

Rexdale rapper Jelleestone will be among the well-known hip-hop artists performing at the urbanNOISE Festival today and tomorrow.

## From hardcore to hopeful

**BRUCE DEMARA** 

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

It's time to counter the sound of gunshots with some positive noise. It's time for voices of reason and hope to rise above anger and anguish.

That is the goal of the first annual urbanNOISE Festival, which will bring together some of Canada's top hip-hop and urban music talent for a two-day event in Rexdale, an area of the city particularly beset by gunfuelled youth violence.

The festival, which will be held today and tomorrow from 3 to 9 p.m. in the parking lot of the Albion Centre mall, will feature top players like Rexdale's own Jelleestone and performers from The 411 Initiative for Change, including diva Melanie Durrant, Rochester aka Juice and Equinox 99.

Coinciding with Multicultural Day today and the last week of school for elementary grades, the festival is intended to offer young people alternatives to violence through urban arts like spoken word, emceein', deejayin' and beatboxin' said Chris Tolley, artistic director of Expect Theatre, one of the event's two co-founders, along with Arts Etobicoke.

"When you're talking to youth in the community . . . they want to improve the community overall and improve the neighbourhood. That is a very desperate need on their part," he said.

The festival is timely; in recent weeks, young people across the city have been victims of gun vi-

A major police operation in the Jamestown area of Rexdale led to more than 100 arrests of alleged gang members in May.

Durrant, who was living in Rexdale just before landing a record deal, said she was more than ready to leave the troubled community when opportunity called.

There was a lot of noise at night, sirens and popping firecrackers or whatever those sounds might be. So of course, that would inspire me to get out

of there," Durrant said.

Durrant said the youth in that community need to hear hopeful, positive messages from leading artists.

"Being in a show with a positive message for those kids who look up to me: that's just a good thing. Not everybody thinks gun violence is cool. (The festival) is all about positivity and we're hoping to expand that positivity into the neighbourhood," she

The event is being held in a shopping mall parking lot, Tolley noted, because there are no places of sufficient size - other than a local high school auditorium - to accommodate its scope.

"In that area, you've got to do it outside because that's really the only facility that is there. So we're trucking in a stage, trucking in everything and building a performance space there," Tolley said.

The Albion Centre is really the heart of that community. The mall is the main meeting

place, the main community space," he added.

The hours of operation, from 3 to 9 p.m., are intended to allow families to share the event, Tollev said.

Along with fellow artistic director Laura Mullin, Tolley began a program two years ago working with high-risk youth, helping them recognize and develop their musical and artistic talents.

Major artists like Jugular, Dwayne Morgan, Motion and DJ Fase - who will appear at the event along with local young artists - lent their talents as part of the program.

"We realized that they (young people) had an incredibly strong .. connection to the hip-hop world as an art form and the work that they created might have been a little rough around the edges, but it came from a very genuine, very passionate place," Tolley said.

"We realized there was a lot of potential in the area and very little opportunity."

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