



THE ART OF RHYME

A film by DJ Organic

Running Time: 80 min, Super 16mm, Color, Dolby Digital, 2005

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WINNER

"Documentary Jury Prize"
Florida Film Festival



WINNER

"Best Documentary"
"Audience Award"
Pan-African Film Festival



WINNER

"Best Documentary"
Urban-World Film Festival



WINNER

"Best Soundtrack"
Los Angeles Independent Film Festival





WINNER
"Best Documentary"
"Maverick Award"
Woodstock Film Festival



WINNER
"Best of The Festival"
Adelaide International Film Festival



OFFICIAL SELECTION

Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival

Slamdance Film Festival

Mostra De Valencia Film Festival

Maryland Film Festival

Brisbane International Film Festival

Leeds International Film Festival (U.K.)

SXSW Film Festival

***"The energy is contagious, the poetry inspired,
The most lively and informative movie
About hip-hop since WILDSTYLE"***

**— Amy Taubin
The Village Voice**

***"...Inspiring, mesmerizing, and creative
Revolutionary street poetry....
Eloquent social knowledge,
The best of rap! "***

— Variety

***" ...Takes on the culture and history of
hip-hop, an awesome high-octane art form
to behold, Will literally leave you
speechless."***

— Indiewire

***"Vital, Pure, and un-compromised,
Elevated, Zen Like, with a spirit of
Scholarly form. The Best Rhymers
from both coasts"***

-- The Chicago Reader

FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme

CREDITS (NOT CONTRACTURAL):

Featuring

Supernatural
Mos Def
Black Thought
Freestyle Fellowship
The Last Poets
Slugg
Aesop Rock
Questlove
Craig G
Black Eyed Peas
Breakestra
The Living Legends
Cut Chemist & DJ Numark
Boots Riley of The Coup
Lord Finesse
Divine Styler
Crazy Legs
Bahamadia
Bobbito Garcia
Chali Tuna of Jurassic-5
Planet Asia
Sway
Wordsworth

Directed by DJ Organic / Kevin Fitzgerald

Produced by Henry Alex Rubin

Producing Editor Paul Devlin

Executive Producer Tiare White

Co-Executive Producers Ann Berger
Michelle White

Producer Youree Henley

Producers Kevin Fitzgerald
Charles Raggio

Co-Producers David Chalker

	Casey Bridges Michel Costes Brian Bellamy Tisha Harris Peter Giblin
Associate Producer	The Lyricist Lounge Brandon James Wesley Jones
Cinematographers	Todd Hickey Daniel Kozman Brian Bellamy
Editors	Isaac Solotaroff Rachel Ramist
Sound Mixing	Ty Bertrand
Additional Camera	Brian Belatic Rachel Ramist Paul Devlin David Chalker Lance Mitchell Michael Brewer
Music Supervision Coordination	Charles Raggio for Kick Snare Hat Records Brooke Wentz for The Rights Workshop
Production Manager	Alex Jablonsky
Music Score	Darkleaf DJ Organic Omid
Editorial	Superior Assembly Bay Area Video Coalition
Production Support	The Center for Hip-Hop Education Hip-Hop Congress Film Arts Foundation Filmmaker's Alliance Bay Area Video Coalition L.A. Film Collaborative

FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme

Explosively documenting the story of a group of underground hip-hop MCs & DJs from the early 1980's to the present day, *FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme* is a film that explores the world of improvisational rap—the rarely recorded art form of rhyming spontaneously; off the top of the head. Made over the course of more than seven years, by a co-operative of filmmakers, b-boys, dj's, and MC's know as The Center for Hip-Hop Education, *FREESTYLE* takes the viewer on a journey through the previously unexamined dimensions of hip-hop as a spiritual and community based art form.

FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme, experimental in its nature as an improvisational film: no showing of the program is ever the same experience, combining the best of independent art house cinema within the hip-hop mix tape format. The project features appearances by: Supernatural, Mos Def, Black Thought & Questlove of the Roots, Freestyle Fellowship, Lord Finesse, Cut Chemist, Craig G, Juice, Boots of the Coup, Medusa, Planet Asia, Sway, Crazy Legs, Jurassic-5, Wordsworth, Bobitto Garcia, and The Last Poets. *FREESTYLE* offers us a context in which to view living art as a social critique in story and rhyme that is designed to bring about a cathartic transformation of frustration into beauty.

Following some of the best MC's ever to bless the mic, the film features legendary battles including those of the film's hero; Supernatural pitted against his arch nemesis Craig G providing the through line for the story. As these artists improvise poetry out of a mix of language, politics and culture that make up their lives, we discover revolutionary worlds where the English language is subverted and re-appropriated as a tool of economic and social empowerment.

FREESTYLE is a critically acclaimed film that is the first of its kind in many respects. It is the first film to explore the social and cultural background that led to the current development of the street poet, or MC. It provides an inside look into the framework of hip-hop culture, its rules, taboos and social impact. It gives a voice to popular Black/urban culture, which is known to be a profound influence on youth culture globally. *FREESTYLE* is also the first independent film to counter false notions of hip-hop's erroneous negative and overly aggressive image, therefore providing a unique look at a growing influence in modern American and world culture. Finally, *FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme* is the first-time documentary directed by Kevin Fitzgerald, co-founder of The Center for Hip-Hop Education and a young and talented African-American filmmaker on the rise.

Holding great educational value for hip-hop enthusiasts as well as for those misinformed about hip-hop culture due to its intimate and honest portrayal of hard working independent artists, the film focuses on a group of intelligent, ambitious, and talented young men in pursuit of a dream, deconstructing the 'thug life' image that is often associated with the music.

A spiritual tale, *FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme* offers a unique glimpse into a driving force in modern-day culture while maintaining the elements of quintessential coming-of-age cinema: an honest and thought provoking portrayal of the experiences surrounding the pursuit of the dreams of youth. The artists in *FREESTYLE* provide insight into one of the least seen faces of present day hip-hop: improvisation and creativity.

Freestyles exist only in the moment

Freestyling is the art of spontaneously rapping whatever comes to mind—whether political or personal—but always keeping what you say in *perfect rhyming verse*. Like the Griots or Jalties' of West Africa, the modern day MC (Master of Ceremonies or Mic Controller) is seen as sharing the same purpose: to communicate poetic story to a society hungry for truth, connecting more often than not through some divine or mystical power.

Though not known to the mainstream media, an MC freestyling over a DJ rocking doubles of a break is said by many to be the root of all hip-hop. Like spontaneous rough drafts, many known MCs freestyle before writing out their lyrics in the studio. Others refuse to record them, insisting that the poetry comes from their fleeting spontaneity. Like jazz solos, most freestyles exist only in the moment, creating a subculture where reputations are made through rhyme and you're often only as good as the last verse you spit.

The original African-American form of story telling

The film begins by launching headfirst into the origins of the black verbal art form known as Rap. From Southern gospel preachers to Jamaican Toasters, and neighborhood park jams where MCs rhyme over DJs; to battles at the now famous Lyricist Lounge open mike in New York: *FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme* builds an authentic quilt of the life, culture and history of hip-hop by capturing some of the most famous—as well as underground—rhyme sayers ever. By mixing known and unknown artists, the filmmakers shows what the media so often doesn't: that at its core hip hop is an expression of spirit, a fleeting escape into the divine found through live creativity in the present moment.

Poetry is a more academic and structured form of rhyme, while a less structured form but no less sophisticated type is Freestyle.

Most rap and hip-hop music played on radio or television is somewhat commercialized. Unlike this homogenized corporate rap gruel the priority of Freestyle is usually that of the highest artistic integrity and social consciousness.

Beneath the surface of commercialized rap and hip-hop lie the deeper roots of rhyme. In this underground realm are the true MC's who do what they do not for

financial gain, but for spiritual fulfillment. Instead, these underground spoken-word-poets do what they do for the freedom of expression. With this freedom comes a release from tensions and relief from everyday problems. And unity discovered is the result of this empowering creativity.

Being Free to express yourself

Freestyle is something we see both young and old people doing in the film and those sessions are some of the most extremely passionate and engaging to experience. Most of the ciphers consist of artists coming together, almost anywhere, getting in the zone with other MCs to spit rhymes. At times the rhymes are just plain stupid and make everyone laugh, but other times they are really deep and thought provoking. Often these rhymes are one of a kind, never to be repeated again, only to be absorbed into our open hearts and minds.

Freestyle is exactly that, a free style of rhyming. There are no set boundaries and generally any new and innovative way to rhyme is looked upon as brilliant. Freestyle is all about a personal form of expression, and spontaneous storytelling one that reflects deeply upon the character of each artist.

In various cities, there are freestyle and open mic competitions. The participants often 'battle' for prizes and for the status of the best MC. Battling isn't physical; it is, for lack of better words, a conversation which goes back and forth between rappers to see who can concoct the best rhymes on the spot. Although, as we see with the films here Supernatural prizes are usually given to the winner, but MC's generally do rhymes for recognition that they're the best and for the fun of competition.

Destroying the played out gangster rap image

Rather than well-lit rap stars with platinum records behind them, *FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme* shows real people from diverse communities explaining the art form in their own words. The film's structure grows organically from their words and performances. These artists shape the form of the film with real ciphers and sessions, and destroy the played out gangster rap image by showing us a real humanity that has attracted both the world's respect and dollars.

In fact, early work-in-progress screenings of the project not only garnered awards but also attracted underground MCs, who would then cipher outside the venue, and ultimately wind up being included in later versions of the movie. The filmmaker/students collected such a diversity of original footage (Super16, Super8, Hi8, DV, Betacam) in addition to "sampling" stock footage spanning decades (from the 50's to now), that the film itself mirrors the freedom and aesthetic of a Freestyle. And in that sense it represents as a true hip-hop film.

A stunningly emotional outlet

Structured with insights from the *Last Poet's* esteemed Abioudun Oyweole and jazz historian Eluard Burt, the film connects the dots from the pain and love of yesterday's rap-poets to today's hip-hop movement. *FREESTYLE: The Art Of Rhyme* reveals freestyling as a stunningly emotional outlet, whether sharing energy in a "CYPHER"—a tight circle of rhymers throwing out ideas in stories, or trading dissés in a "BATTLE"—where any two MCs can pit their wit and timing against one another. Like the griots of Africa or the wail of Coltrane's saxophone, today's hip-hop MCs all have a similar purpose: to share their experience with others hungry for truth, community and healing.

Change happens in the moment not the past and not the future, but now!

This film stands as ever evolving testament to the power of the word to create change. In the Internet World ruled by the impersonal, *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* provides a breath a fresh air and an experimental vision by educating about the past, informing the future, and creating a better today.

"The Poet says: The Hills are shadows and they flow from form to form & nothing stands. Because the physical world is like music; when you play music it simply disappears, theirs nothing left. And for that reason it is one of the highest and most spiritual of all the arts because it is the most transient. The more a thing tends to be permanent the more it tends to be lifeless."

-- Alan Watts

ABOUT THE ARTISTS IN THE FILM

MC Supernatural

Widely considered to be the grand master of freestyle MC-ing, Supernatural began freestyling in 1981, battling local emcees in the school yards of his hometown Marion, Indiana. In '89 he moved to NYC and, affiliated himself with Brooklyn's Alien Nation and soon became a New York club regular, frequenting spots like the Unspoken Heard, Boom Poetics, and the Lyricist Lounge. Only true heads can still recall how Supernatural crashed NYC's hip-hop scene in the summer of 1993. He first got noticed in the world wide rap community for his freestyles on Stretch and Bobbito's groundbreaking hip-hop radio show in the early 90's on WKCR. He then went on to win the New Music Seminar Freestyle Title, co-host a nightly radio show and land a record deal with Elektra Records. "Buddah Blessed It," Supernatural's only release on Elektra, became an instant classic. What Elektra didn't realize back then was that a vibrant underground world was about to open up for real b-boys and Supernatural was in many ways the prototype. Supernatural's uncanny ability to spontaneously combust along with countless radio appearances (Bobbito & Stretch, Sway & Tech) and legendary freestyle battles with Craig G. and Juice have helped him etch out a very special place in hip-hop's history. Supernatural would go on to display his lyrical gift for hip-hoppers worldwide, garnering fans, friends and respect city by city, stage by stage, and mic by mic. He was barred from competing in the '99 Blaze freestyle battle in L.A. because the officials thought it would not be fair to the other contestants. He now he tours worldwide freestyling to sold-out houses proving he is no joke by letting the audience pick topics and then flawlessly flow about whatever they chose sing myriad voices and personalities. Supernatural is widely recognized as the most gifted freestyle MC on the planet. Since hosting the Word of Mouth Tour for Dilated Peoples, The Beat Junkies and Jurassic 5, Supernatural has buried himself in the studio, determined to further chronicle his lyrical gift and prowess with the release of his first full-length album *The Lost Freestyle Files* Baby Grande/Koch records exc. produced by Chuck Wilson and the single produced by DJ Rhettmatic of the World Famous Beat Junkies.

www.babygrande.com www.supernaturalmc.com

Freestyle Fellowship

The darlings of the West Coast underground and undisputedly acknowledged as the inventors the new wave in "Free Rap"; Freestyle Fellowship formed after meeting at the legendary Good Life open mic near Leimert Park, a cultural arts community in South Central Los Angeles. The poetic rhyme geniuses that make up Freestyle Fellowship, Microphone Mike aka Mikha 9, Aceyalone, P.E.A.C.E., and Self Jupiter are true masters of the art of improvisational rhyme. "They are probably one of the most underrated, underappreciated groups in the history of hip-hop. The only other figure in the culture whose whole style had been bitten as often as successfully is 2Pac. To say that Freestyle Fellowship significantly influenced west coast hip-hop is like saying that Jesus was a pivotal figure in Christianity. Before Freestyle Fellowship, the Old Testament of left coast hip-hop consisted of the soon-to-be-played-out gangster funk. With their seminal debut, *To Whom it May Concern*, Freestyle Fellowship ushered in a new era of minimalist, bass-heavy tracks and progressive, socially astute lyrics that incorporated both harmonies and spoken word interludes. Not only did they define the genre's musical aesthetic, they also developed the keep-it-underground ethic that has defined the movement. In the decade-plus that the fellowship has been blitzing stages and ciphers worldwide, they've developed a dedicated cult following-as well. Freestyle Fellowship self-produced their first record, "To Whom It May Concern," independently in 1989 (before it became the norm), to much acclaim and as a result the group was subsequently picked up by Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records. Poised to blow up and change the world of hip hop forever, tragedy struck when one member was arrested just before their first European tour causing the group to split in turmoil – but not before making one of the most beautiful albums ever in hip-hop: "Inner City Griots." And as of June 2004 had Sound scanned over 100,000 units. Since then each MC has gone on to produce solo albums, in AC's case with Capitol Records in an album entitled, "All Balls Don't Bounce." One who is able to balance both the artistic and business side of music Acey also co-founded along with A-Team partner Abstract Rude, Project Blowed, an open mike hip-hop workshop at Ben Caldwell's, KAOS Network in Leimert Park. www.projectblowed.com

Craig G

Seminal member of the classic Marly Marl headed Juice Crew all-star posse, hailing from the infamous Queens Bridge Housing development. Honing his mic skills in Queens, Craig was first approach by super producer Marley to do a rendition of "Shout" a hit song for the rock band Tears for Fears when he was only thirteen years of age. " I used to harass Marley every day. He'd come down the stairs and I'd be banging on the pole in the staircase rhyming." Evidently his determination paid off, after the success of "Shout" Craig was quickly granted Juice Crew membership, so by age seventeen, Craig was already holding his

own with the likes of Big Daddy Kane, Master Ace, Kool G Rap and the other members of the "Juice Crew". Craig-G has an impressive track record of hits, from "Dropping Science" to his electrifying verse as one fourth of The Symphony on the track of the same name, who could ever forget that one, "Next up, I believe that's me". Since then Craig has divulged most of his time on the underground circuit, confronting rappers at popular battles. Craig shows why he has longevity in this game and why he is one of the undisputed kings of the freestyle. A fierce freestyle competitor, Craig penned most of the battle rhymes for Eminem's semi-biographical movie, *8 Mile*, in which he also appears. With such a list of accomplishments and being a long time friend of D&D Records, it seemed only natural that Craig be signed to the label. The much-anticipated 1993 battle, which pitted him against MC Supernatural at the Lyricist Lounge, is one of the most talked about events in 90's underground hip-hop. With the help of Alchemist, Large Professor, Rocwilder, Dj Premier, and Marley Marl he put out an album entitled *This and Now* that dropped in May of 2003. www.craig-g.com

Mos Def

One of the most well known underground artists to come from the group Black Star along with partner Talib Kweli, Mos Def blew up solo backed by the street savvy label Rawkus Records. Mos Def, signed with the Universal Music, MCA and then Geffen with his black hard rock project *BLACK JACK JOHNSON*. Mos has constantly proved himself to be one of hip-hops new-school visionaries - those who break the stereotype of the 'Gangsta rapper' and take hip-hop and rap to new and exciting levels. Indeed, Mos is a precious MC, devoted to his music, with a passion for social consciousness and a divine ability to entertain which will surely cement his place in musical history.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Mos grew up at the center of hip-hops golden era of the 1980's. Inspired by the superhero MC's and New School leaders of the time (Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, De La Soul), Mos began rhyming at the tender age of nine. In the 80's most people who were fans of hip-hop were also fans of the culture in some way, but Mos wasn't just inspired by hip hop, he absorbed musical knowledge from across the artistic spectrum, as he himself states; **"I'm not just inspired by black art, but good art, representations of art that are sincere and genuine"**

Encouraged by his younger brother (Medina Greens [DCQ](#)), Mos formed his first group with his younger sister - Urban Thermo Dynamics. On their first record - 'My Kung Fu' released in 1994, Mos' talent was clear to see - exhibiting all of his trademark nasal flow and playful scattling. After UTD's brief existence, Mos was invited to join the Native Tongues family, founded by Afrika Bambaataa and including established (and highly rated) artists like De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest among its members. This provided the springboard Mos needed to build

his reputation on his undeniable talent; he went on to make cameo appearances on De La Soul's 'Big Brother Beat' and Bush Babee's 'Love Song'. Record labels sat up and took notice of Mos' charm and charisma (essential to appeal to a crossover, worldwide audience) and his deft, intelligent rhyme skills coveted by the underground movement.

It was only a matter of time before Mos would find his way to a record label, and he chose Independent newcomers Rawkus to showcase his talents. At Rawkus Mos found a label willing to play by 'his' rules - **"I liked being a free agent, I liked negotiating my own terms, working with my own friends"** With Mos' new record deal came the instant underground classic 'Universal Magnetic', combining a jazzy beat with Mos' endless stream of pulsating rhymes, and catapulting Mos to an underground favorite. Also in 1996, Mos teamed up for the first time with his soon to be partner-in-rhyme Talib Kweli, producing the legendary 'Fortified Live' collaboration.

In Talib Kweli Mos found a brother with the same beliefs, talent and mindset. Both socially conscious, community activists saw the larger picture of hip-hop's influence in America and the world. The two then joined to form 'Blackstar', named after the first Black owned steamship company in Africa, and produced their debut album - 'Mos Def and Talib Kweli Are....Blackstar'. Blackstar was designed to give the two MC's more recognition, the lesser exposed Talib Kweli became an overnight success and Blackstar's first album went on to become one of the most important albums of 1998. Mos tries to explain what Blackstar meant to the duo - **"I know this is going to sound corny but - it's about black love and self esteem. These things that me and Kweli say on certain records coming out are our love for our tradition and indigenous people in this country, and about the resilience of the spirit to move forward."**

In 1999, three months before the highly publicized end of the millennium, Mos was ready to unveil his first solo album 'Black On Both Sides'. The RIAA certified Gold album embodies the best of hip-hops past, and peels open the persona of one of its brightest hopes for the future. Bringing to the fore Mos' experiences of life and life as a black person. Mos explains; **"So often, artists like myself or Kweli are referred to as alternative or conscious. To me, that's like another code word to diminish your attachments to the community, to black people. You're like this foreign, distant element that people may admire from a distance but they don't have any real closeness to, it's not intimate to them, it's not of them."**

Black On Both Sides officially established Mos amongst the elite of the hip-hop circus - at least in the eyes of the critics and those with an appreciation for REAL rap music. Surely with all the talent he possesses it will only be a matter of time before he (and Kweli) become worldwide rap stars. With a new Blackstar album and a new solo album scheduled for release some time this year, 2001 was also 12 months where the Mighty Mos conquered new shores. But while Mos' music

seems to be created to inspire with its vast imagination and ambition, he has a different perspective - **"The revolution is personal, I'm not doing this for public acclaim. I'm doing this because it's sincere to me, it's real to me and whoever has feelings about it."**

Nothing but good things are in store for this very talented MC, who is also an excellent actor. He appeared in Spike Lee's *BAMBOOZLED*, and stole the show in *Monsters Ball*, starring Bill Bob Thornton and Hailey Berry. His numerous film and television credits include performing in the *Lyricist Lounge* comedy sketch show on MTV and hosting and co-exc. producing *Def Poetry Jam* on HBO for Russell Simmons, the *Italian Job*, *Brown Sugar*,

Mos Def - who starred in Suzan-Lori Parks' Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Topdog/Underdog" - is moving full-speed ahead on his dual career path.

"*The Woodsman*," an indie film he appears in with Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick, was a hit at the recent Sundance Film Festival. He started filming "*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*" this spring in the UK. And he's releasing a new album this summer.

Bobbito Garcia

A.k.a. "The Barber" DJ Cucumber has been holding it down in the studios of NYC's 89.9 WKCR for more than 11 years now, paving the rough terrain of the underground for more than a few superstars. Off the air, he's put in time as an A&R at Def Jam, and as a hip-hop journalist and as head of the revered Fondle'Em imprint. Garcia has since launched a new label called Fruitmeat. He's secured a publishing deal to pen a book tracing basketball shoe culture from 1960 to 1987 called "Where'd You Get Those?" published in 2003 by Testify", one of his romantic obsessions. And somewhere in it all he manages to keep his regular interview column in Vibe magazine.

Cut Chemist & J-5

Former elementary school classmate of the project director Kevin Fitzgerald, there are few DJ's with hands in as many pots as the ubiquitous Cut Chemist. After coming up with the groundbreaking Unity Crew (in which Kevin was the sax player), Cut earned coast-to-coast accolades as part of the double DJ threat behind the Jurassic 5. Together with partner Nu-Mark, he stitched together the distinctive sounds of J-5's full-length debut *Quality Control*, and turn heads wherever and whenever they play live. All the while, Cut manned the turntables for Latino supergroup Ozomatili and has teamed with DJ Shadow on the Brainfreeze project..." Voted Best DJ by The New Times 2001!

Jurassic 5 – MCs Chali 2na, Zaakir (Soup), Akil and Marc 7 and DJs Cut Chemist and Nu-Mark – conjure an energy that recalls a throwback era in hip-hop, when the only thing that seemed to matter was the music and having fun. The time of park jams and block parties, of willful braggadocio and stylish wordplay, of crafty disc jockeys and handclap beats. J5 have always displayed characteristics of those back-in-the-day jams, like their powerful vocal harmonizing and amplified funk beats, but what the group embody more than stylistic flourishes is that era's spirit: making good music that connects with the people.

That sentiment is especially true on *Power In Numbers*, which the group describes as an all-together different sounding album but one still is very much a part of the Jurassic 5 tradition. "We all knew we wanted to do something different than what we had done before, with a whole new sound and a whole new texture to the music," explains Cut Chemist. "We were kind of starting from scratch with no regard to what we had done before, experimenting with technique and sound."

Jurassic 5's roots lie in the L.A. Underground, a hip-hop movement centered around The Good Life Café open-mic space in the heart of South Central Los Angeles' old jazz district, where dozens of MCs and DJs would congregate regularly to perform. During its most prolific period (1991-1994), the L.A. Underground was a Mecca of musical innovation, spawning groups like The Pharcyde and Freestyle Fellowship; more importantly, the movement encouraged its artists to constantly balance progressive styles and good music – an idea that still resonates with J5, the most successful group to emerge from that scene.

Jurassic 5 formed in 1993 as the union between two separate hip-hop groups, Rebels of Rhythm and Unity Committee, both frequent participants at The Good Life. The two groups' came together to release a spontaneous, one-off single, "Unified Rebelution," which made a deep impression with true hip-hop heads everywhere. Its success emphasized the chemistry each of the artists had with one another and they decided to form Jurassic 5 as a singular musical unit.

www.jurassic5.com

Black Thought & Questlove of The Roots

Black Thought is the front man and lead MC for the rawest live band in hip hop, MCA recording artists: The Roots. He is also an actor, appearing in the feature narrative *BROOKLYN BABYLON* directed by the award-winning director of *SLAM*, Marc Levin. Health conscious and spiritual, his words usually follow his actions. He started off playing with the band then called the Square Roots for pocket change on South Street in Philadelphia in the early 90's. Black Thought and the Roots are seminal artists in the world conscious hip-hop. Their albums often go Platinum, and always Gold. www.okayplayer.com

Wordsworth

Star of MTV's highest-rated comedy sketch show, *The Lyricist Lounge*, Wordsworth is the other half of the duo Punch and Words. An underground video of him freestyling at a recording session for the first Lyricist Lounge compilation on Rawkus Records landed and sealed the networks offer to create a TV show by the same name. A gifted storyteller and improviser par excellence, Wordsworth is one of the most versatile freestylers in underground hip-hop.

Sway

MTV hip-hop host, DJ, and MC, Sway is co-host with King Tech of the world's #1 rated hip-hop radio program of all time, *The Wake Up Show*. It was the first internationally syndicated radio show to regularly feature a dedicated freestyle segment. Sway is a positive source of information and righteousness in hip-hop. He was instrumental in healing the East/West feud in the mid 90's, and in establishing a platform from which true hip-hop flourishes. Through Sway, many underground artists have gained worldwide exposure and fame.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

DJ Organic, Director

Kevin Fitzgerald was born to a West Indian mother and Irish-American father in New York in the early 1970's, and has been DJ'ing since the age of 14. He is Co-Founder with Carlos Ninos, of the popular radio show, "All @ One Point," on KPFK 90.7 FM, in Los Angeles. He is also a founding organizer of The Center for Hip-Hop Education and responsible for creating and promoting (along with *MC Hymnal of Dark Leaf*) the open-mic *The Breaks* (the birthplace of the live hip-hop band *Breakestra*) and the original incarnation of the popular weekly LA club *The Root Down*.

Shortly after being awarded a scholarship to attend the University of California's film production program, Kevin started seriously studying, researching, and documenting hip-hop. Shooting for *Freestyle* began with equipment and supplies he gained access to through his classes, and when a DJ friend, Mix Master Wolf (*Breakestra*) introduced him to L.A.'s original hip-hop open mike at the popular South Central community health food café, The Good Life.

A long time student of natural medicine, Kevin's philosophy is to tell stories that reveal and bravely explore the nature of community: both its lines of fracture and its prospects for healing.

Henry Alex Rubin, Producer

Henry is a member of the Director's Guild of America and has directed commercials as well as the Second Unit for films including *COP LAND* and *GIRL INTERRUPTED*. Henry directed the award-winning feature doc *WHO IS HENRY JAGLOM?* (w/Candice Bergen, Dennis Hopper and Orson Wells)

He is currently directing a feature theatrical doc financed by Cinetic Media (*Bowling for Columbine*, *Capturing Friedmans*) and produced by Thinkfilms (*Spellbound*) entitled "Murderball" about rival quadriplegics who compete at rugby in tricked out Mad-Max wheelchairs. Henry is also currently directing a mockumentary with Winona Ryder.

Paul Devlin, Producing Editor

As a freelance editor, Paul has won two Emmy Awards for his work with NBC. He produced and directed the award-winning non-fiction narrative feature *SLAM NATION* (with Saul Williams and Beau Sia) which screened theatrically in over 30 markets and has aired on HBO/Cinemax and Encore/Starz. The film chronicles the life of poets involved in the national poetry slam competition. His new film, *POWER TRIP*, explores the corruption and electricity crisis in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Tiare White, Executive Producer

Tiare is a graduate of the A.F.I. Center for Advanced Film and Television Studies, and co-founder of Industrial Media Arts, a content development company in Santa Monica, California. She is the author, with Camille Landau, of the best selling *What They Don't Teach You at Film School*, published by Hyperion Books.

Youree Henley, Line Producer

Youree is a music video and commercial producer based in Los Angeles. He began collaborating with Kevin on *Freestyle* as a result of his brother Raffi's history as a performer at the Good Life open mike. His most recent project was a music video he produced for the Stone Temple Pilots.

Todd Hickey, Cinematographer

Hailing from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Todd Hickey is a graduate of Temple University Film School, and a former DJ. Shortly after moving to LA he landed a job as filmmaker Spike Jonze's assistant and began his camera work on a video for The Pharcyde. He was Director of Photography on the NEA funded documentary, *CAUGHT NAPPING*. His feature film credits include *STAR MAPS*, *THE KINGS* and *YOU ANT GOTTA LIE TA KICK IT*. Past music credits include cinematography on projects for: Jude, Mystic Journeymen, Aceyalone, Abstract Tribe Unique, The Coup, and Marci Hull Trio, as well as 311, live performances. Todd is currently making a documentary film about the ultra-indie hip-hop crew The Living Legends.

Daniel Kozman, Cinematographer

Dan Kozman is a dedicated independent filmmaker with an eye for detail. His background includes extensive work in music videos, documentaries such as, "The March" and "The Coachella Music and Arts Festival," and features such as, *ATOMIC BLUE MEXICAN WRESTLER* and *SOUL MATES*. He has long been active in social and political issues, but his first love still remains shooting in the only universal high-definition medium: film.

Charles Raggio, Producer/Music Supervisor

President and founder of Kick Snare Hat Coordination, Charles has produced, coordinated, and cleared music rights for numerous independent feature film scores and soundtracks. His list of credits includes: *DREAM WITH THE FISHES* (Sony Pictures Classics), *AROUND THE FIRE* (Unapix), *SCRAPPLE*, and *BURNING SENSATION*, *A JOURNEY TO BURNING MAN*. Charles was the creator/executive producer of "The Funky Precedent," SPIN magazine's #1 pick for the best underground hip-hop album of 1999.

Freestyle as a Structured Part of Hip-Hop

free adj.: capable of moving or turning in any direction

style n.: a distinctive manner of expression (Vibe)

FREESTYLE is a work in-progress project of The Center for Hip-Hop Education, and Hip-Hop Congress, a (501c) not for profit learning organization dedicated to the principles of understanding, preserving and teaching the history of hip-hop as a revolutionary social, cultural, and spiritual movement.

The Center's primary mission is in the area of education and offering learning experiences in the form of performance based workshops, directed study, and instruction in the history, science, art, technology, and practice of hip-hop. It works to develop educational models and empower communities with learning tools such as the film *FREESTYLE* to teach the history of hip-hop at community centers, public schools, colleges, and universities furthering the establishment of a recognized curriculum for it's application in institutions of higher learning.

FREESTYLE is made for the purpose of promoting education, criticism, research, and scholarship. All the music and artists who appear in this project do so for non-commercial reasons and strictly for the advancement of human knowledge! The Center sponsors programs such as it's Book Series, and the touring Hip-Hop Film & Music Festival that showcases some of the best in Short Films, Documentaries, Feature length Motion Pictures, and Interactive Media that deal with or are about hip-hop music and culture. The Center has also worked with other community based hip-hop organizations such as The Freestyle Union, Hip-Hop Congress, JUCIE, Rap The Vote Foundation, Rap It Up, the Truth, and The Tortuga Project.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the mid-1970's when hip-hop was first being created, DJs used turntables and doubles of rock and roll, funk, and soul records to make "breaks," or 4/4 beats, for MC's (rappers) to rap over. Frequently, the MC's would not have any lyrics prepared, but would come in an off-the-head manner called "freestyling." Freestyling, especially in MC battles, has similarities to "playing the dozens" (a spontaneous, back and forth game of insults) in that both require quick wit and cutting down of an opponent. This style of rhyming has taken place in important historical contexts in terms of the hip-hop/b-boy culture, with different definitions depending on who one talks to. Oddly, even though freestyles are a foundation for modern day hip-hop, lots of rappers along the way did not acknowledge the importance of this art form and consequently they suffered commercially.

The hip-hop, or b-boy, culture encompasses graffiti art, DJ'ing and "turntablism", breakdancing, and MC'ing and "freestyling."

"It's the slam dunk contest of the rap game".

The exact definition of freestyling hasn't been pinpointed. Some rappers consider it just rhyming a written verse over any given beat. Others define it as having general ideas planned ahead of time, but the lyrics themselves being created on the spot. ***The hip-hop purists generally define it as 100% improvisation.*** The most likely reason is that the talent it takes to make lyrics up on the spot requires more "mental stamina" (originality) and shows how much a true MC lives and breathes the music.

During the earliest days of hip-hop when Jamaican DJ Kool Herc and his Herculoids began to DJ parties, their performances were largely improvised. While Herc spun doubles of small 2 or 4 bar sections of records, or "breaks," he would chant party lyrics.

"...ya rock and ya don't stop/ and this is the sounds of DJ Kool Herc and the Sound System and/ you're listening to the sounds of what we call the Herculoids. He was born in an orphanage he fought like a slave/ all the Herculoids played / when it come to push come to shove / the Herculoids won't budge / The bass is so low you can't get under it the high is so high you can't get over it / So in other words be with it..." (Kool Herc)

Rappers gained their fame through live street battles with other rappers, first on the neighborhood block and then in other boughs of New York City where hip-hop began.

As hip-hop evolved in the early-80's, but before every kid and his cousin was a rapper with a record deal. While having pre-written lyrics was OK, if a rapper couldn't make up a rhyme on the spot about his opponent, he wasn't going to win the respect of a crowd. Live freestyles began to die out in the mid-to-late 80's as many more artists were getting record contracts, and they recorded their songs with hi-tech production and a goal of heavy airplay. However, the artists that did freestyle at the time, like Biz Markie, Rakim, and KRS-One, are the ones that went on to continue making records up to this day. Other artists, especially some of those in the late-80's to early-90's, actually proudly stated that they did not freestyle and made their songs in the studio for home audiences.

About 1993, freestyling came back into popularity.

Probably because of radio shows throughout the country allowing for rappers, MTV-frequents and underground artists alike, to "flex their skills" (show their

talent) by coming off-the-dome in a live radio setting. It's no coincidence that the resurgence of freestyle popularity came about in 1993 -- the momentum was with underground hip-hop radio shows, popping up all over the world. This resurgence of freestyling by artists like Ahmad, Freestyle Fellowship, Juice, Supernatural, and Tupac & Biggie was showcased on countless hip-hop radio shows like Sway & King Tech's internationally syndicated "The Wake-Up Show, The Rap Olympics founded by Wendy Day, sponsored Rap Pages magazine then Sprite, and " The Blaze Battle on HBO.

The importance of documenting Freestyle cant be undervalued.

This movement in music is an extension of our rich tradition of African based oral teaching and story telling. Sometimes called the Black Verbal Arts it represents so much that tell us who we are as a people. Encompassing roots in religion, politics, sociology, psychology, and of course art and dance it is safe to say that *Freestyle* is modern day folk music.

Perhaps the most talented freestyler of recent times is Supernatural, who "won the New Music Seminar's 1993 MC Battle for World Supremacy by stringing together flawless improvisational rhymes.

He rhymed about people's clothes, hair, or whatever was happening at the moment he was rhyming." He was due out in 1994 with an album that was supposed to be recorded in one-take straight through, totally freestyled, but for whatever reason, the album was never released. Supernatural is best known for his ability to have someone in the crowd (or on the radio) give him a random topic and he would rhyme about it off-the-cuff. Supernatural emulates the styles of old school rappers in his tone and diction. He pulled a piece from the film *Wild Style* with Double Trouble, a hip-hop duo consisting of twin brothers, as well as the articulated sound of Busy Bee, and Notorious B.I.G..

The idea of solo freestyling, as shown in the previous examples, is to present a coherent rhyme about a particular subject. It's not easy to do when you have a beat in the background that you have to keep time with and many ears hanging on your every word. While it's likely safe to say no one can do a perfect freestyle, although many say Juice can in a flawless way, there are devices that help save time and give an MC time to think. Supernatural is said to always be thinking three to four lines ahead of where he is in the freestyle, but in the freestyle on old-school hip-hop, we can see where he momentarily pauses to think of where to go next in lines like "Let me start to flip it as I exactly do work" or "Love the way I explode through the track."

It's clear that the structure of freestyle rapping is similar to that of other modern improvised street art forms. It takes the quick wit of insults required when playing the dozens (aka "snaps" or "bagging") and combines it with the improvised style

of rapping, rhythmic adherence of toasts, and spontaneous outburst of poetry slams. Although slams are generally considered tightly structured and the performances very rehearsed. Sharp mental concentration and creativity have helped to show who is "true" or "real" in hip-hop and who can be disregarded as a strictly-studio rapper. This hip-hop culture has been around for almost 30 years, and the improvised art of freestyling is just as old. It has proven to be absolutely instrumental to the survival of hip-hop as a music and a way of life for many in the culture.

The Art of freestyling is one unique and essential to hip-hop music and culture. It is all about being able to speak truth and knowledge in an un-edited stream of consious way and by that fact makes it totally revolutionary.

The artists that freestyle in the cipher do it for the love of the art form, not for the money. And in the process they are builders of community. The United Sates is supposed to be founded on the principles of Freedom of Speech, however not many people actually believe or practice this. Have you heard the term "biting your tongue", or "watch out what you say". Racism, poverty, violence, political, and social oppression are the topical forces that seems to drive much rap. They are the subjects and concepts that more often than not in the confusion to dispel, end up feeding on the communities they are supposed to uplift, and intern get subverted, and thus creates more misery. However hip-hop at its foundational level really is about re-claiming our tribal, and community roots. The word has power to change, and the freedom of this word is a gift from the divine. How we use it is up to us. Some do it to relieve stress or to just pass the time and have fun, but why are so many drawn to it the world over.

Freestyle is about living a real an authentic spiritual life, and recognizing that hip-hop has a history and cultural foundation based in a belief that living poetry is the new language of empowerment and social change.

FREESTYLE: The Art of Rhyme holds great educational value for hip-hop enthusiasts as well as for those misinformed about hip-hop culture due to its intimate and honest portrayal of hard working independent artists. This film focuses on a group of focused, intelligent, ambitious, and talented young men in pursuit of a dream, deconstructing the 'thug life' image that is often associated with the music.

ABOUT: *FREESTYLE* : The Art of Rhyme

Q&A with filmmaker Kevin Fitzgerald a.k.a. DJ Organic

Interviewer: What were your biggest challenges with this film?

Kevin: The biggest challenge no matter what film you are making is to tell a story. My one greatest hope is that this film reflects what hip-hop really is. For me, it's about a revolutionary movement of people coming together to express their love for themselves and each other.

Interviewer: Did you find strong support within the hip-hop community for this film?

Kevin: From day one this film was a total grassroots, collaborative effort. I have never owned a camera except for a Super-8 when I was in college. Most of the contributors and crewmembers in the film were students who lived and love hip-hop. It got made in the same way that a freestyle cipher or session happens: with creative contributions from people mixing, complementing and working off of each other. Without the help of the artists in the film and their friends and sponsors, this film would have been impossible to make.

The work that we do at The Center for Hip-Hop Education is all a part of this, studying and teaching the history of hip-hop. We use the film as a catalyst to begin a dialogue with students when we show it to them in class. Empowering them to understand that the principles: (Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding, Freedom, Justice, Equality, Peace, Unity, Love, Respect, and Work...) that Afrika Bambaataa founded with Zulu Nation continue to be real and that they have been working through hip-hop since day one.

I think that the artists are interested in seeing images of them selves on screen that are real and unadulterated. I don't think we have had much of that kind of portrayal in hip-hop as a whole and certainly not of the underground community which has been somewhat dissed and is only now just beginning to get the credit it deserves.

Interviewer: You said that hip-hop is all about people coming together to express their love for themselves and each other. What about all the anger we hear in hip-hop lyrics?

Kevin: The anger that people hear coming from some of the MC's are just these individuals being honest about how they see the world around them. The negative stuff is part of human experience. You can't look down on people for that. They are channeling their anger into rhyming about things instead of acting it out on the physical level. It is a good thing. It's therapy.

There is also a lot of very positive, soulful and spiritual material that people are rhyming about – which more often than not does not make it to the general public. One of my major goals with this film and my work with The Center is explore these relationships and show how the beautiful side of hip-hop looks, for all.

The root of the art form that we call hip-hop really goes back to Africa and the Griots. The word "griot" comes from the French word meaning, "to cry". The closest thing we have in traditional western culture was the town crier, or later the bluesman. In Africa, the Griots would travel around reciting the oral history of their village in song to all that would listen. They were and are very respected within African society. People literally throw money at them when they perform. They played an integral part in developing community identity and social ties. Hip-hop really is a reawakening of this ancient spirit.

While it incorporates and creates whole new creative arts such as DJ'ing and graffiti, the freestyle MC is still basically the traveling Bard telling a story. In Ireland, one could not be a teacher without first being a Bard. I plan to produce another musical documentary project that develops the whole historical and spiritual themes in hip-hop, especially the African connection that I was only able to touch on briefly in this film.

A point I want to make is that freestyle hip-hop doesn't really need to be framed; it just happens and it's amazing! But why is this powerful art form so little understood. I believe it is due to its fleeting nature, and that is what makes it so valuable. Only an honest portrayal with respect for it's inherent freedom of expression will work here. That's what makes a freestyle so electrifying; you are hearing the MC's protected inner thoughts. The center of a cipher is a beautiful place to be. You are at the point of undiluted, unedited creativity, which at its source is really love. It is live, in the moment and can never be repeated. It might inspire you or it might scare you. Chances are that for many people who see the film it will do both. My deepest hope is that it will bring understanding and respect from outside the hip-hop community and serve as a positive reinforcement of us as people within.

Interviewer: How did you choose these particular artists for inclusion in the film?

Kevin: Most of the people in the film are friends and people I have had personal relationships with. Many are those whose work I respect and have been intimately familiar with. I hope that this intimacy makes the film real. The film was made in a freestyle sort of way: I documented the work of friends, they gave me introductions from one person to the next and the film grew like that. Even the few work in-progress test screenings that we have had has always provided us with a chance to "re-mix" the film if you like. After the film's Q& A with the audience I ask them what they liked or didn't like, then we usually have a freestyle session with some local MC's, and film it. Then we know how to proceed with the next cut. So in a way this film has been constantly developing, growing and getting better each time we show it.

I wanted the film to be like a DJ mix tape. Mix tapes were the way that music spread from borough to borough in NY in the earliest days of the art. DJ Hollywood was a pivotal figure in the launching of underground mix tape culture in the 70's. I wanted the film to feel like a visual representation of the mix tape form and be educational at the same time.

Interviewer: Are there any unifying characteristics shared by the performers in your film?

Kevin: The thing with freestyling is that it is all about producing work that is personal and therefore, unique. There are no classes or categories here. It is about the freedom that every artist has to not bow to convention. Originality is king in this community. I would have to say that a commitment to creating original work that has the integrity of personal truth behind it is what all of the people in the film share.

Interviewer: Where did you get the resources to start filming?

Kevin: I used equipment from the university between and during class projects. Some days I was literally using the equipment round the clock. It was hard to get other students to help me since it was just after the LA riots that we were doing this and most of them didn't feel comfortable hanging out in the neighborhood at the time. I also borrowed a camera from Ben Caldwell, a professor at Cal Arts who started another famous open mike in Leimert Park called iFresh. Unfortunately, Ben's camera was stolen when some gangsters on the street during one night's shoot jumped me. I hope I'll be able to replace it sometime soon.

Moneywise, I paid for stock and tape from money I made from DJ'ing, my student loans and more often than not as the project went on, from my extremely

supportive family, especially my mom, Michelle. My producer Alex and best friend Ty really went out on limbs so many times for me to make this film happen. Very good people! Love!

Interviewer: What didn't you get to touch on in the film that you wanted to?

Kevin: There are a lot of historical and cultural roots of the art form that I wanted to touch on more: the African griots, scatting, blues, R & B DJ's like Jocko Henderson, and Wolfman Jack and on the growth of freestyle and hip-hop in other countries. There is so little out there right now about the history of the art form – but that will change soon, I think. We need our own hip-hop museum, programs in universities and colleges, etc. Right now we are just at the tip of the iceberg in terms of the broad recognition of hip-hop as an art form.

There are many more films I would like make on the subject of freestyling and hip-hop. In fact, I see this film and the films that will follow it as a work in progress that I will be involved in for the rest of my life. Plus I think I would like to teach kids someday.

Interviewer: This was a very personal project for you. Do you have any personal dedication to make with it?

Kevin: Yes, I've dedicated the film to my father, Robert. He was a pioneer in satellite, closed circuit television and video technology. When I look at his work I see that he brought people together across large distances both literally and metaphorically. I feel that I am trying to do the same thing with this film. So in many ways it is homage to him and the principles he based his life on which I absorbed as my own.

Interviewer: What's next for you?

Kevin: To make more films and to pursue my long-standing interest in natural medicine. I see film as being an integral healing art form in modern society, and I would like to continue to explore and maximize the inherent capabilities of the medium for this end. I hope that *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* will be only the first of many docs and features I make with the goal of healing through the shared experience that cinema can create. There is a musical narrative film called "Tokyo DJ" that we are making next, and co-directing a doc. that my cinematographer, Todd Hickey just finished cinematography on "Sunny Boy" a documentary about Sole Moon Frey's acting teacher father's journey through Alzheimerz disease.