

## It's cool to be Crunchy

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.

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Hipster hip-hoppers, Crunchy Kids provide alternative to swagger rap

In a genre dominated by tales of consumer excess, debauchery, misogyny, excessive drug use and "swag," the Twin Cities' Crunchy Kids are offering the antitoxin to the current era of hip-hop.

"For a while popular hip-hop was all swagger and bling rap, it wasn't asking people to think," said Crunchy front man, Chance York, who performs under the moniker, Slim Chance. "We give voice to the common man. It's not about being mega rich or smashing the most honeys; it's about knowledge and building."

It seems there's a viable audience for this style of conscious rap, or backpack rap as it's been termed. Though not signed to a label, the Crunchy Kids' latest CD, "Mint," is charting inside the top 15 on the College Music Journal (CMJ) chart – a major charting source for independent or "underground" music. Judging by the reaction of a few hundred listeners packed into an open outdoor space that served as a makeshift concert space for a recent street festival in between eateries on Lyndale Avenue in Uptown, fans are ready to be enlightened.

Sometimes it's hard for musical acts to capture a crowd's attention. In that tight space, under the night sky with the smell of cigarettes and beer in the air and puddles of water from a recent rain (hopefully the puddles were water), people were in their circles conversing, drinking, eating – having a grand ol' time. On the portable stage, Crunchy Kids' drummer Marcus Skullman, bassist Eric Burton and keyboardist Eric Mayson were readying their instruments. With a final sound check, the Kids were ready to rock. But was the crowd ready for the Kids? After all, several adult beverages had been consumed by the festival patrons – they were a bit rowdy.

Then the music started and Chance's voice piped out into the night air. It went something like this ...

"Where corporate slave drivers trying to name brand the planet/ damn it/ money's more real when you don't have it/ cuz when you have to borrow that's how you get that ass branded/ Tell me why it's like this/ an economic crisis/ why are the poorest people making the most sacrifices?"

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The lyrics were from the Kids' current single, "Nash Money."

Conversations stopped. People who were milling about turned their attentions to the stage. The area in front of the stage that was previously unoccupied became crammed with a throng of hipsters and skateboarders melodically bobbing their heads to the beat. They were caught in a state of Crunchiness.

The night's audience is mostly white. Three of the Crunchies are white. Hell, Slim Chance is high yellow at best. But the music is unmistakably hip-hop, which in many ways demonstrates the broad reach of the genre – even in so called underground hip-hop.

In an age when many rappers are talking about getting wasted at the club, it's refreshing to hear songs like "Opus" where Chance warns of the dangers of drinking to excess and drinking and driving.

"I had three or four friends die from alcohol," said Slim Chance. "The song was written to talk to someone very close to me. I wrote the lyrics in a fit of rage. I should have been arguing (with the person) about what they were doing, but the person was passed out and couldn't hear me."

Crunchy Kids formed nearly a year and a half ago, and while the group has gained a loyal local following, it hasn't yet captured enough ears for the members to earn fulltime livings from just the music.

"We're getting paid from the Man, but we're working for the people," said Slim Chance, who has degrees in creative writing and Spanish and is working on a master's – all from Mankato State University.

If the crowd's overwhelming approval to the Kids' set was any indication, the hip-hip quartet will soon be giving two-week notices to their daytime employers. In the meantime, fans can listen to the groups music for free at [www.crunchykids.bandcamp.com](http://www.crunchykids.bandcamp.com) and catch them gigging about town; and the Crunchies will have to continue to punch a clock – for now.