9-28-2006

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Amanda Milkovits

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Changing voices, faces of hip-hop

A Brown University professor traces the evolution of hip-hop as part of the "Songs of Social Justice" colloquium at the University of Rhode Island.

BY AMANDA MILKOVITS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

SOUTH KINGSTOWN - Commentator Tricia Rose could talk about what hip-hop is meant to be.

But a group of teenage performers from AS220 in Providence put her words into action.

During a presentation Tuesday night in the University of Rhode Island's colloquium series "Songs of Social Justice: The Rhetoric of Music," the Brown University professor spoke about the evolution of hip-hop - from an underground music scene about the experiences of African-Americans, to a commercialized glori-

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raged become narratives we celebrate," Rose said.

She talked about when she picked up a DVD of hip-hop artist 50 Cent, Live at Detroit, and noticed that clicking the remote brought up an image of 50 Cent in a bulletproof vest and the sound of gunfire. (50 Cent has been shot numerous times.) Viewing the televised concert, she saw that the audience appeared to be all white.

These are the images that people who don’t know about the black experience are buying—the sexism, gang violence, drugs. Hip-hop, like other music of social justice, can be expressions of injustice, she said. But, when that is seen as what it means to be cool, to be black, to be a tough young man, to be a submissive woman, then the message of protest becomes something to follow, “and it’s that moment we’re hanging in right now,” Rose said.

As the diverse crowd in the Edwards Auditorium listened, Rose read the lyrics of several hip-hop songs and then played them. Some nodded their heads to the drum backbeat as she played Akrobatik’s song "Remind My Soul": "Yeah, it’s getting wild out here/Makes me wonder how a black man can raise a child out here... We’re no longer supposed to be slaves/I bet Harriet Tubman will be turning in her grave/Like remind my soul."

The crowd was warmed up by Rose, and brought to their feet by a troupe of five members of AS220’s Broad Street Studio Rhode Show, which wrote and performed its own songs. Amber Newman, 16, her sister Anjel, 18, David Dayday Arkins, 17, and Michelle Mancone, 17, sang about growing up in the inner-city, a rap about the first graf-