

DVD examines effort to reach troubled NYC teens via rap

Written by Kam Williams

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Chris 'Kazi' Rolle was born in the Bahamas where he was abandoned soon after birth by his mother who decided to start over on her own and set out for America. Understandably, Kazi grew up with a hole in his soul, and headed for New York City at the age of 14 to track her down.

But their reunion was to be short-lived and, at 15, the unwanted orphan was kicked out of the house and ended up having to survive by his wits on the hard streets of Brooklyn. He temporarily joined a gang and turned to a life of crime until he hooked up with a program called Art Start.

This self-help group enables troubled teens to channel their frustrations positively by giving them a chance to express their emotions through the rhymes associated rap. The organization even has a recording studio in order to attract aspiring hip-hop artists, though with the goal of getting them to write about the real issues affecting their souls, not ghetto fabulous gangsta fantasies about guns, bling and black-on-black crime.

The upshot is that, with the help of Art Start, Kazi was not only able to heal himself and become a productive member of society, but he then started serving as a mentor to at-risk kids in need of help. This spiritual transformation is the subject of The Hip Hop Project, a warts-and-all documentary which pulls no punches about the prospects of those stuck in poverty while simultaneously making a powerful statement about human potential.

Despite their considerable disadvantages, the triumphant participants in the program prove that, as Kazi claims, "The criminal mind is a creative mind." For they manage to channel their negative experiences constructively by collaborating on a meaningful CD containing insightful personal narratives which touch on a variety of universal themes. As the closing credits roll, postscripts updating the current status of all the folks we've gotten to know leave you with a sense of satisfaction.

With 100% of the profits going to non-profit charities devoted to youth, check with your

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accountant but The Hip Hop Project might be the first totally tax-deductible DVD.

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated PG-13 for profanity and ethnic slurs.

Running time: 85 minutes

Studio: Image Entertainment

DVD Extras: "The Making of" documentary, deleted scenes, additional performances, "Kazi Meets His Father" featurette, and the theatrical trailer.

To order a copy of The Hip Hop Project, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002TZS57O?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B002TZS57O>

To see a trailer for The Hip Hop Project, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8emq1rtBnec>