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Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

Wednesday, February 04, 2009

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Youth JUMP for joy in North Minneapolis

by Charles Hallman

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Originally posted 2/3/2009

A small group of young people are integrating their musical and creative talents to prove that indeed there are North Minneapolis youngsters who are actively involved in positive activities.

"Not everyone on the North Side is bad," asserts 11-year-old Nakiyah Epps of the Redeemer JUMP Crew, who recently brought in the New Year by premiering their first CD, *Reborn*.

Putting together the CD, as well as hosting a release party at Redeemer Lutheran Church on Glenwood Avenue in North Minneapolis, was exciting, said 14-year-old Maggie Moses. "I love to perform in front of people and make people feel comfortable," she admits.

Moses and Epps are two of three females, along with five males, who are the core members of JUMP, which helps them develop their leadership skills as well as inspire others. "Most of us are leaders in the community," affirms 12-year-old Dominique Walker.

"JUMP is an acronym — it stands for Joint Urban Ministries and Praise," David Pellinen, a 27-year-old who is one of the group's adult mentors and who often serves as their spokesman, points out. "What we are trying to do is connect with other people and connect youth with the outside world, to expand people's view of the world and view of worship in the church, and empower young people to be leaders in the church, as well as inspire people to see young people as leaders in the church."

Twenty-year-old William Jones added that he is keenly aware of the present-day image that many people have of Black males his age. "People have the stereotype of Black men growing up in North Minneapolis that we either are drug dealers or in a gang," he says. "That's their first look at me, but I have gotten used to how people look at me."

Being a JUMP member has helped dispel such notions, Jones continues. "I've had a couple of elderly Caucasian ladies come up to me one time and say my music was empower[ing]. One woman said that she didn't let her grandkids listen to hip hop music; but then [once] she heard us, she wouldn't mind going out getting our CD and have them listen to it.

"When people hear about us, they say 'Oh, they are from North Minneapolis,' but then they hear us perform," he adds. "All hip hop is not bad. Rap can be inspiring... If we can do it, anyone can do it."

JUMP regularly meet at the Redeemer Center for Life, which is located just down the street from Redeemer Church.

"This is a place where people can develop and mature as who they are and what they will become in the world, and then go out and use the gifts that they already have been given," Pellinen notes. "There's a lot of ways to use gifts that are in the academic world, but there are not as many good structures in place for people who want to rap, sing and dance."

"This is a good space to grow," says 19-year-old Manny Lewis. "When we do these shows and write these

songs, that's not the biggest part of me. If I can have one person listen to it, or in some way it helps them in whatever way...that's why I do what I do."

Pellinen continues, "When young people are doing...really good things in the world, everyone gets inspired." But his being directly involved is a lot more than that, he adds. "This group for me is a way to express my talents in dance, organization and networking, and use it all to give back to God."

JUMP allows her "to live her dream [through] dancing, and keeping off the streets," Walker proclaims.

"It's a wonderful outlet for youth," says Ali Morgenweck, whose son Nicholas Gordon is a four-year member. "He and the other older members take the younger ones under their wings and bring them up. It's been a very positive experience."

"It's been fun," says Gordon, who recently turned 17.

They usually perform at various local events and occasionally at national gatherings, such as the PUSH 2008 conference that involved an estimated 150 young leaders, which was held last June at the Walker Art Center.

The group performed during the second day of the three-day event, said Pellinen. "We got invited to this event, not knowing what it was. We put together a song-and-dance routine and a poetry piece to expound our role [in society] in the future."

Now that their first recording is out of the way, "I hope that more people want to join what we do," Walker surmised, adding that JUMP "would inspire [young people and others] to learn more and be with Christ more."

Concludes Pellinen, "The way we address faith and religion is different than other people."

For more information about JUMP, or to buy the CD, contact David Pellinen at 612-910-0930 or jumpraise@gmail.com.

Charles Hallman welcomes reader responses to challman@spokesman-recorder.com, or read his blog: www.wwwchallman.blogspot.com.