

SPINNIN' IT LIGHT

DJ puts positive spin on rap



STORY BY JASON HARDY

ART BY MATT HANEY

In some ways, Andy Avila, aka DJ Aztec, doesn't recognize himself anymore.

As host of "DJ Aztec's Clubhouse," a hip-hop music show on KZUM-FM (89.3), Lincoln's community radio station, Avila has played countless hours of hip hop, rap, 1980s

freestyle, old school and house music. Lately, however, Avila has concentrated on just being responsible.

"A few months ago, I would have laughed at me for feeling the way I do about music now," Avila said.

From 9 p.m. to midnight every Saturday, Avila supplies Lincoln with beats and rhymes, just as he has for the past year and a half. The difference is now the rhymes carry more significance.

Hard to believe that a few months ago he was ready to throw in the towel.

"When I became a Christian, I struggled really hard with what to do with the program," Avila said. "I'm a DJ at heart, and I really love doing it, but when I became a Christian, I looked at the

music I was playing, and I knew I couldn't play it anymore."

He was all set to resign when he went into a local Bible book store and noticed the Christian music section. In it was an album by a group called Preachers in the Hood, a group on the Christian rap label Grape Tree.

"I took it home and listened to the first three songs, and I knew what to do with my show," he said. "Something positive."

Now he's offering something positive and different. In a genre marred by gang, drug, sex and violence-related lyrical topics, Avila takes time to find music that is uplifting. He plays songs generally ignored by most radio and TV stations.

"The major artists do have positive cuts on their albums, but you won't hear them on MTV or BET," Avila said. "Snoop Dogg has 21 cuts on his new record, but I'll only play two of them. If I play

Master P, you're going to hear the most positive Master P song I can find."

Aside from playing hip hop's often neglected positive side, Avila also plays Latin rap and Latin house, something near impossible to hear on any Nebraska radio station aside from KZUM. He also plays old school tracks from groups such as Run DMC, UTFO and Zapp that have long been forgotten by most radio station programmers.

Like anything not embraced by mainstream society, Avila knows his show will have its detractors. Some people out there don't want to listen to Christian rap and might not tune into his show because of it.

Because of this, Avila offers a wide variety of music. Music that doesn't always fit into his ideology.

"There are times I still struggle with it,

"I'm not some guy trying to preach at you or lecture you."

ANDY AVILA
KZUM disc jockey

because some of the stuff I play I don't agree with, but I feel I need to play it to get people to hear what I want them to hear," he said. "I'm trying to reach kids who are into the hype."

Another method Avila uses to reach people is including them in his live broadcasts, in which he DJs like he once did in dance clubs.

"When I do my show, I don't go in there with a format. I go in there and go through the night just like I used to at the dance clubs," Avila said. "In the club, you go by the crowd's reaction to the music you're playing. Here, I go by the calls."

By interacting with his listeners, Avila hopes to get his message across on a more personal level.

"I think listeners can relate to it more if they feel like they can relate to the person behind the microphone," Avila said. "I let people know that I made mistakes too. I'm not some guy trying to preach at you or lecture you."

So far, the interaction has worked as Avila has received countless letters and phone calls thanking him for his show.

"We get a lot of calls down there. The phones start ringing when we get there and keep ringing until after we leave," he said. "It gives me a boost and makes me keep doing what I'm doing."

Dancer brings visual, versatile performance to Loft

JOSH KRAUTER
Senior staff writer

Not many dancers are also adept at barrel racing and cattle auctioneering, but Ann Carlson is not like most dancers.

Carlson, a choreographer who incorporates dance, theater, visual art and audience interaction into her work, will perform at the 7th Street Loft on Thursday and Friday.

The piece Carlson will perform, "Grass/Bird/Rodeo," is based on a triptych, in which three panels are carved or painted side by side.

"I've always been interested in the triptych structure in painting and the structural device of a three-part event," Carlson said. "I love threes. I have a real inclination and interest in threes."

In the "Grass" part of the perfor-

mance, Carlson wears an Astroturf suit and shows humanity's complicated relationship with nature. "Bird" features Carlson in a Las Vegas showgirl outfit.

"It's a comment on women's reaction to aging," said Amy Lamphere, director of the Wagon Train Project and organizer of the event.

The third and final piece in the triptych, "Rodeo," comes from Carlson's training as a barrel racer.

Carlson has learned a variety of skills, which she incorporates into her art. Once, she attended a cattle auctioneering school for a piece in which she auctioned off ballet dancers.

"Like Meryl Streep learns accents, (Carlson) learns skills," Lamphere said.

Carlson said she sometimes felt as if she were in over her head.

"I definitely did feel that way with barrel racing," she said. "I took a big fall. I had really great teachers, even

though they were like, 'What are you doing?'"

Carlson said the process of learning the skill was as important to her art as the mastering of it. She said much of her art used learning as a metaphor.

"I love learning stuff, so I don't mind looking stupid," she said. "I love going out of the business I'm in into the other world. I both love that and am perplexed by it."

The audience may learn something, too. A question-and-answer session will follow each part of the triptych.

Carlson said her mixture of artistic forms was a conscious choice inspired by her dance background.

"She let go of traditional dancer baggage and broadened the definition of choreography," Lamphere said.

Carlson said her interest in dance performance began in graduate school, where she learned to use the body as a

vehicle through traditional dance. She was also influenced by visual artists who used the body as a canvas, and wanted to expand on both forms of expression.

"I'm beginning with the body, but I'm working it in all different ways," she said.

Carlson has expanded her mix of dancing and visual art by collaborating with dancers and choreographers, singers, children, musicians and even her quarter horse mare, Risky. For the Lincoln performance, she will be joined by Lincoln's Summit String Quartet.

That's not her only connection to Nebraska. Although she has never performed here, Carlson's family has strong roots in the Cornhusker State. Her parents were born in Central City, and her father attended the University of Nebraska.

Carlson remembers Thanksgiving

Theatre Preview
The Facts

What: "Ann Carlson: Grass/ Bird/ Rodeo"

Where: 7th Street Loft, 504 S. 7th st.

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday

Cost: Free

The Skinny: Artist combines dance, theater, visual art and audience interaction.

dinners as being either joyous or somber, depending on the outcome of the Husker-Sooner football game, Lamphere said.

Carlson hasn't been to Nebraska in years, but she is expecting a few things to remain the same.

"I'm expecting a certain kind of generosity and politeness that I see in the Midwest," she said.