



Antwon Bradshaw's new CD release, "Revolution," which features Ronnie "Diamond" Hoard, the celebrated master artist-musician from the legendary Ohio Players, is attempting to bring gospel to a broader audience.

I auditioned the CD on a recent broadcast of Conversations with Al McFarlane, which airs 9 a.m. Tuesdays on KFAI 90.3 FM in the Twin Cities and online on www.kfai.org. Earlier, Bradshaw addressed a meeting at Zion Baptist Church in north Minneapolis of elders, ministers and pastors, inviting their support for a concert he's promoting. The concert features superstar Shirley Murdock, Hoard and other stellar local and national gospel artists. The concert is June 21 at Bethel University's Benson Hall, 3900 Bethel Dr., St. Paul.

Minneapolis artists, including The Hurst Family from Higher Praise Ministries, Joyful Noize, Tryenyse Jones from Urban Jerusalem and Wayman AME Church's Wayman Steppers, will also perform.

Here's my conversation with Bradshaw.

Al McFarlane

When you addressed the elders, you noted that there was nobody in this room under 30 years old. That was a telling statement. What made you say that? What did you mean by that?

Antwon Bradshaw

The church works. It's just young people don't access the church like the old people. When you understand who God is, of course you're going to go to church because you're not a fool. But when you're young and you are a fool, you don't realize that the church can help you.

I am one of the Youth leaders at Zion Baptist Church. I teach the hip-hop class at Vacation Bible Study that runs from June 24 to June 28 at Zion. If you have any young knuckleheads that rap, but every third word is a curse word, bring them to me. I teach them how to rap correctly and to not destroy their people. Back in the day, I came up with a CD called "Bachelor Recall" and I rapped secular. It was for the world. I actually did a good job. I destroyed and tore down everything. I glorified drugs. I put down women. I talked about how I abused my family. It actually resonated in the hood and it sounded good. But the result was that my little brother, who was trying to act like me, started playing with a gun because I was glorifying guns. He shot himself in the head, and that was a breaking point for me.

Al McFarlane

Did he die?

Antwon Bradshaw

Yes, he died. And I just adopted his son, because of what I was glorifying. And if you listen to the "Revolution" song, Apostle breaks it down. He says, "life and death is in the power of the tongue. What you speak, you might just become." And, you know, it hit hard when I understood that I was responsible for this young man's life. And as soon as I understood that, God started to work in my life. I lost everything. I lost my family, I lost my wife, I didn't see my daughter for four years.

It wasn't until I went to Zion Baptist that I began to heal. I grew up at Zion Baptist.

Al, I had been to prison and everything. And I still hadn't learned my lesson. So when I came to Zion Baptist, they accepted me for who I am. I had nothing. I didn't even have clothes on my back. They accepted me and brought me into the Men's House. Not only did they give me responsibility, but they gave me a chance to get right with God without all of the stuff that's going on in the neighborhood. I had a chance to get away from loose women. I had a chance to not be at clubs, drinking. I had a chance not to smoke drugs and just tear the neighborhood up by selling drugs. I had a chance to concentrate on me.

And you know they just loved on me and loved on me. I did some things while I was in that Men's House that could have put me back in jail and they could have told me not to come back to church. But because they loved me, I saw real love, without money and it just changed my heart condition. Once my heart condition changed, I got everything that I lost, back. I even got remarried to my wife.

Being a rapper you've got two choices. You can come in the game on a gimmick or you can be original. I chose to be original.

I put the lyrics out there that were more or less given to me because of the praying hands that

Written by Al McFarlane, Editor-In-Chief

were laid on me. The lyrics say, “deception, greed, white powder, tricked my mother, tricked me.” It’s drugs that destroyed us as a community in a physical sense. When they do drugs or sell drugs, either they die or go to the penitentiary. The young people are rapping about it. And if the drugs destroyed us in the physical sense, what do you think it’s going to do in the spiritual sense. Rap lyrics are about what destroyed us.

Al McFarlane

What’s the gimmick? What do you mean?

Antwon Bradshaw

You have rappers out here that will rap against each other and talk about each other. And the only thing it does is start beefs. But I went at what they represent. When an MC is rapping about the streets and glorifying about what destroys us as a people, I attack that. I don’t attack the person, I go at what they represent. And I shut them down.

Al McFarlane

You talk about the deed.

Antwon Bradshaw

I talk about the deed and not the person. What I am doing is eternal because not only do I teach a hip-hop class so they understand what type of power they have with their tongue, but I let them know that what they rap about, it has consequences. I see so many young people out here who hear music and just want to get high. Or (they) hear music and just want to go and get drunk and find “a pool full of liquor so I dive in it.” I heard that song. No disrespect to Kendrick Lamar, but what he was putting out there is it’s okay to go and get drunk. But after they hear the song and get drunk, who knows, they might be in a car accident or they go home and get into a domestic fight with their significant other. Or they won’t be the father that their children need(s). I go after what they represent – principalities and darkness. Does this make sense, Al?

Al McFarlane

It does.

Antwon Bradshaw

This is a message to the elders, pastors; I respect what you are doing. If it is traditional, keep it traditional. But I’m going to let you know that unless you become radical, you are not going to reach the young people. I told everybody at that meeting, Al, that I was an undercover agent for Christ. I said, the Feds got undercover, so Christ got undercover. And it’s not that we’re undercover proclaiming the Kingdom. It’s just we have to get to them. And when we get to them, we do it with love. And when they find out where this love is coming from, it makes it all easier to do something right.

Pastors, stop throwing away people that don’t fit the requirements or don’t look like they can do anything for the church or the Kingdom. There are a lot of us out here. And a lot of us want to hear the truth and want to hear what is good. But people don’t take the time out to even deal with people because of the way that they smell, or the problems that they might have.

Written by Al McFarlane, Editor-In-Chief

I don't know where I would be if the Men's House at Zion didn't take me in. I can't believe they did. I was appalling. I was hopeless. And I just gave up.

Al McFarlane

Let's talk more about that. You said that you spent time in prison. Tell me about your background. Where were you born and what's your story? What brought you to where you were in conflict with community, conflict with society and then put in jail?

Antwon Bradshaw

I was born in 1976. I come from the pimp and the prostitute era. I say that with all due respect. I don't mean to offend anybody. But my mother was a street person and she sold her body to put food on our table.

I was born in Toledo, Ohio and I was kidnapped, literally kidnapped by my mom and her pimp and brought to Minnesota at the age of eight. I lived right across the street from Delisi's Bar on Penn and Broadway. I stayed at 2327 Penn (Ave. N.). My mother introduced drugs to me. Not to use drugs, but to sell drugs and make money because she was always getting high off of crack. She needed someone to make money so we could pay the bills and take care of my brother and sister. Because I was street-wise, she used me. My first clientele was my mother and her friends. And I tell you right now, it destroys my mind. I can't stop crying when I think about it. I think out of all the years of my mama being on this earth, the devil used me to do this. I can't think of myself being in the streets anymore and it hurts me mentally to even think that I did this with my mom. But the devil is tricky and he will start when you're young. And transform you. What made me go to prison when I was 16 was that I shot someone six times because they were trying to rob me. The street value of the drugs he was trying to rob was \$200 or \$300. So I shot him.

Nine years and three months in the penitentiary. If you break the money down, it's like a couple of cents a day was the value of everyday that I lived in the penitentiary. I had the mind frame that no one was going to take anything from me, but really, the world took everything from me because I was lost, I had no spiritual backing, I had no mentors. I had no elders in my life to tell me that this is wrong. So when I went to the penitentiary my sickness kept growing because the elders in the penitentiary teach you the same thing.

Al McFarlane

Yes, more gangsters.

Antwon Bradshaw

It's called survival. But you are not supposed to survive – you are supposed to live. Being in the streets did one thing for me. It equipped me to be a part of the street with the Kingdom. Because now that same drive that I had in the streets; I've got that same drive doing the Kingdom business and I'm not scared to go into these dark places that some of these pastors, and some of these deacons, and some of these youth ministers are afraid to go to. If I walk down the alley over on James Avenue and see somebody getting high, I say, "hey man, just close your eyes and receive it. Even if you don't believe it, still receive it." And I pray protection upon them, or pray that addiction is out of their mouths and their minds and their hearts. I am

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one of those people that you can send because I'll go. I'm so used to destruction, nothing surprises me. I could be outside and hear some gun clapping and I won't even duck. I'll just look and make sure where it's coming from so my kids don't get hit. You see where I'm coming from, Al?

Al McFarlane

I do. I'm making a note, Antwon. I hadn't heard this phrase before and it's a marvelous phrase. It's a rich phrase. You said, "gun clapping." I've never heard of that before. Clapping is a joyful thing and now you're saying that our neighborhood, our community has constructed new language that includes the concept "gun clapping." It's amazing. It is sad.

Antwon Bradshaw

You know what Al?

Al McFarlane

Tell me.

Antwon Bradshaw

I used to hate the police. The reason why I hated the police was because I was doing something that they were trying to stop. But now the police have seen me and they are like, "go ahead Mr. Bradshaw, do what you do." I mean, I have been in an area where I'm ministering the young people or giving them my CD and they all leave me alone. They tell their other fellow officers, "Oh this guy is doing Kingdom business. You all leave him alone." It's just authority. That's what I'm trying to say. When I'm doing what I'm doing, I have authority. And literally the saying, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper" – that is so true because every weapon that was formed against me back then is used for me now. That's why I know God is relevant in my life and he preserved me because he knew what I was going to be doing right now. That's why I don't glorify any of the stuff that I used to do. I just tell you that it was a stepping-stone to get me to who I am right now.