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## June is Black Music Month, Countdown of Shamontiel's Top 30 African-American Artists

June 27 Black Music Month Artist Mike-E of AfroFlow

By Shamontiel

President George W. Bush had a lot of screw-ups during his eight-year term, but he did do a couple things right. One of them was proclaiming June as Black Music Month on May 31, 2002. June is here, and to celebrate [Black Music Month](#), I'll be featuring one of my favorite artists each day, sharing my first or most personal memory of them, explain what their accomplishments are and why I felt they should make the Black Music Month Top 30 list. There will be some oldies, some newbies and some artists who are in between stages.

My June 27 selection is **Mike-E of AfroFlow**.

**Black Music Month Heat Factor "Why's this artist hot?":** There are many hip-hop artists who complain about what needs to happen to improve a community.

And right after they finish complaining, they jump right on stage calling each other all kinds of negative names, talking about thug life, big-upping drug dealers, filling the room with smoke trying to look as cool as possible while they're causing lung cancer, disrespecting women, paying homage to goldiggers and promiscuous females but then wonder why mentally they're losing. Mike-E is one of those artists who isn't doing any of the above, and he's still making quality music that you can dance to, rhyming about the beauty and issues in Africa, his second hometown Detroit, politics, current events, love, living, brotherhood, relationships, anti-smoking and the music industry. Regardless of what record companies and puppet rappers will tell you, it is possible to do positive and productive music and still get people on the dance floor. AfroFlow proved that on their CDs "*AfroFlow*" and "*AfroFlow II*." I have created my own dance routine to my favorite song on their latest album, "*My Element*," but I like all of their songs. Is Mike-E hot physically? Yes, he's very nice on the eyes and [Pelle Pelle](#) clearly knew that by letting him model for them. But it's his mentality that makes you look past all that Detroit cool, the mudcloth hanging out his jeans, the fedora tilted on his head, the bright, white smile and see this is one beautiful mind on what just so happens to be a handsome face. And a positive, influential mind always overrides physical appearance.

**First Memory, Most Personal Memory of the Artist:** When I got a press release from AfroFlow's publicity team (I can't remember whether it was the American Cancer Society or his father-manager, the late [Bob Ellison](#), who contacted me at the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper I was working for at the time). When I found out he was a Def Poet from the HBO series "*Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*," I knew I had to have seen him because I planned my schedule around watching that show and attended the Chicago Def Poets tour. I saw his face and immediately started laughing, remembering his poem "*Light Skin-Did*," his ode to light-skinned men while making fun of the [color complexity issues](#). I thought the poem was amusing and wondered how he got involved with ACS. As the Web Editor of the newspaper at that time, I was already looking for artists who were talented enough to bring in web visits for online exclusives so off I went to the DuSable Museum to meet Mike-E. In total, I've completed two interviews with him and seen him perform three times. And every single time I see him live, it feels like the first time. The way he commands a crowd is amazing. The coolest teenagers in the crowd suddenly [go bananas](#) when AfroFlow steps on the stage rapping, dancing, singing and playing their instruments. I've been to a lot of concerts, but AfroFlow is definitely in my top five\*.

**Accomplishments from the Artist:** You may have heard of him or maybe not, but from the way the audience chanted his name at the [Illinois Institute of Technology](#), he definitely has support in the Chicago area. Every single time I've seen him perform, I've walked past crowds of people asking where they can find his music, seen standing ovations and saw more smiling parents and grandparents encouraging their kids to go meet the group. I've never heard of a hip-hop artist who had a notable organization like [American Cancer Society](#) foot the bill for a fully wrapped tour bus, plan concerts, sponsor national positive hip-hop events and give away free CDs. His first tour was for five weeks at HBCUs; the second tour was three months at a combination of HBCUs, non-HBCUs, hospitals, middle schools, clubs and cafes; and his last two tours (including the one that just ended on [Juneteenth 2010](#)) were national tours. At every show, someone (and sometimes groups) come on stage and promise him that they'll give up smoking.

While some artists' accomplishments are solely from the charts or record sales, the artists who do things behind the scenes like charitable events or speaking to the youth or fighting for a cause are what truly matters. Many people can have hits on the Billboard charts, but not many hip-hop artists leave a legacy behind that helps save people's lives no matter where they grew up from the hood to Hollywood. But in the spirit of showcasing the music accomplishments the same way I did with the other artists, he has indeed had hit music and been in films. Besides doing commercials for ACS, he was in "*Butterfly Effect 3*" and had a small part in "*Standing in the Shadows of Motown*." He also had another poem on "*Def Poets*" called "*Mezeker Means to Remember*." (Note: Mezeker is his wife's name, who was also featured in the following video.) Mike-E has a popular song in Ethiopia called "*Ethiopia (Everything Will Be All Right)*," which includes Mezeker dancing and posing in various scenes with him while he raps. He was touched when he found out the effect the video had on the children there. I can't do the experience any justice so here are his own words.

### Takeaways

Mike-E was a poet on HBO's "*Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry*."

Mike-E was born in Ethiopia.

Mike-E is part of the group AfroFlow.

"The highlight of my career was being in Ethiopia," Mike-E said to me on his tour bus in 2009. "We shot a video and did our song '*Ethiopia (Everything Will Be All Right)*' with children we work with...and seeing scores of children coming out of the [Nile] river singing my song and screaming my name was the highlight of my career, and that let me know that I'm on the right path. The [music] industry could never give me that feeling."

**Shamontiel's AfroFlow Photo Galleries, Interviews, Reviews:**

*"AfroFlow 2010 tour comes to Chicago in May, Mike-E releases 'AfroFlow II' CD"*

*"AfroFlow releases second CD in spring 2010, music review"*

*"AfroFlow blends hip hop and spoken word, anti-smoking artist Mike-E on the mic"*

*"AfroFlow's Mike-E fights tobacco industry through music"*

*"AfroFlow releases second CD in spring 2010, music review"*

*"AfroFlow visits Chicago State University, Bantaba drum circle"*

Photo Gallery, 2009 tour: *"AfroFlow on tour, Mike-E on the mic"*

Photo Gallery, 2010 tour: *"AfroFlow performs in Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology"*

*\* My other top four concerts were seeing Big Daddy Kane and MC Lyte at Chicago's House of Blues, Angie Stone at Country Club Hills, Ne-Yo at the Taste of Chicago and Mos Def at Juneteenth's 'Takin' It to the Streets' concert.*

**Other Black Music Month Selections:**

June 1 Trey Songz

June 2 Marvin Gaye

June 3 Rakim Allah

June 4 Brandy Norwood

June 5 Tina Turner

June 6 MC Lyte

June 7 Lyfe Jennings

June 8 Bill Withers

June 9 Wyclef Jean

June 10 Erykah Badu

June 11 Chaka Khan

June 12 Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott

June 13 Ne-Yo

June 14 Michael Jackson

June 15 Mos Def

June 16 Aaliyah

June 17 Angie Stone

June 18 Salt n' Pepa

June 19 Nas

June 20 Musiq Soulchild

June 21 James Brown