

Hip hop

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visual platform to promote artists and assist them with branding, and it's been really well received by hip hop artists."

Unlike other outlets that highlight the genre, The Real Planet Hip Hop, which Leonard launched a year ago, filters all of its content, rejecting anything that he feels is negative or harmful.

"We care about what the public sees," Leonard declared. "We have ethics and we're going to continue to stay ethical because we have a message and that message is not to objectify women and promote violence on our site. We don't want to demean our people or any other race either. That's what is so important - that we filter all videos that are sent to us."

By highlighting "authentic" hip hop, which he defines as hip hop that doesn't stoop to negative imagery, Leonard hopes to change the way the world views hip hop music and the black community.

"I felt like there was not enough awareness to promote authentic hip hop and I wanted to be the one to promote the movement, especially since I'm in the field as an advocate for women," said the Detroit native. "I felt like somebody really needed to take a stand."

Leonard, a former deejay and lifelong fan of hip hop music, will be the first to admit that the genre has some major issues when it comes to its portrayal of black women and black culture.

"I don't think it's a good thing," he said of the direction that hip hop is moving in. "I think we've lost the essence of real hip hop. It used to be about having fun and partying and now I think it's



Submitted Photo

Winston-Salem's own Mayne 1.

about objectifying women. Now, it's about jewelry and cars."

As a case manager for Offender Services and a Strong Fathers facilitator for Family Services Inc., Leonard says he has witnessed the harmful effects that negative attitudes about women can have on families and societies.

"I think in general, people still relate to the hip hop culture and I think those guys who haven't been exposed to positivity in their homes, they use hip hop to sort of fill that void of the role models that they lost," he stated. "I think they look up to Rick Ross, to Lil Weezy."

The site, which has over 1100 likes on Facebook, features articles on secular and Christian hip hop artists, from Raekwon to Sho Baraka. Leonard is also working on a hip hop inspired clothing line that is slated to debut in stores next year. Like the magazine and Web site, the messages displayed on his apparel will be exclu-

sively upbeat.

"We're staying true," declared the father of one. "Everything that we do, that we produce, will be positivity."

Rapper Corwin "Mayne 1" Pyles said being featured on The Real Planet Hip Hop has been beneficial to his career as a musician.

"Right now, my main focus is just getting my music heard," said the Twin City resident. "It's a major challenge for any hip hop artist in North Carolina."

While not all his lyrics are strictly optimistic, Pyles said he hopes his listeners will recognize the positive message that can be found in his music. The 28-year-old said he believes Hip Hop Planet is filling an important niche in the hip hop community.

"I like it. I think it's needed," remarked Pyles, who released his latest mixtape, "#Solid," in January. "I think it brings more balance. It shows artists that you don't have

to be a certain way, you can be loyal to the essence of hip hop and still get notoriety."

Greensboro native Ethemadassassin said Hip Hop Planet was a good outlet for his music, which chronicles his journey from the streets to college at North Carolina A&T State University.

"It's like street music with a message," said the longtime lyricist, who released his third solo album, "Soul on Fire" in September. "...My whole message is there's more to (life) than just the street."

Though he has since moved to the West Coast to pursue his music career in earnest, the Los Angeles resident maintains ties with Leonard and The Real Planet Hip Hop.

"I'm all for anything that people would consider unconventional, that people are trying to make a go of to make it successful," he remarked. "I think it's good because I think a lot of that kind of hip hop is definitely being dwarfed by music that does otherwise. If you go to any Top 40 acts and listen to the music, there's really not a lot of inspiration in it. None of it is trying to really uplift any thinking ... it's just all of these superficial things."

Like many of the artists it represents, The Real Planet Hip Hop is on its way up, Leonard said.

"I feel good about the progress that I've made so far," Leonard said. "There's still a lot of work to do; there's still a lot of exposure that Planet Hip Hop needs to really promote authentic hip hop, but I'm definitely up for the challenge."

For more information about The Real Planet Hip Hop, visit <http://www.therealplanethiphop.com>.

Local arts magnets earn Kennedy Awards

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Diggs-Latham Elementary School and Reynolds High School are two of the five schools in North Carolina that have received the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts School of Excellence in Arts Education Award.

Both Diggs-Latham and Reynolds offer arts magnet programs. The award recognizes schools that have done a superior job of incorporating arts into a quality education for all students. Arts North Carolina, which is a member of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network, selected the schools for North Carolina.

"Diggs-Latham's faculty, staff and students are extremely honored by this prestigious award," said Principal Donna Cannon. "Our school is dedicated to the integration of arts throughout our curriculum. With limited resources, we have been able to reach out to the community and use all internal resources to help our students achieve."

The state-level awards honor and highlight schools and the role they play in providing a creative learning environment for outstanding student achievement. Competitive applications included programs that encompass arts education, arts integration and arts exposure.

Karen Morris, director of arts at Reynolds, worked with the magnet program at Reynolds since it began in 2007 and became the program's director last year. At Reynolds, she said, they think that incorporating arts into academics can increase achievement while making learning fun and relevant.

At Diggs-Latham, the magnet program focuses on global studies and arts. Diggs-Latham has teachers who specialize in dance, visual art, choral music, band and orchestra. One of its goals is to integrate the arts into the entire curriculum, and the arts teachers collaborate with the other teachers.

Memorial

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constructing the site and the City of Jacksonville will be responsible for maintaining it.

The project cost to NCDOT is \$700,000 and it is being funded through money allocated for landscaping on the Jacksonville Bypass project. In addition to the 273 trees, the grove will also have double knockout roses and daylilies around the

perimeter. Work began on the site last week and the new trees, which were selected in great part because they bloom in October, are expected to be blooming at the time of next year's ceremony.

Secretary Tata, a retired U.S. Army Brigadier General, spoke at the recent 30th annual Beirut Memorial Observance Ceremony held at the Beirut Memorial Site in the Camp Lejeune Memorial Gardens.

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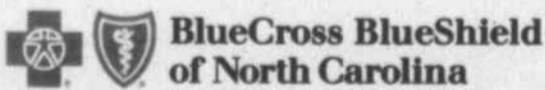
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