

Home About Us Contact Us Advertise Locations Subscribe FAQ MySpace Twitter Facebook



- HOME
- OUR CITY
- OUR NATION
- OUR WORLD
- OUR FOCUS
- OUR VIEWS
- OUR HEALTH
- OUR BUSINESS
- OUR ENTERTAINMENT
- OUR CULTURE
- OUR FAITH
- OUR SPORTS
- OUR EVENTS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- PHOTOS
- ARCHIVES

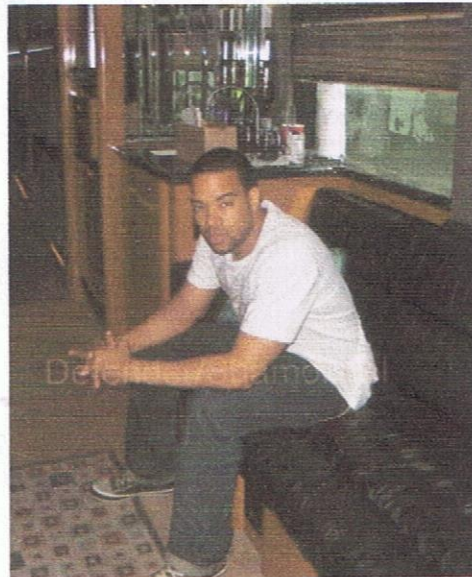
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MAY 18 **AfroFlow blends hip hop and spoken word, sponsor ACS**  
 Posted By: [Message From Montie](#) In Section: [Staff Blog](#)

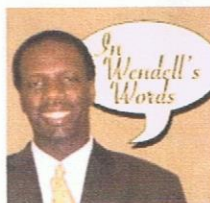
AfroFlow artist Michael "Mike-E" Ellison got his heart broken about three minutes after I met him before the AfroFlow concert. At least that's what he told a DuSable Museum security guard when he saw her smoking. She looked at him apologetically as he talked about the tobacco industry being "financial fellatio" and "legalized genocide." His intensity (although polite) caught me a little off guard from his otherwise charismatic personality.



I remembered seeing Mike-E first on HBO's "Def Poetry" doing a humorous spoken word poem about being "Light Skin Dia" and how light-skinned brothers had gone out of style. He was all smiles with the model poses you may have seen him use for a Pelle Pelle ad.



But when it comes to cigarettes, outer appearance is secondary, unless it's the look of cigarette smoke being inhaled. "There are advocates who will be attending the (AfroFlow) show who have attempted to sit down and protest with (the tobacco industry)...these people have deep pockets, and they buy off politicians, lobbyists (and) artists," Mike-E stated leaning back on a seat in Afroflow's decked-out tour bus. "I don't throw my stones at them. They're not the enemy at the end of the day. If you can make that decision, that's between you and God. But what I can say is if Mike-E and AfroFlow, by industry standards grassroots artists, put together a tour (and) got ourselves on a fully wrapped tour bus for four months, surely our more well-established artists with deeper pockets could do better by us."



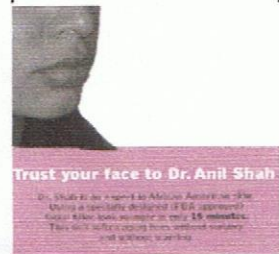
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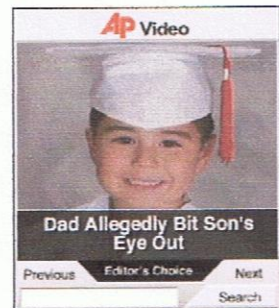
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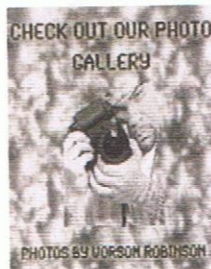
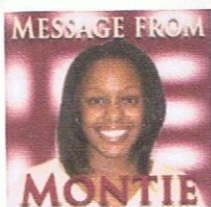
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Mike-E isn't downplaying the success of other artists, but he emphasizes that celebrity and music can bring much more to the entertainment industry to help others. The "others" in Afroflow who help Mike-E in his fight against the tobacco industry include DJ Invisible, vocalist Kenny Watson, and drummer Sowande Keita.

"People will say (the tobacco industry) helps out a lot of programs. They fund Black organizations. They buy their silence too, by the way. And what I say to that is crack dealers give out turkeys on Thanksgiving," Mike-E stated with a head tilt to emphasize his point.

But not only is Mike-E proud of standing up against the mainstream. He's proud to represent for Africa too, being born Ethiopian and using his experiences there for the music industry.

"The tie to Ethiopia is very important to me," he said. "The highlight of my career was being in Ethiopia...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 industry could never give me that feeling."

Other golden moments included talking to students at the DuSable High School, a leukemia survivor Brandon Guffey calculating how he could go on tour with AfroFlow and a North Carolina woman named June Ledbetter who sang for the first time with AfroFlow vocalist Kenny Watson after being diagnosed with cancer.



The encouragement people get from seeing AfroFlow was more than obvious while seeing them live at the DuSable. During one song, Mike-E asked a few people to come onstage to groove with him, thinking he'd only get one or two. Instead about 40 percent of the audience jumped onstage to dance, sing and take photos with him to "My Grind Is Divine."

"I've never had so many people onstage," he said, cheesing at the crowd. He didn't want them to leave, stopping after the song to take photos and rock a B-boy pose with them.

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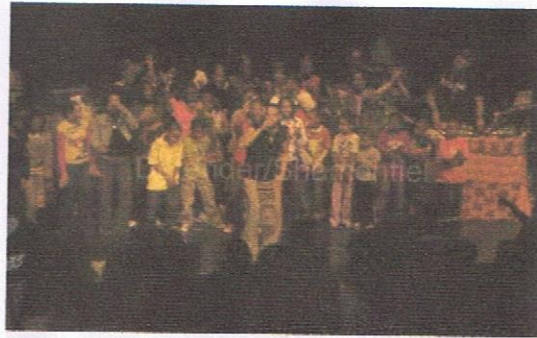


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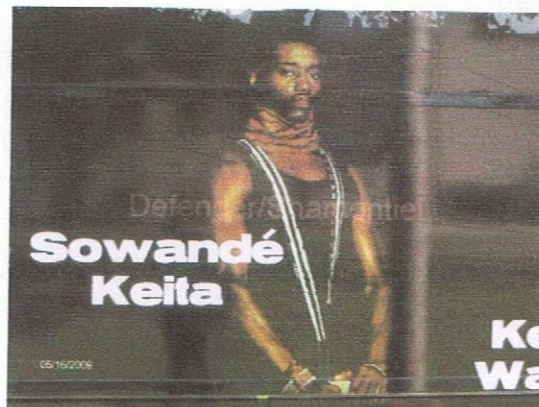
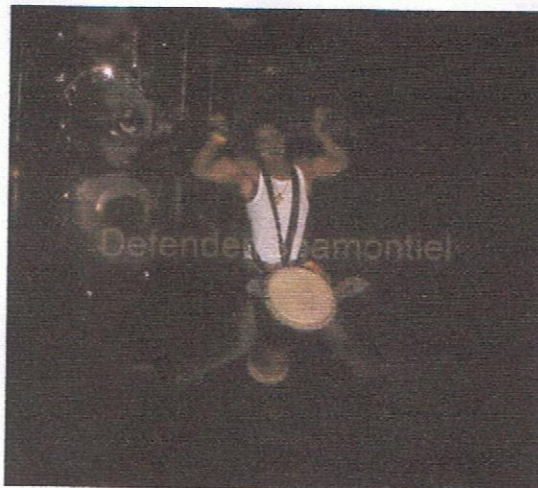
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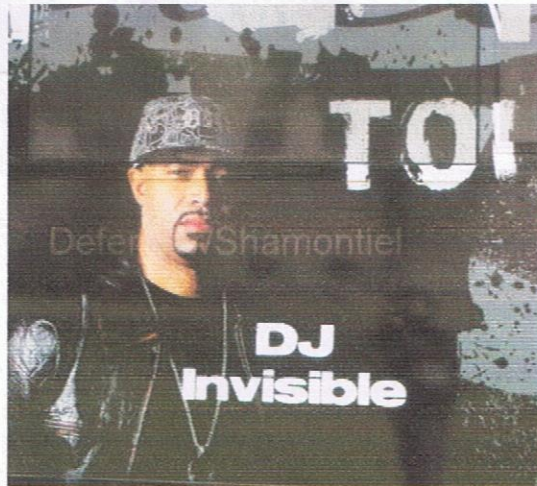
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Of course being sponsored by the American Cancer Society, audience members expected songs against smoking and clapped when audience member Lanette came onstage to say she was going to quit smoking for her children. But the energy of percussionist Sowande Keita playing his drum so hard that he busted it is something words can't deliver. Another drummer let him use his drum (a huge offering for a musician), and Mike-E joked about an audience member at another show saying she just wanted to "lick Sowande's arms" because they're so muscular. Sowande hammed it up and flexed for the audience, which was met with oohs and giggles.



During some parts of the performance, Mike-E said he didn't need music, "just (my) mic and the integrity." He performed several songs from the AfroFlow CD and others impromptu. AfroFlow's DJ Invisible also incorporated rock music by legends like Jimi Hendrix.



Other memorable and educational moments included Mike-E stating that Biggie, Tupac or any other lyricist couldn't top the lyrics delivered by Dr. King's speech "*I Have a Dream*," and educating the audience on how the symbol for a swastika originated in Africa. After looking it up, a swastika resembles the Hindu good luck symbol called the Wheel of Sri and the Ghanaian sun symbol, and Hitler stole this symbol interpreting it a different way.

Although AfroFlow ran out of time, the audience begged for the two songs he was told he didn't have the timeframe to do, so he gave us a teaser of both. People danced, sang and hurried out to collect CDs before Afroflow was off to their next show.

The Afroflow tour is sponsored by the American Cancer Society, Pelle Pelle, Fuze and the Cancer Action Network traveling around the United States.

*[Click here](#) to read an exclusive interview with Mike-E of AfroFlow (also in OUR ENTERTAINMENT): AfroFlow's Mike-E fights tobacco industry through music.*

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Gwendolyn

These young men sound like very strong positive young men. They are fighting for a good cause. The article sound very interesting - makes me interested enough to want to listen to their music and I do believe I will. Mike=E looks like he is enjoying the crowd intermingling with him while he is singing. Can't wait until Wednesday to read the online interview. Keep up the good work.