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Aspiring artists bust gospel rhymes at summit

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Steven Boue's violent career in gangbanging for the Bloods might have destroyed him if it weren't for two unlikely seeds of salvation: the gospel of Jesus Christ and hip-hop music.

Inspired by teachings from the Bible and the positive influence hip-hop could endear if used for spreading the messages of Christ instead of promoting drugs and violence, Boue fled the criminal lifestyle, escaped from his deadbeat father and donned the stage handle "Se1v1en" to preach the love of God.

"My worldly father wasn't there for me but my spiritual father was," said Boue, 20, of Miramar. "When I see a kid without a father figure going into a world of violence I tell him about the word of Christ. You can change lives, careers. You shouldn't be scared to be the Jesus freak that you are."

Gospel hip-hop, or "holy hip-hop" among artists, last month packed hundreds of Miramar residents and fans of the subgenre into the 800-seat auditorium of Miramar Art and Cultural Center, 2400 Civic Center Place.

As spotlights bathed the lavish stage in soft white, nine holy hip-hop MCs – including Se1v1en – let freak flags fly at the two-day inaugural Gospel Hip-Hop Cultural Showcase and Summit. The aim that Friday night, other than dropping unbreakable flows on the mic as souljas of God, was to partake in a talent contest.

The stakes were career-changing: a \$500 cash prize, a suave, red-carpet limousine ride to a concert the following evening and a shot to rock steady onstage with national gospel hip-hop artists The Ambassador, Dooney Da Priest and Da' T.R.U.T.H.

The summit largely strove to promote inspirational messages in hip-hop, but event promoter Joy Veasy also wanted to supply an educational venue for local artists hungry to carve their place in the music biz.

That's why she devoted all Saturday morning and afternoon that weekend to workshops designed to expose young talent to music industry executives.

"This is a vision I've had for years," said Veasy, of Plantation. "We need to bring awareness to local artists because it's easy to be exploited in the business. The workshops are a great way to learn about self-promotion because gospel hip-hop is not just about the music. It's a whole culture of online videos, clothing and comic books."

The nine-man crew of lyric-flipping talent show contestants wowed judges with ballads of redemption by Christ from a life of crime. As MCs like Lynx Christ spit crunked-out lyrics next to graffiti-esque billboards tagged "King of Kings" and "Highway 2 Heaven," hundreds of parents, children from Boys and Girls Club and even the auditorium ushers head-bobbed and foot-stomped to the hip-hop beats.

"If any of you been delivered by the Lord and you ain't never going back, say what's up!" shouted Lynx Christ to the audience, who tossed back, "What's up!"

Holy hip-hop tryout Sean Olivera, 23, delivered a lyrical smackdown against rappers who feel ashamed to represent God in their music with his hook-heavy "Move Your Body."

The judges loved Olivera's bravado: The Hialeah native won first place and pocketed the prize money.

"I have a studio I'm with and so this money will be all about improving and promoting myself through God and my ministry," Olivera said. "The money is no thing. All material things fade, and the only thing that doesn't is your love in Jesus."

Following that night's talent contest, dozens of Miramar families and artists dropped by the Cultural Center for a batch of educational breakout sessions.

Topics varied from the art of songwriting from gospel singer Vanessa Bell Armstrong and how artists appeal to record companies to record pools, where aspiring rappers distribute their promotional record cuts to DJs to play in nightclubs.

Jasmine Floyd, 19, of Margate loved grooving to the righteous beats of the contestants and the following night's lineup of rappers, which included.

"Positive songs are so uplifting and everyone was honestly so good," Floyd said. "Everyone is here to glorify the Lord."

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