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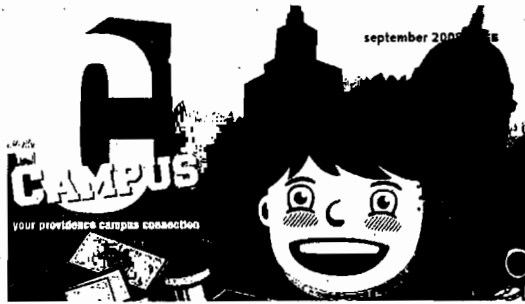
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Rhode Music

by JOHN TARABORELLI

The members of Rhodeshow, the AS220-affiliated hip-hop collective, would probably prefer that you didn't smoke, but they're not going to write a song about it. This troupe of teens and twenty-somethings began its life as a state-sponsored youth outreach group doing skits about the dangers of smoking. However, as they rapidly pass into adulthood, they're leaving behind the afterschool special stereotypes, and asserting their identity as a full-fledged part of the local hip-hop scene.

With the knowledge and drive of David Gonzalez, the kinetic 29-year-old Rhodeshow founder, to guide them, these young artists are making a statement with their second CD, the appropriately titled *Growth Project 2.0*. Just to prove how serious they are, they brought in Joey Beats, the local production maestro with the national reputation, to provide the musical backdrop. His contributions are reminiscent of Liquid Swords era RZA: gritty, minimalist, and head nod-inducing. Having one producer provide all but two of the beats helps provide a cohesive sound for a large, diverse group of young talents growing up in public.

Rhodeshow doesn't deal in the kind of crass, insipid commercialism of the Top 40 set, nor are they the sort of fussy, self-concerned college radio MCs who make hip-hop about hip-hop. Instead, they rap about what they know: dead-end jobs, absentee parents, death, romance, growing pains, and everyday struggles. It's like Aasim, a newcomer to the group, says, "I just want to make sure I'm putting out music that I know is real. I don't want to be another disposable rapper."

"The appeal of our music doesn't match the music that we were brought up with," adds Andre, who pulls double duty rapping and singing. "The ideas that we have, the type of people that we are, the lessons that we learned growing up are more in line with the hip-hop that you guys grew up with," he says, referring back to the hip-hop touchstones of David, Joey, and this writer's teenage years.

The music they make is honest, exuberant, and unpretentious. At times you can hear the vocalists grasping for a level of nuance or sophistication that isn't quite there yet, but they already have a head start on achieving. What they lack in polish or complexity,



music

URBAN GROWTH: members of Rhodeshow grow up with *Growth Project 2.0*

they make up for in energy and unabashed self-expression. On stage they come alive, radiating enthusiasm and determination in contrast to the self-satisfied or standoffish tendencies of so many hip-hop performers.

For some of them, this could be a job one day. Others will go on to find other careers. "I think I'm gonna go to school to be an anesthesiologist," cracks Andre, "just so I can make a shitload of money and do everything I want creatively on my own time."

Michelle, an 18-year-old rapper and singer, is a bit more reflective about what Rhodeshow represents for her. "I watched my dad give up on art and be a miserable person over it," she recalls. "I don't want to be that person. I want to find an even balance. Whatever this turns into for me is what it turns into. As long as I'm doing what I love that's all that matters."

Check out Rhodeshow's latest CD, *Growth Project 2.0*, at therhodeshow.com.

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