

# Students give positive spin to local hip-hop

■ The Eugene hip-hop scene is growing and changing, according to groups trying to improve hip-hop's image

By **Alix Kerl**  
Oregon Daily Emerald

A dedicated group of students has started an organization to bring together musicians and artists interested in strengthening the Eugene hip-hop scene. The group's efforts during the past year are culminating in "Let it Reign," a hip-hop show Saturday at the EMU Ballroom.

The group is known as The Hip-Hop Organization, and its 50-plus members are working to bring together artists and musicians who are interested in hip-hop and creating a more realistic perception of the genre. Gabe Sechrist, a University student, has led the charge, organizing hip-hop shows that involve musicians, breakdancers and artists.

The roots of hip-hop began with Jamaican ska. A DJ would create music with records and an MC would shout poetry or rhymes over it. This music was carried to New York, where modern hip-hop and rap were created. Presently, there are hip-hop groups in the suburbs of Portland, the cities of Israel and even in Japan.

*"Hip-hop is a living, breathing culture. People look down on it because they don't understand."*

**Hunter Blackwell**  
Juice 2 Make it Happen

"I've definitely heard some Japanese freestylers," said Cosmos Corbin, member of the group Raging Family.

Until recently, hip-hop was mainly associated with inner-city gangs, drugs and derogatory speech about women.

"A lot of people have negative perceptions of hip-hop," Sechrist said. "We're trying to be originators."

Scheduling venues, dealing with administrators, paying for flyers and drumming up interest in an art-based hip-hop organization has been difficult, but no one is discouraged.

"The point of our union is to bring that all together, right?" said Luke Mallery, a member of Raw Action's break squad, a local break-dancing squad.

"Right," Sechrist said.

Sechrist plans to go beyond performing to work on education and outreach issues.

## Community education

Organization members Cortez Jordan and Garrik Buschek have been educating the masses on the truth about hip-hop. Buschek has been working with Eugene middle and grade schools to create after-school hip-hop classes to encourage kids to disassociate violence and posturing from hip-hop. Jordan has initiated a program called Cosmic Swimming, a baby brother of cosmic bowling. Jordan throws performers, DJs and some 300 middle-schoolers in swimsuits together to provide a safe, albeit crazy, extracurricular program. Sechrist's group Logic once performed at the event, which takes place at Echo Hollow Pool at 1655 Echo Hollow Road.

"Half of them are swimming and half are trying to break and beat box very poorly," Sechrist said. "It's absolute mayhem."

Mallery is excited that the kids got a chance to be exposed to the positive parts of the scene.

"(In breakdancing) there are a limitless amount of moves, and it's an opportunity for physical, mental and artistic expression," Mallery said. "Breaking is a wonderful form of expression."

Numerous members of the group are frustrated by the mainstream idea that listening to rap music creates violence. They believe that hip-hop has grown beyond that.

"Hip-hop is a living, breathing culture," said Hunter Blackwell, a member of the music group Juice 2 Make it Happen. "People look down on it because they don't understand."

## What makes a scene

There are currently hip-hop groups in nearly every U.S. city. They abound in urban, suburban and rural areas and for many people, hip-hop is no longer about growing up in the ghetto. "It's pretty wild how hip-hop spread," said Mike Schuman, a member of the group 13th Tribe.

However, Levi Banner argues that hip-hop hasn't spread enough.

"Even Medford has a bigger scene (than Eugene), and it's smaller," said Banner, a member of Raw Action's break squad.

Banner is a strong believer that a healthy hip-hop scene needs four components: MCs, DJs, break-dancers and graffiti artists, commonly called graf artists.

All four ingredients are strong in Eugene, although graf artists have the most difficult time because their art is illegal. Banner supports the idea of Eugene supporting a free graffiti wall — a legal wall where painters can draw over other people's work at any time. In the United States, graffiti is considered criminal mischief, with penalties that range from a Class C misdemeanor to a felony, depending on the extent of the property damage.

It has been difficult to establish a stable graffiti wall in Eugene. The Lane Arts Council presented a plan in 1999 for wall and mural projects, which the Eugene City Council approved. The plan included commissioning local artists to paint on the side of businesses that wanted to participate. It also established a free wall on the side of Factory Fabrics near Seventh Avenue and Filmore Street. Eugene Police Department gang information coordinator Lin Holmquist said that the free wall was intended to create a place for expression.

"The intent was to allow an opportunity for not everyone involved in the program, but a lot of people, to come work on the project and to express themselves," Holmquist said.

While the free wall survived for a short time, EPD eventually decided to shut it down because neighborhood businesses were being tagged.

"There is a fine line between what's OK and what's not," Blackwell said. "Between what's legal or not, between what keeps or kills a free wall."

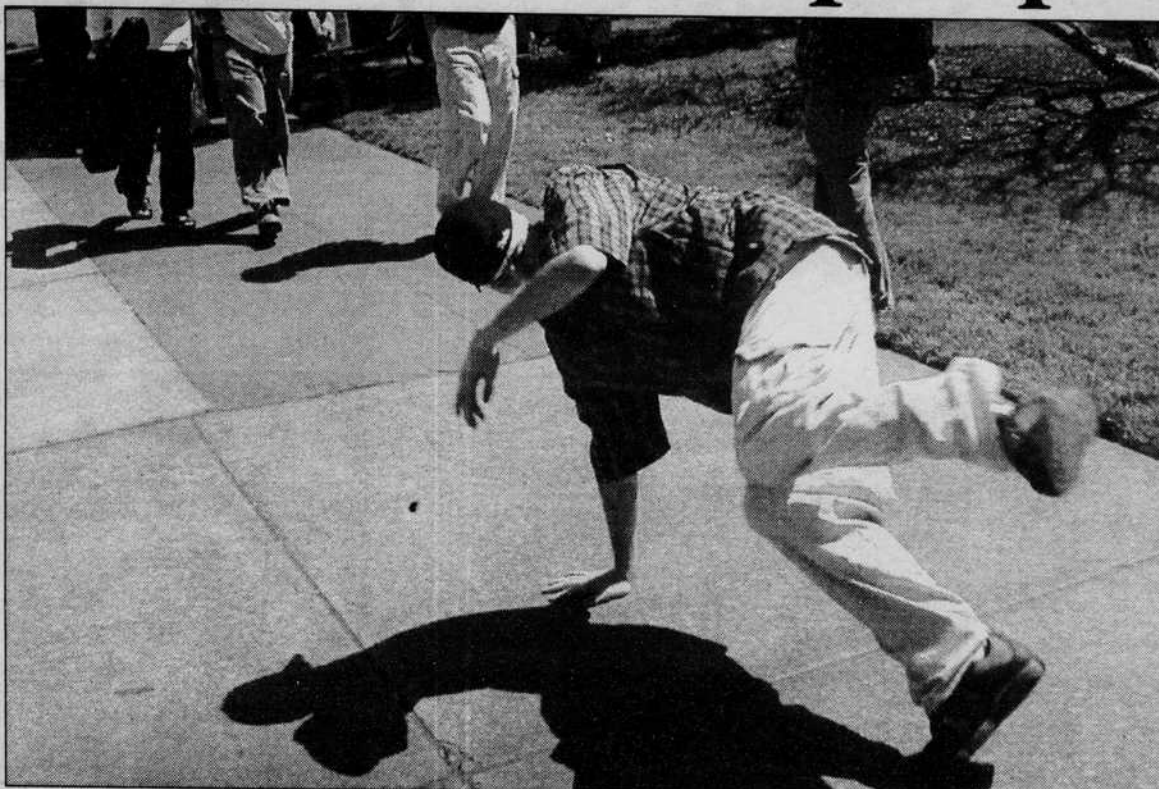
## Where hip-hop is headed

Sechrist doesn't know what direction hip-hop is going in, but he does see an increasing emphasis on live musicians and the incorporation of a variety of different instruments in creating hip-hop music.

"I plan to go beyond performing. As people who do art and performance, we have an influence on how people act," Sechrist said. "Right now, I'm just trying to put together as much stuff as I can."

The ballroom show on Saturday will be one of the biggest events the group has organized, with performances by several local groups and a few well-known DJs from Portland.

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Alix Kerl Emerald

Powder, a member of Raw Action's break squad, breaks Wednesday at Street Faire to attract interest in Saturday's hip-hop show.

'Let it Reign,' sponsored by The Hip-Hop Organization, includes six acts, beginning at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, April 27th, at the EMU Ballroom. The Hip-Hop Organization is a student group bringing hip-hop artists and musicians together.

Where: EMU Ballroom

When: Doors at 8 p.m., show at 8:30 p.m.

How much: \$3 students, \$4 general, \$5 at the door

Advance tickets are available at the EMU Ticket Office

Featuring:

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Raging Family

Logic

Juice 2 Make it Happen

13th Tribe

Raw Action's break squad

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