

# Hip Hop Nation Makes a Bid for a Renaissance

The student group's first performance in two years showcased UNC hip-hop and spoken-word talent.

By SHINDY CHEN  
Staff Writer

For two years, the existence of UNC's Hip Hop Nation was in limbo. Many former members graduated, and if they didn't graduate, they went AWOL, leaving the group temporarily inactive.

Hip Hop Nation never went defunct, its most recent leaders just failed to make Carolina students aware of UNC-bred hip hop, usually showcased at its Union Cabaret events.

Luckily, former Hip Hop Nation President Briana Parkins smartly passed the torch to Charles Vakalla, a sophomore from Charlotte.

An excited newcomer, Vakalla is determined to bring Hip Hop Nation out of its recent hibernation.

"With the new Hip Hop Nation, it's going to be about the expansion of hip hop as a culture," Vakalla said.

"It's going to stress hip-hop music as an art form, like any other major form of music, with its own unique culture," he said.

Vakalla also expressed the need to address the scope of hip-hop issues among future Hip Hop Nation members, from its fashion to its socioeconomic origins.

"I want to stress reconstruction," Vakalla said.

The energetic president also said he is planning on staging late-night parties and fashion shows and is working with the Carolina Union Activities Board to bring rap artists like Mos Def and Common to perform at UNC.

Quick to show that he's serious about it, Vakalla staged the first Hip Hop Nation show in two years at the Union Cabaret Sept. 14.

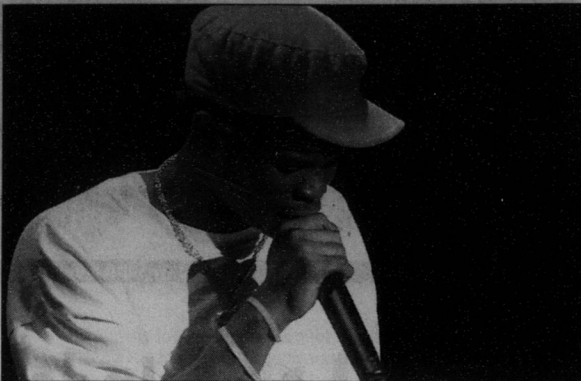
Aptly titled "Reconstruction," the capacity crowd was treated to a lively mix of hip-hop elements, combining banger performances by Reignmen and Vakalla's group Brazen, Hip Hop Nation co-founder Kevin Thomas, a.k.a. Kevikaze, and a slew of spoken-word and open-mic performers.

"It took about two weeks to organize," Vakalla, a.k.a. Cocoa Sarise, said of the show.

Reignmen set the mood of the show with its raw, underground sound. Member Jason Weathers, a.k.a. Stélar, kept the crowd pumped with his strong presence as he spit on the mic, while partner Brandon Jones, a.k.a. Illizit, accompanied with Jay-Z influenced rhymes.

"The campus vibe is basically that they don't support you 'til you're established," Weathers, a sophomore from Washington, D.C., said, calling for strong student body support for all of Hip Hop Nation's currently unsigned performers.

Reignmen, with its Director of Marketing and Promotions Calvin Matthews, a sophomore from South Orange, N.J., said they hope to establish themselves with their own start-up label, Chosen Records, with Weathers'



DTH/SEFTON IPOCK

"Cocoa," of the group Brazen, performs an original verse at Hip Hop Nation's show in the Student Union Cabaret last Thursday night.

upcoming album *Pagemaster* as its next project.

This business sense is also shared by Vakalla and fellow Brazen members Arkitek and Emperor, who established Brazen Records.

"We're ready to get it," Vakalla said, with hopes of performing in Charlotte, Raleigh and beyond.

"Hip Hop Nation started in '96 as a forum for hip-hop performers," said Thomas, who founded Hip Hop Nation with UNC alumnus Niko Cunningham.

He recalled the spotlight Hip Hop Nation efforts gave to such groups as Crimson Guard, Samadhi Manifest, Sankofa and Tyfu.

This last band hopes its second album, *Out of Control*, scheduled to be

released Sept. 26, will achieve widespread recognition on a national level.

"I'm glad the new guys are trying to restore Hip Hop Nation," Kevikaze said. "Its downfall wasn't really attributed to administration."

"All the old, main people just graduated."

The reconstructed Hip Hop Nation seeks anyone who loves hip hop, and membership has never strictly consisted of performers.

"If you're interested in hip hop, then join," Vakalla said. With his fresh outlook, Hip Hop Nation's longevity looks secure.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

## this week

■ **Queens of the Stone Age, Vast, Like Hell, Today** at Cat's Cradle. The Queens make sludgy stoner rock, but it's intelligent 'cause they use a xylophone. Call 967-9053 for information.

■ **B.B. King Blues Festival**, Friday at Alltel Pavilion. Buddy Guy, Susan Tedeschi, Corey Harris and the man himself play the blues to get some of your green. Call 831-6666 for information.

■ **Latin Dancing**, Friday at El Chilango restaurant and cultural center. DJ Juencio spins salsa, cumbia and merengue. Free instruction before dancing. Baile, baile! Call 960-0171 for information.

■ **Allman Bros. Band**, Saturday at Alltel Pavilion. Southern rock dinosaurs continue to blur the line between good ol' boys and hippies. Call 831-6666 for information.

■ **Sunday Showcase**, Sunday at Cat's Cradle. Eight local bands, \$2. What a deal! Call 967-9053 for information.

■ **Joan of Arc and Malabaster**, Sunday at Go! Studios. Chicago hipster Tim Kinsella and Joan of Arc make weird, pretty noises. Malabaster, from Winston-Salem, sounds like Sonic Youth and Trans Am got in a train wreck and lost their keyboards. Call 969-1400 for information.

■ **Dr. Madd Vibe**, Tuesday at Cat's Cradle. The wacky alter ego of Fishbone frontman Angelo Moore presents a spoken-word performance where anything goes. Call 967-9053 for information.

■ **"Girl Fight"** Wednesday at Carolina Union Auditorium. Sneak preview of new drama about girls boxing. Girls boxing ... Yes! Call 962-1157 for information.

■ **Third Annual Rumi Festival**, starts Wednesday at the Carrboro ArtsCenter. Poetry, lectures and music celebrate Rumi, an ancient Sufi poet. Call 929-2787 for information.

■ **"School For Wives,"** through Oct. 1 at the Paul Green Theatre, UNC campus. PlayMakers Repertory Company presents Moliere's slapstick verse comedy in the first show of its 25th anniversary season. Call 962-PLAY for information.

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