of African, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, the Americas, all indigenous people and the significant transcendent role women have, and still, play through sacrifice as women warriors.

During the first act, a film on child abuse produced by the women of Casa Atabex Ache, the house of women's healing in the south Bronx, was shown. To loosen up the audience, Marte got everyone up on their feet for a group ritual scream and hug before poet Miss Miconception rapped hard lines like, "I have more soul than Bob Marley's segregated dreadlocks....I'm an unorthodox

paradox..."

The Hip Hop artists at this event showed that their music can be a force for change in the lives of women, especially in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the country. The concert, organized by Lah Tere, Advocates for Youth, Casa Atabex Ache and other artists, hoped to affirm and make a stand that "enough is enough," said Lah Tere, "we can use this and use it in a positive way and young women know you can use hip hop and not just shake your butt. There are other ways you can use hip hop that can change your life."

*This story was developed through the Education Beat Writing Fellowship at the New York Community Alliance.*

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