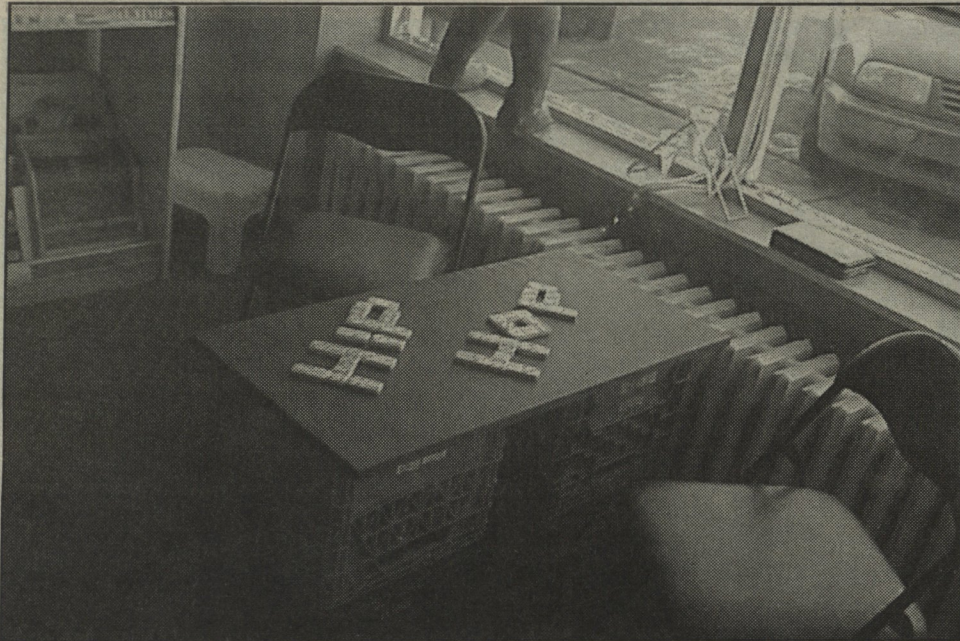


Our Bronx

A Look at Charlottetown's Small but Growing Hip-Hop Community

By Marc MacDonald



THE HISTORY OF HIP-HOP

Over thirty years ago, the culture that is known as hip-hop began in the Bronx borough in New York City. Despite oppression, poverty and lack of opportunity, the industrious youths of the area created a music and an art form, just as their African-American forebearers had created jazz, blues, R&B and rock and roll.

The man who is credited with having begun hip-hop is Kool Herc who, when deejaying at parties, began using two turntables instead of one and extended the break beats of songs by "hip hopping" back and forth between the two tables.

Soon after this innovation, break dancers or b-boys began displaying their moves during the music breaks. Also, the DJs' call and response developed into a discipline of its own. People who performed in this aspect became known as MCs, or rappers.

In the absence of musical instruments, the hip-hop pioneers took turntables and used them as

their instruments. When they could not find venues in which to play, they played in parks, using street lamps for power sources at the city's expense.

Hip-hop was created and has evolved in the face of opposition and now has spread to every part of the world.

HIP-HOP HITS CHARLOTTETOWN

Charlottetown is now witnessing its hip-hop beginnings. All four elements of hip-hop are present and accounted for, in some form, in the city. Much of the elements are still in their embryonic stages, but they are still growing. There are now MCs, DJs, break dancers and graffiti artists who are attempting to develop their art and hopefully display it.

Hip-hop in this city, however, faces some serious problems. One of the most evident problems is the lack of a venue where artists can display their talents and compete against others. Another problem is that many participants are younger than the legal drinking age

(19 years old) and are not permitted to hip-hop shows that take place in bars.

Another major problem afflicting the local scene is musical influence. In Charlottetown, the three main influences come from underground and mainstream artists from Halifax, Toronto and the United States.

The American artists have the strongest presence because of their high profiles in music videos and in record stores. The Toronto commercial acts (along with those from other major Canadian hip-hop centres) also get air time and shelf space in videos and stores, and even make rare performances in Charlottetown bars.

Halifax, because it is the closest hip-hop centre in geographic terms, frequently has its artists perform in Charlottetown bars and other venues and allows for hip-hoppers to travel to that city to perform. It is often more difficult, however, to obtain and be exposed to Halifax hip-hop through CDs and videos.

But that is not to say that things are all bad in Charlottetown. People are working to make a difference and establish the foundations.

BREAK DANCING

Greg Fleming is doing his part for the community through his break dancing club. In true hip-hop fashion, Greg picked up his skills in another city and brought them here.

Fleming explained, "I learned what I know in Halifax at the University of Kings College. They started a club there last year, and anyone was welcome to come.

So I met a lot of cool people who taught me a bunch of moves and I picked it up pretty quick."

Last year, after Fleming's plans to attend Dalhousie fell through, he ventured back to the Island and began a b-boy club.

In explaining his reasons for starting the club, Fleming stated, "I still wanted to b-boy, of course, but I had no one to do it with. I thought it would be a good idea to teach some people some moves, and then I'd have some friends to play with... I wanted to have it so that everyone would have the basics, and then we could teach each other harder moves as we went along.... Like more of a b-boy community than a class. That's starting to happen now, but not with the numbers I would have liked."

At present, Fleming holds his b-boy and b-girl lessons for free at the UPEI Fieldhouse on Sunday evenings.

Fleming has even bigger plans for the summer, though. "This summer, I'm gonna make all the people that have been coming to break come to the Confed Mall with me and b-boy in public as some sort of club initiation.... When the snow's gone and the pavement dries up, I wanna get some linoleum and cardboard and get people together.... That would be really fun. People would stop and watch, and all the b-boys that I don't know about would come out of the woodwork and we could battle and stuff."

GRAFFITI

The one element that has had the most difficult time developing in Charlottetown has been graf-