

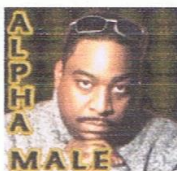
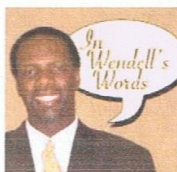
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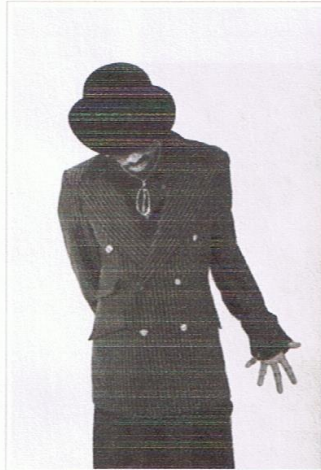


HOME OUR ENTERTAINMENT KHARI B., THE DISCOPOET, CELEBRATES POETRY THROUGH MUSIC

Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Khari B., the Disco poet, celebrates poetry through music

by Shamontiel L. Vaughn



Actors Larenz Tate and Nia Long may have made it look cooler to be a Chicago poet, but Khari B., also known as the Disco poet, was frequenting open mic nights and spoken word cafes a few years before the movie "Love Jones" released.

With a background in architectural engineering and one year left to graduate from college at Tennessee State University, the Disco poet realized that major was not his cup of tea.

"I left school, and less than a year later, I was doing poetry," Khari B. told the Defender.

Dressed in a black tank top; baggy wide-legged blue jeans; prescription glasses and a medium-length Mohawk, with red rubber bands on each side of his head, Khari B. munched on a Subway sandwich in the dressing room at the DuSable Museum prior to getting ready for his first CD release performance with

his group, *The Rockstar Poetry Project*, on Friday, July 24. The name of their CD is "*I'mma Bad Mutha: The Rockstar Poetry Project*."

Before *The Rockstar Poetry Project* was created by networking at one of Chicago's cultural centers, the HotHouse, Khari B. imagined being a professional poet. At the age of nine, he performed Nikki Giovanni's "Great Pax Whitey" at church. Growing up, he also listened and read work from The Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron courtesy of his mother. His father, a jazz musician who was performing that night too, exposed him to music at an early age.

And in adulthood, his artsy dreams continued. In 1992, he performed sporadically in the now-closed Jazz & Java café on the South Side of Chicago during college vacation breaks and at Gibson's Guitar Gallery & Café, nicknamed "The Spot," in Nashville, TN for a couple of college years.

"Then 'Love Jones' came out, and it was open mic nights all over the country," Khari B. joked about the 1997 film. "I was staking a reputation for what I do, but ('Love Jones') made it easy because poetry became more popular."



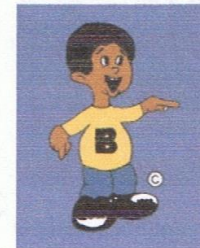
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The Disco poet is one third rocker, one third disco and the final third an academic free spirit who talks about everything from Amadou Diallo, the government, poverty, the complexities and popularity of "the hood," how much he hates and loves his ex-girlfriend and why he's scared to cut weeds because they may be the cure to some disease. This is the freedom he wasn't getting from his nine-to-five job working overtime.

In 1998, Khari B. was working at a nonprofit child advocacy agency after leaving TSU back and coming back to Chicago. He woke up one day, called in and quit his job after only working there a year or so.

"I woke up one morning mad as hell that I had to get up and get on a bus and a train and a bus...to go to a job that I hated. I realized that nobody should wake up mad ever. When you wake up, it's a gift, and you should celebrate the present," he said. "I'd been doing open mic for awhile, and I like it and it makes me happy. Let's make this into a career, and that's how it started."

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In the same week he resigned from the nonprofit company, he got two calls to host poetry sets, one of which was at the now-closed Ebony Room, located on the South Side of Chicago, but he wasn't making much to pay the bills.

"I was making a whopping \$25 every two weeks, but I was thrilled," he said. "It was the greatest \$25 I'd ever made."

He'd saved money, but over time, his savings account was decreasing even with a \$25 raise to \$50 bi-weekly pay. But after reading, researching and taking "the philosophy for how people promote a party," he made spoken word a profession.

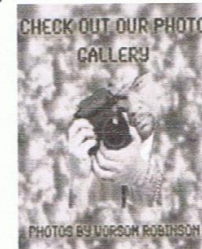
"You have to decide with any entrepreneurial endeavor that you're going to make this happen no matter what, and no matter how many pitfalls and obstacles you come to, you jump over and break through any way you know how, keeping your integrity in tact," he said.

He's worked with the AACM Jazz organization; was featured in the Illinois Arts Council's "Meet the Composer" program and Sons d'hiver Festival in Paris, France with Ernest Dawkins; was a part of three annual Crepuscules with Douglas Ewart; Prince's Xenophobia festival at Paisley Park and both Neo-Soul Explosions at Chicago's Navy Pier and DuSable Museum. He has also hosted open mic nights at the Spoken Word Café in Bronzeville and held writing workshops at the Boulevard Arts Center, Ravinia Festival Program and Purdue University.

In 2004, he released his debut CD, "WordSound: THIS AIN'T NO PUNK-ASSED POETRY!!!" Five years later at present day, he's in [The Rockstar Poetry Project](#)—a band of three vocalists, three horns, three guitarists, a drummer and himself.

Before showtime, the Defender asked what contributions would [The Rockstar Poetry Project](#) bring to the entertainment industry.

"We bring music back to the music scene," Khari B. said. "We're playing. We have live



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instrumentation and lyrical quality that is stimulating."

[Click here to check out the performance: "Review: The Rockstar Poetry Project blends poetry, live band"](#)

Photos courtesy of Khari B.

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