

MCs in training to share Strand stage with old school vets

By PAT TARANTINO
REPORTER STAFF

The Blue Hills Boys and Girls Club is tapping the mic in preparation for a show that will pair some of hip hop's elder statesmen with the club's youngest talent at the Strand Theatre.

Organizers behind the benefit, titled "Passing the Mic," is meant to not only help fund Boys and Girls Club programs, but also remind the audience of hip hop's roots as a call for social change. The June 23 show features members from the club's Studio Heat program, as well as artists Chubb Rock, Audio Two, Kurtis Blow, Joeski Love, and Dana Dane.

"We want this to be a mix of old-school and new-school," said Richard "Chubb Rock" Simpson, who wrangled talent and helped organize the event. "We want to show the kids and their parents a different side, a positive side of hip hop."

Despite the show's impressive lineup, the Boys and Girls Club performers are eager to show off their skills as they present a retooled version of Simpson's 90's hit "Treat 'em right."

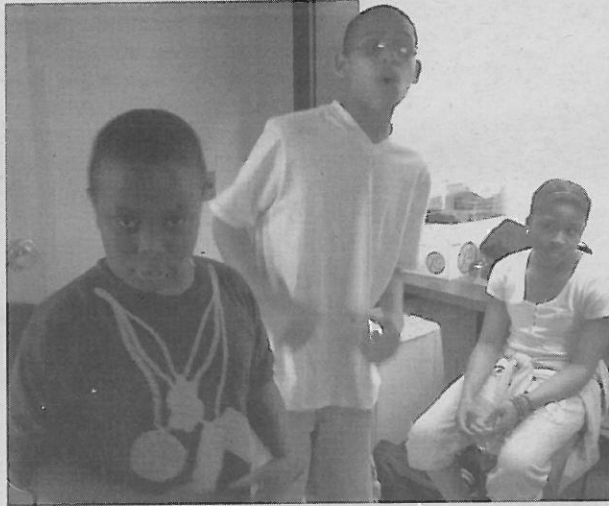
Ten-year-old Echezonachukwu Onwuama, "Obama" to his friends,

is one such artist.

"I'm not nervous, this show is going to be hip," Obama said. "When I'm on that grand stage at the Strand, people are going to be talking."

Studio Heat is the brainchild of music clubhouse director Rick Aggeler, a Berklee College of Music graduate who began working at the Boys and Girls Club in 2006, where he found himself inundated with youngsters eager to test their musical talent.

"Early on a fight broke out about all these kids trying to get into the music room," Aggeler said. "[Other staff members] said it was the first time they had heard of anyone fighting to actually get into a room."



Rappers in training – Echezonachukwu Onwuama, Josiah White and Tykera Nichols Tyrance rehearse for their Strand debut.

With a collection of gear donated by his alma mater and the Boston Music and Youth Ini-

tiative, Aggeler helped expand the club's music program from a single room with two drum sets

into a professional-grade production and recording space that produces a new track on nearly a weekly basis.

Studio Heat's Akeylah Rosco-Hunter, 12, and Tykera Nichols-Tyrance, 11 have attended the program for almost two years largely because it is the only chance they have to learn about the music that interests them most.

"A lot of kids want an opportunity to rap or sing about how you feel," Rosco-Hunter said. "At school we have stuff like flutes and trumpets, but nothing like this."

For Nichols-Tyrance, the satisfaction of teamwork and a well-recorded track is all she needs to keep coming back.

"I like how we all get

along here, we accomplish stuff and you want to keep moving, get to the next song."

Simpson said he is eager to share the stage with Studio Heat's young stars and remind them that hip hop can be much about much more than gangs, girls, and grills, a sentiment Obama was quick to echo.

"If I'm going up there, if I'm going to be a rapper, I want to talk about stuff that makes sense to the audience, I'm not talking about drugs and all the other dumb stuff."

Tickets to Passing the Mic can be bought at the Blue Hill Boys and Girls Club at 15 Talbot Avenue or online at bgcb.org