

Rhyme & Reason: Local Hip-Hop Group Goes Beyond The Stage



Left to right:

Rick Spades, Lex Supa, Chronos, Nahbi Reality, Danjah, Paper Boy, K-Vinyl, Funky M.I.S.F.I.T

The 'Gansetts flowed and the speakers spoke at The Met for DirtyDurdie's *Golden Soul Comrade* album release party. Though all in attendance expected (and received) a throbbing show from DD, the surprise of the night was the completely original and motivational set from new Rhode Island hip-hop group The Universal Disciplez.

The original Disciplez were Rhode Island rappers, Nahbi Reality (Andre Wilkinson), K-Vinyl and Ace Martinez, who performed often with conveniently named Boston MC Mike Boston (real name and stage name). In December 2014, New York filmmaker Petros Kasfikis reached out to Boston and Wilkinson to include them in a documentary that explores the social impact of hip-hop through various personal stories.

Kasfikis says, "They [Boston and Wilkinson] explain how important hip-hop is for uplifting youths in underprivileged neighborhoods, because they feel mainstream hip-hop is failing this generation. They want to inspire these kids in the right ways."

Speaking with Kasfikis about their creative ambitions drove Boston and Wilkinson to further act on their words, launching them into a larger conversation about creative philanthropy in urban communities.

Today the Disciplez consist of rappers K-Vinyl, Lex-supra, Mike Boston, Ace Martinez, BX yung GZ, Paperboy, Funky M.I.S.F.I.T, Rick Spades, Danjah, Chronos and Nahbi Reality, who serves as chairman of the Disciplez and its larger subgroup, Universal Collective.

Universal Collective boasts an age range of artists from 15 to 44, and serves as the greater canopy of artists who branch off the core membership of the Disciplez. This includes DirtyDurdie, Zoedajit from South Florida and a Philadelphia Collective of rapper/activists Pili X, Miss K and Bro IB. The newest addition is The Collective International, bringing rappers from England, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Columbia,

South Africa and Iceland.

In introducing the Collective International, The Universal Disciplez Facebook page stated, “We are separated by many miles, but we unite through hip-hop to stand up against ignorance, racism and all forms of oppression—that is the 5th element.”

This collaboration of musicians has roots that go well beyond hip-hop. Non-profit community development organizations like Americorps and City Year brought the team together before places like The Met even existed.



Left to right: Mike Boston, Lex_Supa, Paper Boy, Bx Young Gz, K-Vinyl, Nahbi Reality

The long-term goal for the collective is to develop an artist-driven non-profit organization with the focus on teaching youths the core beneficial principles of hip-hop, like poetry, break-dancing, music composition and civic engagement, with the altruistic channel of youthful expression that facilitates education and development in communities where resources are limited.

“Mike Boston and I come from a rich background in community-based work. We both have been part of some amazing things through Americorps, and especially City Year, which is how Mike and I met. We believe community building comes first, then the music,” Wilkinson explains outside The Met Cafe.

During their time with City Year, Boston and Wilkinson were part of an initiative that involved meeting Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton, and they’re strong supporters of their colleagues’ work. Pili X, Brother Tommy, Bro IB and Miss K of the Philadelphia Collective have been in the news battling the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) for the past six months.

“They (Philly Collective) are the real heroes,” Wilkinson adds. “These guys built the North Philly Peace Park, which is an urban community garden in one of the worst neighborhoods in Philly as far as poverty and resources go. They built a little school for classes on practical use of recycled materials and are very much involved in community education.”

The North Philly Peace Park has provided organic produce and connected generations of families within the neighborhood for three years. In early 2015, the PHA began development testing for a large-scale gentrification that threatens the location of the park and could displace of many residents in the Blumberg Housing Project.

Wilkinson sees a connection between the work his colleagues are doing in Philadelphia and what can be

done in Rhode Island.

“You have to remember that Philly and Rhode Island are two very different places. Even though it’s not as bad as Philly out here, we still deal with poverty, we still deal with drugs, we still deal with gangs, we’re just trying to find a way to make it applicable to Rhode Island.”

That’s where University of Rhode Island professor and art director Bob Dilworth comes in. Dilworth has been a mentor to Wilkinson and other members of the collective for many years. Jason Smith is a former student of Dilworth’s, and now serves as the art director for Universal Collective, creating all of its graphics and promotional material. He has his first solo art opening at the Newport Art Museum in January 2016.

Dilworth’s relationship to the collective is as the unobtrusive guiding hand that has helped Wilkinson and his team take the right steps in fostering the capacity for the Collective to do great things.

Being a prominent figure in the Rhode Island fine arts scene, Dilworth’s experience writing and applying for state grants is essential to the growth of the Collective’s mission.



Left to right: Paper Boy, Rick Spades, K-Vinyl, Lex_Supa, Nahbi Reality, Mike Boston, Bx Young Gz

“The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and The Rhode Island Foundation are the two biggest sources for development money that we have looked into,” Dilworth says of his involvement with the Collective. “He’s (Wilkinson) moving cautiously right now as this is happening very fast, and everything is still being put into place. Soon everybody involved will know exactly what’s going on. “

The expediency of the Collective’s development in less than a year is a remarkable testament to the belief in this mission at a time when collaborative projects tread through Internet traffic, viewed by fleeting eyes constantly looking for the next big thing.

“We know what we want, and we know where we wanna go, but we wanna create music and at the same time create a responsibility to respect good music. We have all these people out there doin’ all this hip-hop, and a lot of it is just all so negative. We wanna create something different, something alternative,” Wilkinson adds.

Dilworth is a seasoned surveyor of creative potential, calling the Disciplez “a very talented group of songwriters and musicians, with a strong vision that will get a lot of attention from people involved in

community-based projects.”

Aside from community development, the Disciplez are musicians. They are currently working on producing their first official album, while at the same time producing the Universal Collective International album. They have already released a song with Italian hip-hop duo Tesde Calde called “The 5th Element,” open to streaming in anticipation for the International Collective album.

Wilkinson adds, “The idea is for every song to have a different country represented. The album will be 15 tracks, each song having a different rapper or rap group accompanying the Disciplez.”

International collaboration in hip-hop is not uncommon, but a project on this scale coming out of Rhode Island elucidates that four-letter word that seals our state flag. On top of all the moving parts, Wilkinson wants to ensure that all this work incites generational change.

“Think of us as a spark. It’s like a crazy hybrid to me, and there’s nothing out there like us. Once people hear what we’re making, get inspired by it and learn a little bit about us, then more people will want to be a part of it.”

Universal Disciplez’s next public show is at Jimmy’s Saloon in Newport on July 14. Check out their Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/universaldisciplez?fref=ts>

See video from DirtyDurdie’s release party at The Met here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5QHFMF0IH8>.