

MOVIES

Sundance says yes to two Ohio films for 2002 festival

JULIE E. WASHINGTON
Plain Dealer Reporter

Two films with Ohio roots have been accepted into the 2002 Sundance Film Festival.

"Hiphopbattle.com: Hiphop for Life" was written and directed by Shaker Heights resident David Velo Stewart, and filmed in Northeast Ohio.

"Blue Car," a girl's coming-of-age film written and directed by Karen Moncrieff, was shot almost exclusively in Dayton.

Stewart heard the news while celebrating his 29th birthday with family and friends on Nov. 21. "It's changed the whole dynamic of my relationships with other filmmakers," Stewart said, explaining that now others in the film industry are realizing that film with an urban theme can attract a wide audience.

"Hiphopbattle.com" will screen in Sundance's Park City at Midnight category for cutting-edge films. It will not be part of the competition. The film concerns a young man who dreams of a career as a hip-hop emcee even though his choice jeopardizes his relationships with his father and girlfriend.

Stewart said his film looks more professional than the work-in-progress that was shown at Tower City Cinemas and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum earlier this year. It also was shown at this year's Acapulco Black Film Festival.

Stewart said he plans to go to Sundance — held in Park City, Utah, Jan. 10-20 — along with a few actors, crew and family members.

Stewart teaches film at University School, and some of his students were waiting to hear if their short film had been accepted into Sundance as well.

Moncrieff's "Blue Car" is part of Sundance's American Spectrum category. Moncrieff received the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences' Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting Award for "Blue Car."

While her short films have been shown in several film festivals, "Blue Car" is her first feature film.

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MOVIES

Locally made hip-hop flick bound for Acapulco Black Film Festival

By JULIE E. WASHINGTON
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

A movie born in Cleveland's hip-hop underground is on its way to Acapulco.

"Hiphopbattle.com: Hiphop For Life," written and directed by local independent filmmaker David Velo Stewart, will be screened

at the Acapulco Black Film Festival June 4-9 in Mexico. Stewart, 28, hopes to meet distributors interested in giving his film a wider release.

The fifth Acapulco Black Film Festival will showcase 19 new films, including American and international feature films. Spike Lee's latest film, "A Huey P. Newton Story," is in competition, and Warrington Hudlin, the producer of "House Party," is festival curator.

"I always said that was a goal of mine to get into that festival," Stewart said.

Cleveland audiences can see "Hiphopbattle" at two screenings tonight at Tower City Cinemas. A free premiere screening at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in April drew about 100 viewers.

Stewart used "Hiphopbattle" — the fifth self-financed film from Stewart's Velocity Productions company — to showcase Cleveland's hip-hop culture.

"Hiphop" is about Devon (poet/rapper Q-Nice), a young man who dreams of a career as an emcee. His relationships with his father and girlfriend suffer as he makes choices to pursue his dream and grow as an artist. Devon also must decide between college and life as an entertainer.

Stewart has lived Devon's struggle. He was an emcee and hip-hop fan while growing up in Cleveland and attending University School in Hunting Valley.

Now he lives in Shaker Heights and teaches classes in film and video at University School. He is also director of admissions for the upper school. Current and former



LYNN ISCHAY/THE PLAIN DEALER

Independent filmmaker David Velo Stewart takes a call while artist Ripley Peele looks at the last take during the filming of a hip-hop poetry video.

University School students performed as rappers in "Hiphopbattle," designed and maintained the related Hiphopbattle.com web site, scored the movie and designed the film's opening graphics, he said.

Some of the rappers were participants in REACH, a summer enrichment program for African-American middle school boys. Stewart is REACH director, which is sponsored by University School.

He wants Clevelanders — especially young people — to realize that there is a lot of talent in the city, and get over the city's inferiority complex.

FILM PREVIEW

Hiphopbattle.com: Hiphop For Life

Who: Written and directed by local independent filmmaker David Velo Stewart, which is part of the Acapulco Black Film Festival

When: 7 and 9 tonight

Where: Tower City Cinemas

Tickets: \$7

Contact: 216-791-3600 or hiphopbattle.com.

"We think Hollywood is the only place films are made," Stewart said. "The only thing we lack (in Cleveland) is organization," he said.

Stewart started deejaying when he was 18. In college, he continued listening to hip-hop and deejaying at clubs and parties.

Stewart launched the hiphopbattle.com web site in May 1999. He envisioned the site as a place where rappers could resolve their competitive rivalries peacefully by posting streaming video performances and competing for the votes of the web audience.

"The movie is designed to promote the Website," he said.

He filmed "Hiphopbattle" for about a year, finishing in February 2001, and shot so much footage that he divided it into "Hiphopbattle" and an upcoming sequel.

The cast numbered about 80, including extras as club dancers

the film as well, including Q-Nice, D'Epitome, Black Nile, Suave Gotti and Da Boogie Man. A Cleveland choreographer created a percussive, syncopated line dance for the film.

Stewart graduated from University School in 1991, and majored in American studies with a concentration in film at the University of Virginia. He had his first taste of filmmaking success when he shot a horror film for \$100 and made \$500 during a Halloween screening. "It was wonderful," he recalled.

He earned a master's in education from Ursuline College in 1996.

Stewart has steadily written and directed films. Two of them, "Love Noir" and "Crazy Amour," were screened at Ohio Independent Film Festival, a showcase for area independent filmmakers. "Love Noir" was nominated for the festival's Best of Ohio award in 1998.

"Hiphopbattle" has already achieved two of Stewart's goals with the screenings at the Rock Hall and the Acapulco Black Film Festival.

Stewart's next goal is placing "Hiphopbattle" in the Sundance Independent Film Festival, but he's keeping a laid-back attitude.

"There is no time limit. I am not in a rush for any of these things," Stewart said.

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CLEVELAND, OH
THE PLAIN DEALER
MARCH 24, 2000

Hip-Hop flick filmed in Cleveland

By JOHN SOEDER

PLAIN DEALER POP MUSIC CRITIC

Filming began in Cleveland this week for "Hiphopbattle.com: Hip-Hop for Life," a movie written, directed and produced by David Stewart of Shaker Heights. The cast features several local rappers, including Black Nile, George Baynard, Fee-Jay, Eric Brown, Carlton Hunt and Kem Machete.

Q-Nice, who raps with Smooth Approach, stars as Devon, an MC who launches a Web site to showcase aspiring hip-hoppers.

LOCAL BEAT

All of the music in the movie will be done by Cleveland artists. Local producer Michael Bell is putting together a soundtrack album.

"We want to promote the fact that we have a lot of talent here," says Stewart, 27, who teaches a film class at University School. One of his students, 16-year-old sophomore Clarence Gaines, is composing part of the score for "Hiphopbattle.com."

Stewart and his crew plan to shoot club scenes every weekend in April at the Top of the Flats, 1100 W. 9th St., Cleveland. They hope to complete the direct-to-video project by June. Stewart says the movie will be sold in area record stores as well as on the Web site:

<http://www.hiphopbattle.com>

Haps To the academy members for their elegant Gala. My favorite part of the evening was their prim and proper, fancy tuxedoed, white gloved fist sodomy of Denzel Washington. I mean what does he have to do? He's played every major role a black man can without having to have a serious romantic attachment to a non-black woman (like Wesley did), and he even broke that rule in the Bone Collector. Even that half-hearted attempt at step and fetch it wasn't enough. A little advice Denzel- take a whole tub of Vaseline to your next movie shoot, the lubrication will help lesson the pain of the violation.



Slaps To the Cleveland State University Department of Student life for their half-assed effort for this years Black Aspiration week. I mean you would think that with all of the money CSU earned in

interest while holding on to students' loan refund checks, they would have enough money to print more than two flyers for these events. Kevin Powell, an esteemed writer for the national hip hop magazines, spoke to a capacity crowd of ten. This week was a prime example of the complete lack of respect and attention that CSU gives its black students. If it wasn't for all the new computers, again centrally placed for students use in the colleges that are prodomidently attend by white students, I would think this was the 70's afros and bell bottoms are back, why not overt racism?- it's always in fad.



Haps To young film maker David Stewart for his true to life movie

HipHop for Life, that stars Q-Nice, Black Nile, Ebony Williams and ASM of TSax Entertainment to name a few. With talent in Cleveland being so vast, the support for Clevelanders is limited. I applaud David's effort to help put C-Town on the map. It takes brains, balls and a lot of credit card maxin' to put on a production such as this one. While he may not be Spike Lee yet, he's a lot taller and ladies he is fine. And those dimples. He is a little on the skinny side, he needs a woman's cooking. No skinny girls need to apply, you all not eating your damn self.

Slaps Speaking of skinny girls, and I'm sure that my thick sista's can testify, don't they get on your last nerve? Always on a diet but eating everything in sight, never gaining a pound but, always talking about how they need to lose weight — It's sickening. Skinny girls don't get me wrong, you do have your function, usually after a brotha dates you all it makes it that much easier for him to appreciate my cooking, hats off to you skinny girls, keep starving.



Haps To Lisa Bonet, is it me or have you missed her too? For a moment I thought she was going to be forgotten like so many other child stars sucked into drug abuse and failed marriages, however I find myself pleasantly surprised at her recent career re-emergence. But on a "things that make you go hmmm" note, have you ever noticed that Lisa, Lenny, and Maxwell look a awful lot alike? Have you ever seen Lisa in the same place with either one? Coincidence or Gender Bending, you be the judge.

MUSIC

Soundbites

BY JEFF NIESEL

David Velo Stewart's modest Shaker Heights apartment is the quintessential bachelor pad. A few African masks hang on the walls in no particular order, and the only furniture consists of a sofa and a dining room table. On top of the table — which is so cluttered, there's no space for place-mats or candles — there's a computer with a video camera plugged into it. Stewart's got everything rigged so that he can watch TV, edit whatever movie or video he's working on, and eat, all at the same time. The setup might be useful for filmmaking, but it's not exactly conducive to entertaining the opposite sex, and Stewart knows it. He's fed some of his relationship frustrations into the script he wrote for *Hip Hop for Life*, a movie about the difficulties faced by an aspiring rapper named Devon (played by local rapper Q-Nice). Despite being a low-budget production filmed entirely at small clubs in Cleveland, *Hip Hop for Life* recently screened at the prestigious Acapulco Film Festival and will have its official Cleveland debut on May 25, with a showing at Tower City (it screened privately last month at the Rock Hall).

"A lot of it is based in terms of me and my experiences as a filmmaker and disc jockey," Stewart explains over pizza and soft drinks. "As an artist, a lot of my friends told me to stick to teaching, or that I should have gone into corporate America, and that filmmaking wasn't going to work out. Some of the film is based on my experiences working as a disc jockey at different parties and how you're treated — especially with relationships. On Friday night, I would be going to disc jockey, and my girlfriend would ask, 'Why can't you stay here?' or 'Can we go to the movies?' A lot of scenes I've lived."

When Stewart, a Cleveland native who graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in African American studies and a concentration on film, finished undergraduate schooling, he had two choices: He could go to grad school or try to make it in Hollywood. He says he chose to get his master's degree in education and worry about pursuing a career in filmmaking later.

"I tell the students continued on page 43

41 The Books of Bob

As Bob Dylan turns 60, his life and legacy are explored in two new biographies.

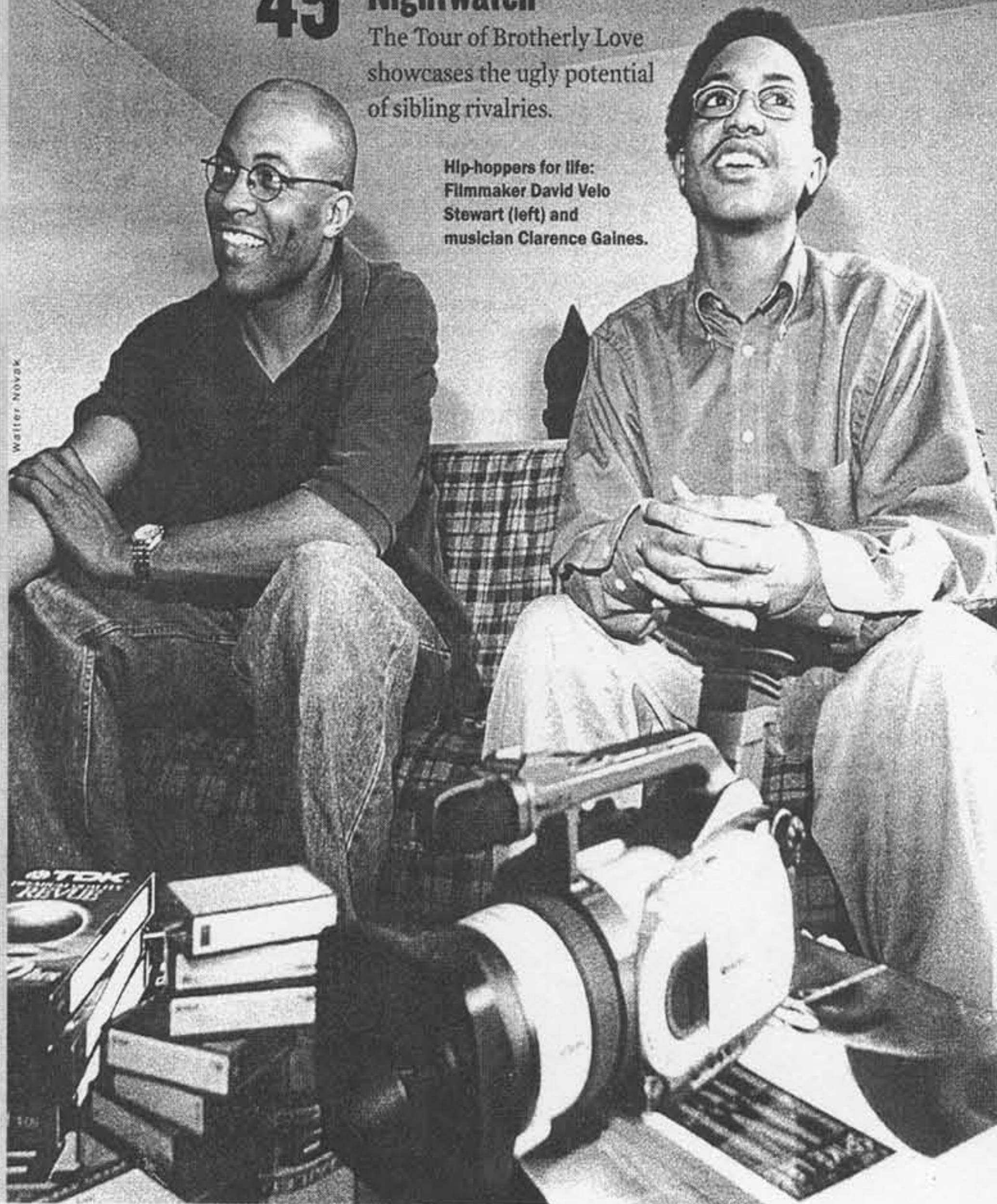
44 Playback

After five years, Tool returns with an album that's as brilliant as the last one.

45 Nightwatch

The Tour of Brotherly Love showcases the ugly potential of sibling rivalries.

Hip-hoppers for life: Filmmaker David Velo Stewart (left) and musician Clarence Gaines.



whatever. And then, when it's all over and the mic is turned off, they can always get a decent job and support their family."

For Stewart, who teaches at University School, an all-boys private school in Hunting Valley, working with students has actually helped his filmmaking career. He says he often asks his students for advice when he's stuck with a scene, and he recruited 17-year-old Clarence Gaines IV (a.k.a. NRG) to assist him with the music and sound effects for *Hip Hop for Life*. Gaines and Stewart have worked together in the past on other movies that Stewart has made, but this is the first to result in an actual soundtrack.

"It's easy for me to imagine what he's talking about," says Gaines. "When we first met, he showed me a Freddy Krueger clip [that he wanted to imitate for its sound effects], and I automatically knew what he was talking about. I just went to the keyboard and started playing what I wanted."

Gaines, who started playing saxophone when he was in fifth grade and currently produces and manages two high school rap acts (*Mach 3* and the *Desert Crew*) wrote and played all the music for *Hip Hop for Life*. He recruited local rappers to make cameos and handle vocals. The one stipulation was that there would be no swearing, but Gaines says that wasn't a problem for any of the contributors, which include Q-Nice, Paulie Rhyme, and Ken Machete, among others.

"You don't have to curse to be real," he says. "There are so many words you can use. Usually, if you curse, it's because your vocabulary is limited. If your vocabulary is large, you can find another word to use in its place."

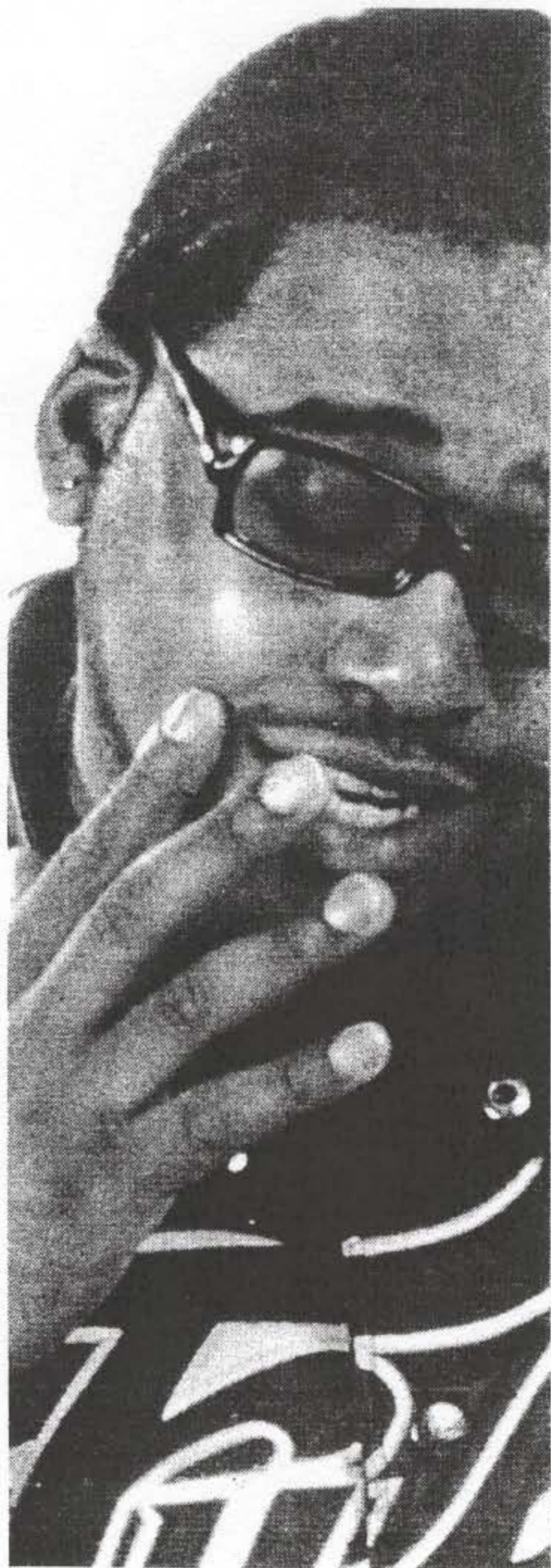
Stewart agrees.

"On the issue of keepin' it real and everything, hip-hop was originally designed to provide a strategy against the streets," he explains. "The origins of hip hop were about not indulging in drugs and street violence. They started breakdancing and beatboxing to get away from that. That's really what keepin' it real is about."

When Stewart started working on the film a year and a half ago, rappers such as KRS-One and Grand Puba showed interest in it, but Stewart opted to keep the production local, using only Northeast Ohio actors and actresses. While he admits that he thinks of *Hip Hop for Life* as a "demo" that would enable him to film a sequel with a bigger budget, he's content with the final product and proud of the local talent (both the rappers and the actors) that it showcases.

"I'm so glad that we decided it wasn't worth the money to bring them in," he says of the national artists. "We just wanted to let the local actors do it because if it got to Acapulco or screened at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, people would say that it was because it had KRS One or Grand Puba in it. But we got to those two main goals that I set, and I love that it was nobody but Cleveland people that got that accomplished."

Hip Hop for Life. 7 p.m., Friday, May 25. Tower City Cinemas, 50 Public Square, \$7, 440-717-4697.



T.J. WHEELER

become artistically bankrupt.

"The slam, I think, because it's become a buzzword and almost like a culture word now and it's entered into that realm, I think as an art form, it's kind of stagnant," says Ray McNiece, one of the earliest and most successful participants on Cleveland's poetry slam team. "It's become formulaic and it's become rhetorical.

"It's also become identity politics," McNiece continues. "People found out that if I stand up there and give my point of view from my identity group, gay, black, or let's pick mine, Irish Catholic working-class, I'm staking out an area where if you don't vote for me you're perceived to be reactionary or conservative or homophobic. And I don't have any problem with people speaking about where they're from — that's what we should be doing, speaking your own truth. But when you're doing it to win, we've kind of crossed over into the area of politics. And we know how politics are, so it's like the old joke, 'How do you tell when a politician is lying?' His mouth is moving."

Still, it's hard to deny slam's impact on performance poetry, even though it is now a somewhat dubious outlet. Perhaps the most significant aspect of slam is the racial

Though the team was all-white at first, open competition made it accessible to African Americans, who became some of its most notable performers. Other early participants on the team, such as Salinger — who now holds preliminaries for the team — and McNiece, have long worked within the scene promoting diverse bills and pointedly infiltrating once-segregated clubs to engender a sense of community.

Over a decade later, their work is evident. At Salinger's monthly slam at the Beachland, you can see a middle-aged white lady adopt an Irish accent and talk about her breasts one minute, a young black woman spit some sista spleen the next. At Kevin "Kaos" Moore's open mike at Club X/O, you can hear the honeyed hymnals of Erykah Badu's soul sister La Shaun "Phoenix" Moore juxtaposed with the algebraic outpourings of Terry Provost. This communal atmosphere has an energy about spoken word and performance poetry that has fostered renewed growth and buoyed popularity, with Boogie at its nexus.

"What happens is you find people that come to poetry readings and start turning off the TV. I've had many people who were like, 'Man, I didn't like poetry till I heard you.' Now you can't get them away from the poetry readings," Boogie says. "Then all of a sudden they start becoming affected by the content. 'Man, I can't watch all that bullcrap anymore.' It all started from a seed being planted and nurtured, like everything else in life. If you plant a seed and nurture it, it's going to grow. Whether you want it to or not. Whether it's ragweed or roses."

Boogie died when I saw him last, a victim of the now-cliché urban violence scenario. Offed like a light switch. No tears are necessary; there's still plenty of spring in Boogie's mortal coil, but his celluloid self is as dead as the Cavs' playoff hopes. It all goes down in the film *Hip-Hop For Life*, a Cleveland-based picture that premiered at the Rock Hall last week. Boogie plays Kenny, a sort of hip-hop Burgess Meredith from *Rocky* who mentors the film's aspiring rapper protagonist Devon (played by Q-Nice), delivering such memorable lines as, "You're messing up my timing on this cheese curl."

It's a fitting role for Boogie, whose character embodies many of the traits of Boogie himself. Though he relocated to New York at the end of last year, he frequently returns to town — he'll be at Tri-C on the 28th to perform at a Langston Hughes celebration — to offer his tutelage to young poets, like Kenny does Devon in the film. In it, he instructs Devon to speak from his heart rather than his head, to get in touch with his feminine side — the side that gives birth to feeling, to passion, to anima; in short, to our very humanity.

"I was told when I was young by my godbrother, 'Man, you ain't gonna save the world, but it's not your job to save the world,'" Boogie recalls. "He's like, 'No, your job is to provide a means for the world to save itself.' In other words, if a man is drowning, you throw him a raft, he gets in it, and you pull him in. But if that joker doesn't want to get in the life raft, it's not your job to jump in the ocean and try and put him in it. That's what a lot of us do — we try to jump in the ocean of problems

Phat Filmmakers

O K, But Don't Tell Them They Misspelled "Fat." Among the many sources of soul-gnawing personal pain to Mr. Reel Report these days is having to write previews of the big summer movie season. Sequel! Remake! Sequel! Aargh! But the medium of digital-video allows the independent filmmaker to end-run around the Hollywood system of 35mm production and distribution and present grass-roots film and video. On that note, be aware that Phat Phive Productions, a multimedia collective of performers **Larry Housel, Charlie DeMarco, Mike Lowe, Scott Simone** and **Jesse Lamovsky**, long active on the Kent-area scene, have embarked upon their first feature, a digital-video tale entitled *dev/null*. "It's basically a coming-of-age movie, for the twentysomethings involved in the dot-com world," said Housel. The hero, a chief information officer, suffers "a midlife crisis a little early, as most people do who are involved in technology." A nervous breakdown causes him to lose his job; a girl named Faith and a gang of computer hackers help restore it. *dev/null* is shooting in Cleveland, Kent and Akron, with Housel in the director's chair. The collective plans to chronicle the shoot's progress on their website, in keeping with the cyber-theme; check them out at www.phat5.com.

If He Can Make It There, He'll Make It Anywhere. While things are on a digital note, congratulations to playwright/filmmaker/actor **Alex P. Michaels**. His Cleveland-made DV feature *Blood Kiss* is enjoying its world premiere in the United Kingdom, at the York International Film Festival in York, England — but no, they did not foot the bill to fly Michaels to York. That's why he was able to make last weekend's premiere screening of *Hip-Hop for Life*, a local DV feature directed by **David "Velo" Stewart**, in which Michaels has a supporting role. A musical drama of the North Coast music scene, *Hip-Hop for Life* proceeds onward to Acapulco, Mexico, as one of the opening features in the upcoming Acapulco Black Film Festival. For more about Stewart and partner **Jae Beasley's** Velocity Productions (including a call for talent for their next picture), check out www.hiphopbattle.com. For *Blood Kiss* and Alex P. Michaels' other irons in the fire, check out www.prelude2cinema.com.

Cast Away. **Ray Szuch's** invaluable North Coast Stunts and Movie Extras, the area headquarters for local film auditions, has changed their name to North Coast Central Casting. Their address remains at 4913 Storer Ave., Cleveland, OH, 44102, which you'll need if you wish to mail in résumés and headshots for extra work in three new projects: *The Calling*, shooting on 35mm in Columbus under Hollywood actor/director Damian Chapa. It's the biopic of longtime evangelist Leroy Jenkins (the executive producer), and requires hundreds of churchgoers in the fashions of the 1950s up through today. Then there's *Dark Match*, a digital-video feature looking for "Ultimate Fighting-type-looking guys" for realistic mortal-combat scenes. Finally, Szuch seeks child performers ages 5-10 and their parents for the latest volume in his successful Tapeworm Video cassette series *Common Sense Self-Defense*, martial arts instructions aimed at kids and families.

But They Spell "Film" without the "Ph." The next meeting of Cleveland Filmmakers, the arm of the Cleveland Film Society that fosters production, convenes today, Wednesday, May 30, beginning at 6:30 pm at the Great Lakes Brewing Company, next door to the CFS offices by the West Side Market. The night's special topic will be the

Local hip hop movie makes the cut at Acapulco Black Film Festival

"Hip Hop For Life" will be showcased during June event

By Neal Hodges
Cleveland Life

Film it, direct it, and they will come to view it.

That's what happened last Wednesday at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum as nearly 200 film consumers attended the premiere of David Velo Stewart's "Hip Hop For Life," an ode to the local underground hip hop culture. The writer-director chronicles the decisions and choices of a young aspiring MC (mic controller.)

Shot entirely in Cleveland



Keeping it real- Writer/director David Velo Stewart's film, "Hip Hop For Life," will be shown during the Acapulco Black Film Festival June 4 - 9.

on a shoe-string budget of \$12,000 (a half of a drop in the bucket in terms of mainstream film production), "Hip Hop For Life" is a testament to the commitment of local artists who have united to showcase the many talents in Northeast Ohio. The result is an invitation to the 5th Annual Acapulco Black Film Festival long film competition in Acapulco, Mexico June 4 - 9.

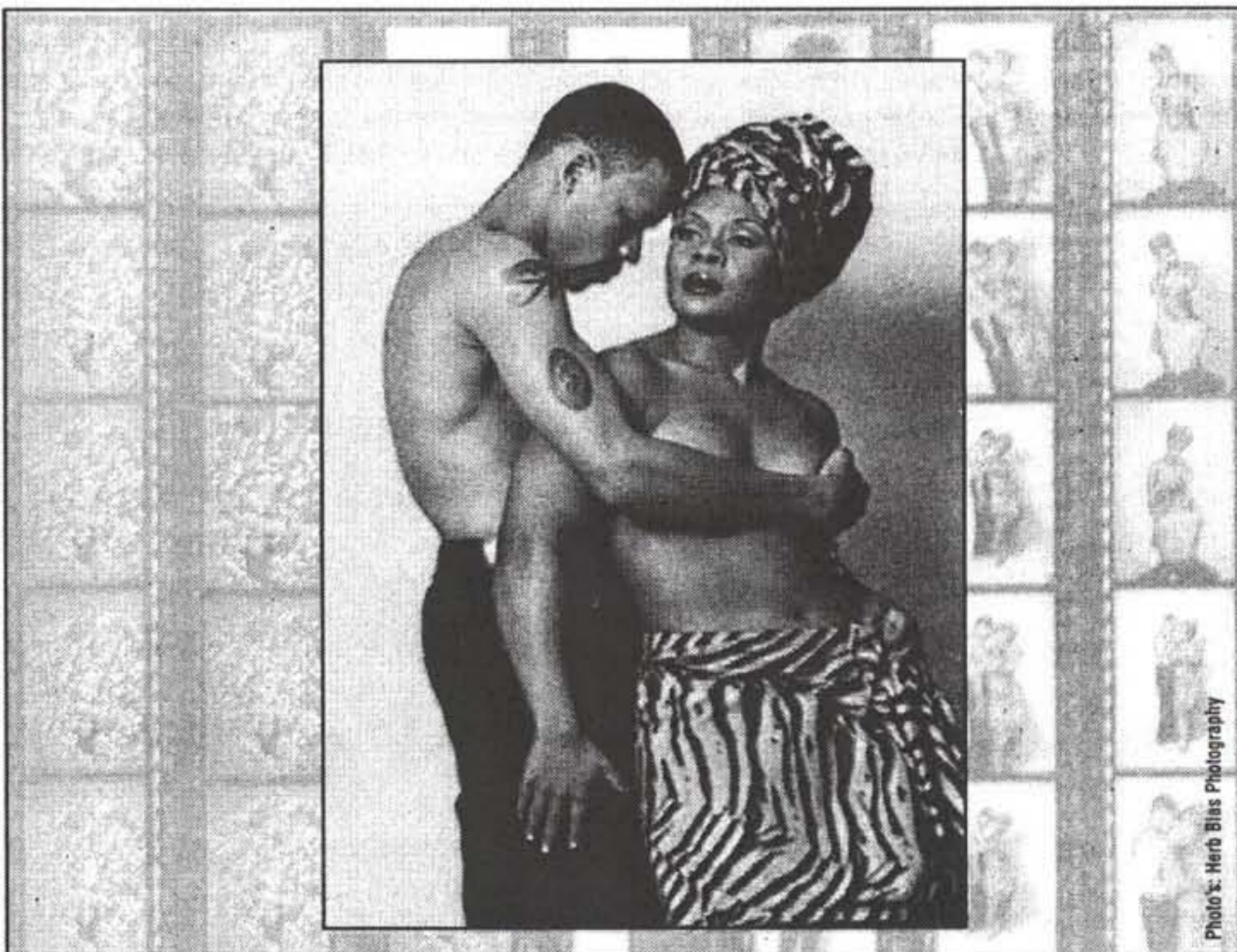
Devon Collins (played by rapper/actor/poet Q-Nice) dreams of becoming the next big rap act since Bone Thugs - Harmony to make it out of Cleveland, but there are a few obstacles standing in his way: his father, who is adamant about his son receiving a college education; the trials and tribulations of a new relationship with his girlfriend Jessica; and the support (or lack of) from his so-called friends.

Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Along the way Devon encounters mistrust, deceit and betrayal from some of his closest peers, which causes an emotional roller coaster ride that Q-Nice handles with ease. Q-Nice isn't afraid to let the sensitive side that every man has display itself, and his engaging smile will make you

stop and take a second look at the screen. Ripley Peele, an actress on her way to Los Angeles via a national competition she won courtesy of a national talent search by Warner Bros. Studio, is convincing as the lovely Jessica. She is a sight for sore eyes as evidenced by all the hooping and hollering from the men in the audience when her character first graced the screen. She is a perfect example that women don't have to exude your typical "video look" to be considered sexy. The sister is holding.

Stewart filmed the production with digital cameras, creating a realistic vibe, and used Cleveland landmarks to sustain a local look. Look closely and you will see the Lancer on Carnegie



Hip hop love affair: Actors Q-Nice and Ripley Peele heat up the screen in "Hip Hop For Life."

Avenue, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Flats, exterior shots of Cedar Road, and several local night clubs. Da Boogie Man, a national poet and Cleveland native, makes a nice, comedic cameo appearance.

"Hip Hop For Life" stays true to the local underground hip hop culture. Blunts, forty-ounces, beautiful women, social commen-

tary, free-stylin,' gambling, sampling (there is a Rocky-style scene) coupled with the will to survive and the importance of education ensures the reality of the genre.

Stewart, like his colleague Robert Banks, is finally getting some much deserved national attention. And like Banks, Stewart manages to keep his vision real.

RHYTHM

Arts • Entertainment • Music • NiteClubs • Restaurants

Hip Hop boot camp trains local artists

Weekly get-together of D.J.'s, M.C.'s and beat boxers sharpens rhythm and rhyme skills

By **JERRY STROTHERS**
Cleveland life

Every Tuesday night you can try your hand at being a "Hip Hop" music star at the Rhythm Room with the "Spitboxers Freestyle Session." A positive environment that is supposed to develop lyrical abilities is how one of the hosts "Suave Gotti" describes the weekly session. Anyone can try and climb the "32 Chambers of Skillz" or watch the action from the sidelines.

This weekly get-together of DJ's, MC's and "Beat Boxers" is all about progression through the "32 Chambers of Skillz," and much like a Karate school, each person can move to the next level by completing a series of tasks

which range from drinking a whole can of soda in 60 seconds and being able to create a rhyme, to the master level where participants can challenge their teachers.

Contrary to negative stereotypes of rappers, this session is not about heavy drinking nor creating rhymes which degrade women. All of the performances must teach about some topic

and be interesting at the same time. There is even a rule that prevents direct attacks on other people and one that requires the group to hold a consensus vote before the student can advance.

Performing Freestyle Rap is a



JERRY STROTHERS

Suave Gotti masters 32 Chambers of Skillz at the Rhythm Room in Cleveland Heights.

sort of lyrical "Tai-Bo" which presents unique tasks and exercises that the founders feel will help all who participate to increase their skill level and perhaps get noticed by a record company. At one level the participant must rap

totally freestyle as a person in front of them tosses various objects at their feet. Their rap must include the object which may range from a crazy hat to a kitty cat.

Freestyle rhyming requires split second thinking as to what word or sentence will make sense. The audience promptly lets the students know that their lyrical selection "sucks" by booing them off stage.

The higher levels require the ability to create a rhyme not using a certain letter or to rhyme while performing push-ups. As the students continue their ascent towards master level they are

tasked to shadowbox with multiple master teachers.

In attendance for this session of the freestyle session was Dahveed Nelson one of the founding members of the legendary group "The Last Poets." Nelson commented that many of their songs have been sampled by many hip-hop groups ranging from N.W.A., and "Too Short." Last Poets songs are now classics and have made a come-back in the hip-hop community. The six members of the Last Poets group continue to network with each other however there is no current plan for a reunion of the group.

Catch the Freestyle Session every Tuesday night at the Rhythm Room, 2140 Taylor Road in Cleveland Heights starting at 9 PM.