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Subject: Bohemian youth, Hip Hop poets coming to Ferris State University
Date: 09/29/2006 10:27 AM

Included below is a press release regarding the Bohemian youth, Hip Hop poets performance at Ferris State University.

For Immediate Release
Sept. 29, 2006

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Bohemian youth, Hip Hop poets coming to Ferris State University

BIG RAPIDS – Universes’ performers are a new strain of Jonathan Larson’s bohemian youth: A cast of characters who represent the urban discontent but for whom the issues of drugs, poverty, politics, racism, religion and violence remain similar. The group will perform in Williams Auditorium at 8 p.m. Oct. 5.

Universes’ performance style is exemplified in its first (and still best-known) production, “Slanguage,” an evening of poetry-as-theater. It is an amalgam of spoken word-songs divided among a multi-ethnic cast of four containing, surprisingly, only one woman – Mildred Ruiz – who has the voice of three and whose smooth and gutsy tones provide a high counterpoint to the lower tones of the men. The poems themselves are delivered in spoken harmony, ranging in style from Hip Hop, alliterative jazz, to spoken songs, with occasional riffs of Top-40 songs (like “Rockin’ Robin”), Doo-Wop, Mambo tunes and Haitian styles.

The performance style suggests both originality and a knack for sophisticated and intelligent adaptation of modern art: Robert Frost and Langston Hughes meet Muhammad Ali and the Black Eyed Peas. “Slanguage” is a “verbal gumbo” particular to this talented underground sect of performers. Their provocative word-songs expose the heartbeat of anyone for whom life itself is not to be taken for granted, and enlighten the rest of us.

The content offers varying perspectives on urban ghetto life and a bracing dose of introspective statements on poetry. Some are concept pieces, like a poem done in Dr. Seuss style about a slang duel between street gangs. Although the performers claim, in the text of the show, that there are “nursery rhymes filled with curse lines,” there is actually “darn little cussin’” in the work, hardly enough to establish the flavor. This is surprising since much material is devoted to dangers of the ghetto.

The ensemble cites as its influences Jack Kerouac, Richard Pryor and Muhammad Ali. Interestingly, its performance style lends itself to reaching young people through poetry and poetic language. Members met in the New York poetry scene but all have had 10 years experience in workshops for Bronx youth. Says leader Steven Sapp, “We write for adults as professional artists, but since slang and Hip Hop is what they can tune into, they tune in quick.”

Prior to the performance, students from the group First Expressions will be

performing/demonstrating different forms of poetry in performance in the Williams Auditorium lobby. Light refreshments will be served, this pre-event is free and open to the public.

This appearance of “Universes” was made possible through funding from 2006-2007 Performing Arts Fund, a program of Arts Midwest funded by the National Endowment for the Arts with additional contributions from General Mills Foundation, Land O’Lakes Foundation, and the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

Tickets for “Universes” may be purchased by calling the Williams Auditorium Ticket Office at (231) 591-5600 or online at www.ferris.edu/arts/ticket_office.htm. The ticket office is open Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Student tickets are \$8, general admission \$15, all seats reserved.

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