

# RAP ROOSTS IN MIDWEST

## Local musicians maintain heritage

By Kim Spurlock

"... The first record of man was found in Africa. I was told Adam was the first, but that was way after the real beginning/so already they're winning. Lies one, truth nothing/look at them grinning. ... Next we have Jesus/the story of Christ. They'd never let you think that he was anything but white. ..."

— Klass K

The heartbeat of the Motherland — the sound of the drums echoing through the night in the land of Africa — could be felt from far away in the land of the United States by the slaves as they labored.

And the sound still can be heard by the youth of today who yearn for that same heartbeat.

"African culture is the rhythm of life," said Otto Green, a senior speech pathology major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, from Syracuse, N.Y.

The sounds of Africa have taken on new styles and new faces as time passes, but the meaning remains the same.

Thus, the musical heritage is maintained.

"(Rap) is a means for a lot of people who have no voice to be heard," said Otto Green, also known as "M.C. O.G." of the local rap group, Peace Nation. Green joins Michael "Mike Life" Evans and Kenneth "DJ K Luv-On" Watson.

Since its dawning in Africa, Green said, rap has popularized itself throughout the world. People from all walks of life listen, dance and express themselves both socially and politically through the art of rap.

Rap can be used as a means to teach the history of African-American struggles. Right now, he said, record companies don't acknowledge that educational responsibility. Instead, Green said, they and others exploit consumers just to make money.

"I like the fact that rap is universal," he said. "But the educational element has to become equally universal."

Green grew up at a time when theatrical and musical expression was characterized by the African-Americans' struggle to be free, respected, and acknowledged as human, he said.

The same cry from blacks, Green said, still can be heard. "Through critical thinking and study, I wish to create mental pictures of joy, pain and solutions in my writing," he said.

Grant Kauffman, known as "Klass K," is host of the rap show, "The Movement." Green works with Kauffman to put the show

together.

Funky beats with hip-hop sounds and flowing, urbane lyrics of various rap artists, can be heard on "The Movement" Friday nights at 10 on UNL's radio station, KRNU.

The

Movement was created in December 1991, and its format consists of commentaries, on-the-air interviews and black history lessons revisited — plus the voices of Green and Kauffman as heard from their demos.

This diversity, Kauffman said, makes The Movement different from other rap shows. Kauffman and Green attempt to accommodate everyone with their old-school music coupled with new-school funk.

"Old-school music was all about fat beats," Kauffman said. "If the beat was on, it was hittin'." It really didn't matter what you said, as long as the beat was dope."

New-school music, Kauffman said, is more about the lyrics and their meaning than the beat. The new-school rhymes are more conscious of society's problems, he said.

The changing times have a lot to do with the music styles, Green said. In the past, conscious rap was trendy, Green said. "Now it is becoming a necessary element and can't be ignored."

Both black and white people must realize the need for conscious rap, Kauffman said.

Kauffman said many people probably wouldn't believe he grew up listening to great rap artists such

as the Sugarhill Gang, Grand Master Flash and Kurtis Blow, not only because he grew up in Lincoln, but also because he's white.

"I'm not supposed to know anything —" he said as Green added, "Because of his skin color."

But Kauffman, who said he grew up listening to hip-hop music, doesn't exploit the music — he raps about what he knows and what he learns.

"I have been driven (to speak out against) the racist white America I can honestly say I have witnessed up close. ... I have heard and seen the most racist of acts. ... And it doesn't take much of an effort to unleash the caged fury that lies within me," Kauffman said.

Kauffman, a senior broadcasting major, said that when he was in a fraternity at UNL, he heard derogatory comments about blacks all the time. Once he missed a visit from a black friend who had come to the fraternity.

"At the dinner table a (fraternity brother) said, 'Grant Kauffman, some stupid nigger named ... came to see you today.'"

Kauffman keeps a diary of all the racist incidents he encounters. He uses that information in his songs to open people's eyes to the reality of racism.

"It's molded me to what I am," he said. Although he can't speak for black people,



MICHELLE PAULMAN/ON

“OK, we had to learn his story and we learned it  
So, now we understand the need for brothers to work and earn it  
And teach each other self. ... respect  
We have to work, earn, and keep the things we should get. ...  
Be firm where we stand so their future is a possibility  
They are the leaders of days to come  
And the return of African history will make the  
world one  
And making history in ways we need  
Kill the noise  
I hurt when my people bleed  
In summation of the above facts  
To be strong, gifted, and black  
I like that. ...

— M.C. O.G.

Kauffman said, he can speak for the white people who have revealed to him their prejudices.

"I have to expose the racism," he said. Kauffman said his music would achieve that. "White people will hate me when I come out with my shit," he said. "African people who are not fully aware of the depths of racism will hate me as well. But the more people hate me, the more they will learn — not only about this country, but about themselves."

Kauffman said the lyrics of rappers such as Public Enemy, Sister Souljah and KRS-One were not tales from their imagination.

"History has taught me that their lyrics are justified," he said.

Kauffman said rap, which is considered virtually the only voice of black people, was his way of expressing the injustices blacks endured and would continue to experience.

"My messages are plain and simple: Stop the bullshit, from economic oppression to the mental slavery that exists throughout the country," he said. "I have dedicated my life to opposing oppression, racism, black-on-black crime and all other injustices that have manifested as a result of the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Jerel "Flow EZ" Ford just can't understand that amount of dedication from a white rapper, he said.

Ford is a member of an Omaha rap group, Supreme Soloists. Other members are Brad "M.D." Dacus of Omaha and Steve "EKO" Gordon, a UNL freshman architecture major.

Ford said he didn't agree with white rappers who tried to help black people in their struggle for equality.

"I just feel like they should leave it up to us," the freshman fine arts major said. "Historically, the white majority has stolen ideas and inventions from the oppressed minority and claimed them as their own," Ford said.

The same thing is happening with rap, Ford said. "It seems like they're trying to come in and (take what we started)," he said.

But Ford said he thought it was positive when white rappers unveiled the truth that they discovered about racism in U.S. history.

While the United States is tied together by its history of racism, Ford said, each region's version of rap is distinct.

East Coast rappers focus on their lyrics and the West Coast rappers on their beat, Ford said. Rappers in the Midwest combine the lyrics with the beats.

"We learn from both sides," Ford said. Omaha has many up and coming rap groups, but

Ford said the Midwest was ignored by major record labels.

"The whole record industry is thinking East and West Coast. ... They're forgetting to come to the middle," Ford said.

These companies, he said, might be missing out on some local talent.

Antone "All-Ayz" Douglas is a member of the Omaha rap group, Black Label. The group includes John "D.J. House," Gallion a freshman UNL business administration major, and Andre "Player P" Perkins, a UNL freshman majoring in industrial engineering. All are Omahans. Douglas also is a representative for Basement Society, a family of "underground, hip-hop technicians," he said.

Douglas started rapping the school announcements in the eighth grade with Ford, who was Douglas' classmate.

Thumpin' Hard Records is going to release a debut album produced by Omahan Todd "D.J. Suicide" Reese. The album will consist of a compilation of tracks from various rap artists in Omaha. The tracks will include a song from the Basement Society.

Douglas said the album had a variety of artists including females and political rappers. And although

all of the groups are black, Douglas said, Thumpin' Hard Productions is "not an all-black label," he said. "They're looking for diverse groups."

Douglas said music didn't discriminate. "If you have talent, then you have talent."

Douglas and Ford had a chance for their efforts to be recognized last month at UNL's talent show, sponsored by the Afrikan People's Union.

The two got together with college friends Andre Woolridge, a freshman majoring in journalism and UNL basketball player, and Gordon. Together, they formed HP 10, named after the residence hall they lived in — Harper, on the tenth floor.

"The talent show was just to let (the audience) know that we were here," Ford said.

The audience yelled, shouted, danced and laughed to HP 10's beats and lyrics. HP 10, which was formed only for the talent show, Douglas said, tied for second place.

Aside from talent shows or benefits, Ford said he probably wouldn't want to perform at just any bar or nightclub.

"I need a place where you feel comfortable — a place where (rap's) accepted," Ford said.

Larry Boehmer, owner of the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St., said the audience enjoyed a rap performance there three years ago. But the local bar is known for its rhythm and blues, he said.

LEFT: The Movement members, from left: Mike Lee, Grant Kauffman, Otto Green and Mike Evans. Group member Ken Watson is not pictured.

BELOW: Otto Green, co-host of The Movement radio program, sorts through albums at the KRNU studio. The Movement tries to accommodate all rap listeners by mixing both old- and new-school artists.

LOWER LEFT: Brad Darcus of Supreme Soloists, an Omaha rap band.



MICHELLE PAULMAN/ON

Boehmer said it would be very unlikely that a rap band would perform at the Zoo Bar in the future, because, "I'm not terribly interested (in rap music)."

He said he didn't feel like he had any expertise in rap bands and "wouldn't know a good one from a bad one."

Reg McMeen, owner of Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St., said a rap band had performed at the bar in the past, but the bar's customers weren't necessarily coming to hear rap.

"Rap gets played a lot on the jukebox. ...," McMeen said. But, he said, the rap act wasn't well-

supported. Duffy's usually offers mostly alternative bands, attracting diverse crowds.

Dave Rabe, who books bands for Duffy's, said the local bar's management was open to a variety of acts. Any artists and musicians can contact the bar if they are looking for a place to perform, he said.

"We listen to a tape and use it as a reference. ... We see if it sounds good," Rabe said. "If they're good enough, they can play," he said.

Rabe said there were few artists who were rejected

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