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Rick Massimo

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The group took five years to come out with last year's self-titled debut; this one comes only a year later, and was only three months in the making. And while the first disc was produced by Rhode Show director David Gonzalez and some of the students in the Broad Street Studio's beat-making workshops, 11 of the 13 tracks on The Growth Project 2.0 were produced by Rhode Island hip-hop producer Joey Beats.

The difference is clear: a sleek, warm, old-school sound that takes from soul and jazz records as much as from newfangled electronica. Gonzalez says the producer came up with 40 to 45 beats — what would be about two years' output for Gonzalez — in 11 days. From there, the rappers listened, chose beats that inspired them, and put rhymes over them.

The content is a little different as well. While the first record felt like a debut record, with declarative statements about who the young rappers were and what they were about, this disc feels like a second record — a collection of songs by a group who has done it before and knows they can do it again.

So while there are earnest slice-of-life tracks such as the leadoff “Be Me,” by Michelle Mancone, and “This One Goes Out,” by Mancone and Anjel Newmann, there's also the battle rhyme “You Ain't Nothing,” by Randolph Placide and Gonzalez, the romantic “Love So Divine” by Newmann and the harrowing “36 Hours,” by Joshua Vega.

Hip-hop group The Rhode Show celebrates the release of its sophomore album, The Growth Project 2.0, Saturday at AS220 in Providence.

The group, for the workshops he runs in the Training School and associated projects. “Usually, there's a beat presented and we all write for it, and we fight over it... I can't make beats fast enough,” he says. Now, when the time comes to make a third record, he says, they already have about 30 tracks to choose from.

Joey Beats says he was impressed with the buzz around the Rhode Show after their performance at last year's AS220 Foo Fest, and ran into time for this disc. He will graduate from the Met High School next month and calls Gonzalez "a great mentor [and] a big reason why I'm back in school."

“36 Hours” is about his aunt's cancer and the time the hospital mixed up his records and, for a day and a half, he thought he also had cancer. It was a hard experience to talk about, he says, but that's where the Rhode Show, and hip-hop in general, comes in. "People tend to be quiet about their experiences." so as he was making the beats for the songs, "the thing that I like about these most is that they're a team. It makes them very powerful as a unit."

The Growth Project 2.0 is a collaborative effort. "It's better to create the music within a concentrated period of time. If it gets drawn out too long, the music loses a piece of its identity."

Some of the beats he had been working on, and some were created especially for the occasion when he heard their ideas.

"This group is the most professional that I have ever had the pleasure of working with. There's a certain candor, maturity, regimen, that I don't have the luxury to experience in a lot of projects I associate myself with. The thing that I like about them most is that they're a team. It makes them very powerful as a unit."

Some of the new blood in the group is responsible for the best moments. Alinoka Daramola is represented on three tracks, including the foreboding "I Got a Feeling" ("Food for thought on Heil's dance"), which showcases his dramatic rhymes and musical voice, and the four-headed collaboration "Shine" with Mancone, Andrè Bradley and Gonzalez.

"He is a phenomenal rapper — performance, everything," and a perfectionist in the studio, Gonzalez raves about Daramola. "This is a new voice that we [didn't] have to put into development," the months-long initiation that new Rhode Show members usually have to go through before they're ready to take the stage.

Vega, 19, of Providence, joined the Rhode Show as a dancer and did some spoken-word pieces, and has taken to the mike for the first time when they're near us, maybe they think, 'Maybe I shouldn't keep this to myself.'"

Daramola, 20, of East Providence, calls the Rhode Show "A place where I can really get my voice out. It's become an amazing life experience." He had produced some discs on his own, but the group structure and support of the program has widened his creative horizons. "They're allowing me to express myself in different ways. I had one direction, which was rapping, about riches and fame. Now I rap about things that I see, things people go through. It makes me feel good."

The Rhode Show celebrates the release of The Growth Project 2.0 Saturday night at AS220, 115 Empire St., Providence, at 8 p.m. Admission is $5; the disc sells for $10. Call (401) 831-8327.

Robillard at Chan's
Rhode Island blues legend Duke Robillard pulls into Woonsocket Saturday night with his crack band for two shows at Chan's, 207 Main St. Admission is $17 for the 8 p.m. show, $12 for the 10 p.m. show and $20 for both. Call Chan's at (401) 703-1800.

Correction
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Music

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01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, May 29, 2008

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So while there are earnest slice-of-life tracks such as the leadoff “Be Me,” by Michelle Mancone, and “This One Goes Out,” by Mancone and Anjel Newmann, there’s also the battle rhyme “You Ain’t Nothing,” by Randolph Placide and Gonzalez, the romantic “Love So Divine” by Newmann and the harrowing “36 Hours,” by Joshua Vega.

The Rhode Show takes young performers from all over Rhode Island in a variety of situations, including those transitioning out of the Training School (confidentiality regulations prevent Gonzalez from revealing which kids are from the school), and pays a stipend to learn the art and the business of music. These works are slices of the lives of real young people, without the lowest-common-denominator influences of corporate hip-hop and party music.

Gonzalez looks back on the first record and says, “We were so strong on defining what was different about the Rhode Show [from] other youth programs and hip-hop groups. … It was militant as hell; it was a reflection of our personality.”

This time around, with the help of an outside producer, Gonzalez says, “It’s like ‘Let’s introduce ourselves. Let’s ride the intro; let’s really enjoy the music and make that outro last.’ We always felt like we needed to ‘speak.’ Now, a lot of things are just chill.”

Gonzalez can be a taskmaster, and sometimes it’s necessary, he says, but the accomplishment of finally getting out that first record helped him to develop “a trust in the process. … I notice I’ve calmed down tremendously. I’ve stopped screaming, but I’ve got a lot more gray hairs.”

Working with Joey Beats was “a great opportunity for someone else to worry about the beats,” Gonzalez says. The beat-making process is a slow one in the Rhode Show environment, with Gonzalez and his students producing for the group, for the workshops he runs in the Training School and associated projects. “Usually, there’s a beat presented and we all write for it, and we fight over it. … I can’t make beats fast enough,” he says. Now, when the time comes to make a third record, he says, they already have about 30 tracks to choose from.
Joey Beats says he was impressed with the buzz around the Rhode Show after their performance at last year’s AS220 Foo Fest, and ran into Gonzalez at the SoundSession festival.

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