

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

HOME OUR ENTERTAINMENT AFROFLOW'S MIKE-E FIGHTS TOBACCO INDUSTRY THROUGH MUSIC

Wednesday, May 20, 2009

AfroFlow's Mike-E fights tobacco industry through music

by Shamontiel L. Vaughn



Hip hop poet Michael "Mike-E" Ellison said he wasn't interested in a nine-to-five job, and from the way he marched from his tour bus to the DuSable Museum to convince a security guard to put her cigarette out, fans of AfroFlow know why. While there are artists who put their face on a cause long enough to get a paycheck, Mike-E fights against tobacco companies and smoking twenty-four seven.

And on May 16, Mike-E's group, AfroFlow, with vocalist Kenny Watson, DJ Invisible and percussionist Sowande Keita, visited the DuSable Museum to

perform their self-entitled CD, "AfroFlow." AfroFlow consists of a signature style heavily influenced by African beats through drums, spoken word, and call and response. The tour is sponsored by the American Cancer Society, Pelle Pelle, Fuze and the Cancer Action Network.

Before the live performance started with a packed house of teenagers, college students and adults, Mike-E (spoken word artist, voiceover artist for organizations like Pelle Pelle; the American Cancer Society; and the NFL, and youth educator) spoke with the *Defender*.

Defender: You live in Detroit now, but where are you from?

Mike-E: I was born in Ethiopia, and my family lived in Adisabab, and we left Ethiopia when I was about three years old to Virginia.... I went to the University of Virginia, and from there, I moved to New York.

D: Are you more interested in the hip hop side or the poetry side, or do they coincide together?

M: They coincide. Part of the reason we call it AfroFlow is...it's not even a style of music. It's an acknowledgment of where all this music comes from. It was also out of respect for the late great Fela Anikulapo-Kuti who created (a style of music called) afrobeat.

D: How did you end up with AfroFlow?

M: The name came first, and when (AfroFlow) became a tour, I recruited different artists. It evolved in the members you see now. They're all friends we've known for years. The primary members are DJ Invisible; Kenny Watson, who needs and deserves his own platform as an artist; and Sowande Keita is our African percussionist. On the tour, we supplemented that with Nick Miller and DQ Sanders, and (Miller and Sanders) have been with us for two years.

D: How long has AfroFlow been a group?

M: We've been doing this tour for three years. The concept of AfroFlow is probably five years in the making though.

D: Do you remember the day that you decided that you were done with professional jobs?

M: Yeah, the day they told me to leave. (laughing) I had never been on a vacation, and a good friend and I saved up and went to Cancun for a week in my twenties. Being on my own time made me say, "I can never go back to a nine to five." I lasted another year and a half, but I told my boss this isn't what I want to do. They tried to convince me to stick around, and I stuck around too long. Then it was mutual. When I left a structured job, I did independent consulting, legal hustling to help pay for the art. It was poetry. It was spoken word venues and the Detroit Repertory Theater that helped me reclaim my artistry.

D: What was your most notable acting gig?

M: Most recently I was in "The Butterfly Effect 3" and a small part in "Standing in the Shadows of Motown."

D: You were also on HBO's "Def Poetry."

M: Initially they were supposed to get people on the show based on a competition format, and I slammed in Detroit and came in second in the competition. It wasn't until three seasons later that

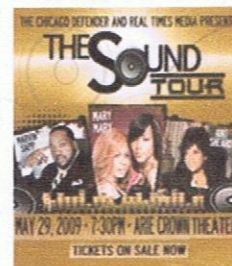
Member Log-In

- My Profile
- My Blog
- My Public Profile
- Logout

Search

Search now

Register to win!



Trust your face to Dr. Anil Shah

Dr. Shah is an expert in African American skin. Using a specially designed FDA approved laser filter, his average in only 15 minutes. This will remove acne, freckles, and unwanted hair and without scarring.

ANIL SHAH MD FACS SC



AccuWeather.com

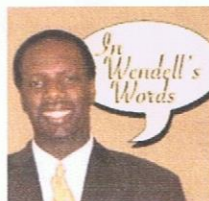
Chicago, IL

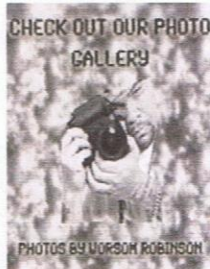
Hourly Info | 16 Days

Sunny
77°F

RealFeel®: 73°F
Winds: SW at 16 mph

Weather Forecast | Weather Maps





I got on, and that was from a bunch of gigs I did in New York. Feliz Bell and another poet named Tauntra booked me on a bunch of gigs, and that led me to "Def Poetry." I did this one called "Light Skin Did," and it gives props to all the so-called dark-skinned pioneers in entertainment and other fields. It's more of a tribute. People would send me blogs where I'm being criticized. They misinterpret the poem, and think I'm furthering the debate when in actuality I'm pointing out the ridiculous undertones and highlighting the pioneers who broke those barriers.

D: What was the other poem?

M: "Mezeker Means to Remember." What's interesting is when you do "Def Poetry," they have you do two poems. The second time I was on, they wanted me to do a poem called "The Roots of Tobacco," and I did that poem and "Mezeker Means to Remember." "The Roots of Tobacco" never made it. It was talking about the slave labor ties to the tobacco industry, the disproportionate marketing to African-Americans and the way that they use hip hop to do it. I think a lot of hip hop artists, so-called conscious rappers, get paid directly from cigarettes, and a lot of tours are funded from tobacco money.

D: How has AfroFlow been tied to the American Cancer Society as sponsors?

M: It started with a conference (with) a former ACS employee named Tatia Ash and Rita Miller. Tatia invited me to perform at a conference, and I did a combination of hip hop and spoken word. I kinda pitched them the whole concept of using music to entertain and educate and to create awareness to bridge community relationships that would have tangible results. Working with Rita Miller and Patricia Hoge, who is the Chief Mission Officer for the South-Atlantic Division of the American Cancer Society, helped push this initiative through. At first, it was five weeks at HBCUs, and the next year it was three months and it was a combination of HBCUS; non-HBCUS; hospitals; middle schools; clubs, cafes, you name it. This year was the first year we took it national.

D: Where did the interest in nonsmoking come from?

M: As an artist, I had been writing poems about the tobacco industry long before ACS contacted me (for the AfroFlow tour).

D: What can an audience expect to get from an AfroFlow concert?

M: When we perform, it's a combination of songs from the AfroFlow CD, and then live spoken word that isn't on the CD, and then songs like "Murderer" where we just freestyle and do songs specifically for this tour. We wrap the message in the middle. We give you music entertainment, African percussion, hip hop, spoken word, Kenny Watson on the vocals and give people opportunities to take better care of themselves regarding cancer. We actually have almost like an alter-call where I would say 80 percent of the shows, we get at least one person to come up onstage and stop smoking right there on the spot.

D: Do they really quit or do they just say it? Do you keep in contact to make sure?

M: Some of them stay in contact and stay with it. Some of them, like everybody else, struggle. But it takes a lot of confidence and perseverance to stand in front of everybody and say "I'm a smoker" after we just spent ten, fifteen minutes tearing the habit down. It's symbolic and encourages other people to stop.

D: Did you ever smoke? And by smoke, I mean anything.

M: (laughing) Never. You ain't right. I'm not a weed smoker either. It's hard to do music and be in college and not be around it. I've never been a habitual user of any substance, but cigarettes absolutely positively never. I'm not an advocate of marijuana, but I'm talking about the substance itself versus the cigarette. One is far more deadly. (Cigarette smoke) is tied to erectile dysfunction. A lot of brothas smoke weed and they wrap it in blunts, and the blunts have the same harmful chemicals in the paper. They have this argument that smoking weed is more healthy than cigarettes, but essentially they're smoking weed in cigarette paper, which is where a good majority of the chemicals are.

(Editor's note: The fibers in cigarette paper include non-degradable, toxin coated cellulose acetate fragments and carbon microparticles, also used in photographic film and defective cigarettes have coal products in them, according to TobaccoControl.bmj.com. Cigarettes-below-cost.com states that the paper includes titanium oxide and charcoal filters don't make cigarette paper less dangerous.)

M (continues): Linda Blount, the VP of Health Disparities for the American Cancer Society, indicated that, "The cigarette is the only retail product that can kill you if used as directed." If I eat something that's unhealthy in the privacy of my own home or out in public, the residue isn't going around to everybody. But when you smoke, the whole room is affected. And now they're even finding that there's harm in third-hand smoke. Even that can affect children and those around you.

(Editor's Note: ScientificAmerican magazine states that there is arsenic, used to kill rats, in cigarette smoke and there is no risk-free exposure to tobacco exposure, including

Related Content:

- AfroFlow blends hip hop and Thousands flee Central African
- The Great Wall of Chinese Debt
- Cargo plane crashes in Uganda, Congo warlord forced children to Thabo Mbeki to Zimbabwe to
- Related to: Afroflow Mike-E Michael Ellison Afroflow Tour
- Kenny Watson DJ Invisible Sowande Keita
- Ghanaian star swastika Hindu good luck symbol
- Wheel of Sri Africa tobacco industry antismoking

Join Our Mailing List
 Email:

SUBSCRIBE: CDD DIGITAL EDITION

Digital Edition

third-hand smoking, because of the 250 poisonous toxins in cigarette smoke.)

M (continues): Children in economically oppressed communities who can't get vegetables can get cigars and cigarettes at the corner store. (Cigarette companies) call them "replacement smokers." They know that it kills people, so they need replacements.

Cancer Action Network, Pelle Pelle and Cancer Action Network are also sponsors of the AfroFlow tour. For more information, visit www.AfroFlow.com.

In photo:(from left) Sowande Kella, DJ Invisible, Mike-E and Kenny Watson

[Click here to read a Message from Montie blog](#) about the AfroFlow concert: AfroFlow blends hip hop and spoken word, sponsor ACS

Copyright 2009 Chicago Defender. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Also in OUR ENTERTAINMENT:

- Movie Review: Jazz in the Diamond District
- Police: Man arrested in LA killing of rapper
- Daytime Emmy nominations snub Lucci, 'The View'
- Cosby tells group to reach out to struggling kids
- India Arie brings Soulbird tour to Chicago
- Jury clears rapper Snoop Dogg of man's beating
- Woodson Library to host 'Poetry' author
- Actor Danny Glover joins tour supporting labor
- Oprah Winfrey to say goodbye to Dr. Oz
- Eminem to fly 200 laid-off auto workers to Kimmel

HOME ABOUT US CONTACT US ADVERTISE LOCATIONS SUBSCRIBE FAQ MYSPACE TWITTER FACEBOOK



[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

©2008 Chicago Defender Online | Powered by Real Times Media | All rights reserved