

Urban music off the streets and into the classroom

by Monica Eng
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CHICAGO — It's a beautiful Sunday afternoon and a group of three white students sit gathered around their African-American teacher in a small sunny room at the Old Town School of Folk Music. A loping, atmospheric beat is streaming out of the boom box in the corner. They bob their heads and tap their feet as they spill words onto the pages of their rhyme books.

It's a generally laid-back room, but this exercise creates a certain Final Jeopardy-like tension as the students compose a rhyme against the ticking clock of music. As the beat winds down, the slim, conceit-oreoed teacher, who goes by the single name Anacron, asks, "Is everybody ready?" They indicate that they are ready to go. The beat kicks in again. Fifteen-year-old Jonah "J4Play" Bondurant begins the rhyme circle with his composition, which starts: "Watch me penetrate the senses ... chemical imbalances ...". His rap style rides the beat with complicated cadences and a slight gangsta accent.

Wrapping up his rhyme by repeating the last line, the lanky Lane Tech junior kicks it to Anacron, who begins, "This week's topic is performing live/ Including the nutritional facts without the excess jive/ To survive on the stage is an astounding feat in itself/ You must be live to engage a pounding beat upon the shell...". He seems totally at ease with the form, moving his head from side to side with the beat. Next up is Tisa "The Tisanator" Batcheldt, who wears combat boots, leggings, a dress and a sweater. Her pigtails make her look like Mary Ann from *Gilligan's Island*. She raps softly in a smooth stream and then hands the invisible mike to Cece, a day trader/aspiring singer/songwriter.

Cece "Shimmy" Page, a blond in conservative dress, improvises an intro to her rhythmic rap, explaining that she

wants to join the class so that she can add some texture to a folk-rock Christmas album she is making. She winds down the rhyme, and the whole group smiles and relaxes. Anacron commends them all on a job well done.

(Larissa) McClaren [earlier this year] for the hip-hop dance class, and she started teaching right away and her class ran with unprecedented success." Boogie McClaren is a local dance teacher with a new but loyal following

and European culture. But really it's any kind of music that is created from the heart and soul and is practiced by a large group of people from the same background."

For the most part, that "background" has been the African-American urban experience. So does he find it all strange that he is teaching the class to a group of white students? "I don't think it's strange at all because I feel like a lot of people are interested in hip-hop because it is something they don't know about," Anacron says. "They are interested in learning what is behind rap music and what is behind the lyrics, what people are feeling and what's going on. I can't make anybody a rapper. You just can't do that. I would rather have people go through the eight weeks and come out with a better understanding of what hip-hop as a whole is and a specific understanding of what rap is about, but I'm not trying to make anybody into a star. I think hip-hop has too many rappers as it is anyway."

Although he stresses the music-appreciation aspect of the class, Anacron, who says he calls himself by that name because "I'm very anachronistic," offers plenty of practical tips to his students as well. As a teaching aid for a lecture on live performance, he recently showed a clip from the movie *Wild Style*. It featured a duo called the 5 Footers, who were charging up a tough audience with the following traditional chant: "Throw your hands in the air/Come on and wave 'em like you just don't care/I said hey oh/Oh oh oh."

"Now that is a classic way to engage an audience," Anacron says, pointing to the video. "People are still doing it today and it works. And you see that audience? It's full of thugs who are too hard to smile at their mama, and they're waving their hands in the air."

Anacron plans to continue his exploration of the urban contemporary genre with break dancing and deejay workshops.



PHOTO BY NUCCIO DINUZZO - CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Rap teacher Anacron reads to his students what he wrote during an exercise on putting thoughts to music. He teaches a course in rap music at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago.

"Do you write for Master P or something?" he asks the new student, Cece, who credits her poetry writing for her facility with rhymes. If a formal class based around rap sounds unusual, that's because it is. The Old Town School even conjectures that it may be the first of its kind. But if administrators at the school have anything to say about it, it won't be the last. It's just one part of the school's push to expand notions of folk music and update its offerings with more urban arts and contemporary styles.

"That has been the mission of a lot of people here, but there haven't been many contacts with contemporary urban folk practitioners," says Old Town adult program associate and rap student Ari "Just" Frede. "I interviewed Boogie

at the school. When Frede was looking for a rap and break dancer teacher, McClaren introduced him to Anacron. The 23-year-old underground rapper moved here from Los Angeles four years ago and has been rapping, producing, bartending and poetry-slaming ever since.

Some may have a hard time thinking of rap (which is incidentally about 25 years old) as folk music, but Anacron thinks it's about as folkie as music gets. "I think that folk music is something that goes along with any group of people who have been established as a culture," says Anacron, who has been studying music since he was a child. "But in this day, most folk music has only been looked at in terms of white

Project seeks to prevent suicides among gay teens

by Vanessa Bauza
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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MIAMI — He cried for three hours on the phone with his mother before getting out those three little words: "I am gay." Joe Zolobezuk had spent his high school years being pelted by cafeteria food and beaten up in gym class. He had pretended and denied, asking girls on dates to cover up the truth.

He was depressed and felt isolated. It wasn't until he found Project YES that he finally felt he belonged. Zolobezuk survived his turbulent teens, but many are not so fortunate. One-third of teen suicides are committed by gays, lesbians or bisexuals, according to a survey of 3,000 students attending Massachusetts public high schools. Similar studies nationwide have confirmed that gay teens are at-risk for suicide.

Though many states have committed task forces to preventing teen suicides, Miami-based Project YES is one of the few in the country to specifically address gay teens. Project YES founder Martha Fugate had worked as an interior design consultant for 25 years when she decided she needed to do something about the conditions that were driving teens to kill themselves, including isolation, stress from peer pressure, lack of acceptance, teasing and depression.

She herself had not encountered discrimination as a teen primarily because when Fugate, 52, was in high school, no one talked about homosexuality and she herself was not harassed.

"I didn't even discuss [that] I was a lesbian," she said. Fugate moved to Miami looking for "more room to breathe." And though she found a growing gay community, there was still a need to help guide gay teens through their high school years.

In 1995 she organized a few volunteers in her home and later met at the headquarters of a crisis helpline. Her mission was simple: she knew she could not reach every gay teen who needed her, so she decided she would target community leaders and youth counselors who were already working with teens.

"The kids are OK. It's the world that needs to change," said Fugate. "The real difference is going to have to happen in the community. We have to go to the places where people are getting the message [that] they're not

loved." According to Fugate, these places can include churches, synagogues, schools and community groups.

Fugate said many area churches and religious groups respond once they are told the facts, and more than 58 congregations of various denominations have signed a model statement "agreeing to minister to the spiritual needs of all people, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth."

The Rev. Carlos Miyares, of St. Richards Catholic Church in Cutler

"I've known of kids who were beat up or abused."

Carlos Miyares,
The Rev. of St. Richards
Catholic Church

Ridge, a Miami suburb, said he attended a Project YES meeting in September after being approached by several parents whose children came out to them as gay.

"I've known of kids who were beat up or abused," Miyares said. "They [Project YES] don't challenge anyone's religious beliefs. They emphasize something we all have in common, that no one should be abused."

A report funded by the Department of Children & Families, which will be released at the end of the month, confirms what Fugate has known for years: Few programs address directly the problem of gay, lesbian and bisexual suicides. "In some of the programs, there wasn't specific mention of working with kids who have sexual orientation issues, or even an acknowledgement that they were an at-risk population," said Kathy Lazear, who is drafting the study.

Today, Zolobezuk, 21, is a community coordinator who has held about 250 meetings to show teachers how to prevent gay, lesbian and bisexual students from being harassed. "Sometimes I have to talk to faculty and it's scary because I don't know how they're going to react," he said. "But what happened to me in high school doesn't have to happen to another kid."

Town prepares for second defendant's trial in gay student beating death

by Raad Cawthon
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

LARAMIE, Wyo. — Surrounding the Albany County Courthouse, a three-story pile of sandstone block that sits between downtown Laramie and the University of Wyoming campus, is a chest-high, dark green plastic fence containing rows of oblong holes. The fencing is the kind usually used to hold back the snow on ski slopes. But today -- Monday, Oct. 25 -- at the beginning of the trial of Aaron McKinney, 22, who is accused of killing Matthew Shepard, the fence is there to hold back the curious. Prosecutors claim McKinney and Russell Henderson, 22, lured Shepard from a Laramie bar last October with the intent of robbing him. They also say Shepard, who was beaten to death, was targeted because he was gay.

"We are prepared for big crowds, but we are not expecting them," said Randy Vickers, a Laramie law enforcement spokesman. Indeed, no one has applied for a permit to demonstrate at the trial and people here hope to avoid scenes such as the one last year, when anti-gay demonstrators descended on Shepard's funeral. From the middle of Grand Avenue in downtown Laramie, one can look south, across the Union Pacific railroad tracks, into the Snowy Mountains. Look north, and the view goes past the university and out across dun-colored, low ranging hills dotted with evergreens. In any direction, the landscape is pure West.

On Oct. 6, 1998, prosecutors allege that McKinney and Henderson, after attracting Shepard by pretending to be gay, drove him a mile or so east of town, beat him, pistol-whipped him, and left him tied to a rail fence. Shepard, found comatose and still tied to the fence 18 hours later, had told friends he always wanted to live in Laramie because it was a friendly town. He died Oct. 12. Shepard's killing caused outrage across the country in large part because McKinney and Henderson, whose guilty plea in April led to two life sentences, quickly defended their

brutality by saying Shepard was beaten because he made sexual overtures toward them.

Impromptu memorials to Shepard sprang up in gay neighborhoods in Chicago, New York and San Francisco. Human rights activists quickly portrayed Shepard as a martyr and Laramie as a place where gay bashing was the inevitable product of America's mythologizing of the cowboy, who, seated on a bucking horse, is the state's emblem. "Blood & Tears: Poems for Matthew Shepard" was published, its title drawn from a news account saying Shepard's head was blood covered except for a spot where "he'd been crying and the tears went down his face." The book is for sale, along with the latest short story collection from E. Annie Proulx, a National Book Award-winning author who lives here, at the Grand Newsstand in Laramie, a town of 24,000 if you count the 10,000 university students, with its coffee shops, vegetarian restaurants, outdoor gear emporiums, and cowboy saloons, is a place where it is as likely you will see Birkenstock sandals as cowboy boots.

"If it [Shepard's killing] had happened in New York City, nobody would have noticed it," said Jack McClennen, who owns a small shop where he makes and sells pottery. "What happened is not what this town is like. People talk about the 'cowboy mentality' here. But those guys were about as far from cowboys as you can get." Laramie has a palpable sense of isolation, of being a town adrift in a landscape that defines it and, at times, overwhelms it. Only a two-hour drive from Denver, nobody commutes there because eight or 10 times in the winter "ground blizzards" are created by the wind whipping across the Laramie Plateau.

"The sky will be as blue as it is today but you won't be able to see across the street," McClennen said. "The white-out will only go to about 10 feet up, but they will close the gates [across the highways] and you can't get out of here. You're stuck."

When that happens, people in Laramie are left to their own devices

to the north, to find the Buckhorn Bar, about the size of a quarter, the roomy 1990s-era one of a bartender's sporadic friend lining his rifle from across the street and through the front window. Late October and Halloween decorations stream out of the hole this time of year. "This can be a pretty rough bar," said Jim Gregoire, one of the current bartenders. All the violence at the Buckhorn, founded in 1890 and on the National Register of Historic Places, is not of an older vintage.

The pay phone at the top of the stairs leading to the basement men's room has three large dents in it, and the plexiglass shield behind it is shattered. That damage is a week old and is the result of a customer's frustration when the phone took \$4 of his money. Revenge was taken with a .38-caliber pistol.

"The phone works better now than before he shot it," Gregoire said. Matthew Shepard was in the Buckhorn the night he was killed.

"I knew Matthew, he was a real sweet, gentle person," said Gregoire, a Vietnam veteran who is also a fitness counselor. "If I had seen him leave with those two guys, I would have stopped it. I wouldn't have let him go with them." But that night Shepard left the Buckhorn for the Fireside Lounge, another on the circuit of four or five downtown Laramie bars, where he met McKinney and Henderson. "One of the things that sort of [angered] me about it was I know the bartender at the Fireside," Gregoire said. "He knew Matthew, too, and he didn't stop him for leaving with those guys."

Matthew was just a gentle person. He weighed all of 120 pounds. Wyatt Skaggs, McKinney's attorney, told prospective jurors in the trial that they should not be swayed by the national opinions Shepard's death brought to the surface. "We've got to begin by disregarding the guilt thing, that we have to punish somebody to show the nation we're not some dusty old cowtown," he said. Prosecutor Cal Rerucha told the same jurors that in McKinney and Henderson, who are expected to testify against his partner,

"If you cast a play in Hell, you are not going to get angels as actors," he said. Around Laramie this weekend, thoughts were more taken up with the Wyoming Cowboys nationally televised football game against Colorado State, a heated rivalry called "the border war," than with Shepard, thoughts of justice or what, if anything, the crime said about this town.

"There are gays here, like everywhere," said Brenda Martin, a former student here and bartender at The Fireside who lives in Cheyenne. "You hear [anti-gay] jokes and stuff like that. But most people here are just like people anywhere else. They wouldn't actually hurt someone because they were gay."

Martin, asked if violence was second nature in Wyoming, told of witnessing a shooting at the Buckhorn. "Two guys got into a fight over something, some argument about a spilled drink or something, and one of them pulled a gun and shot the other one four times," she said. "It happened right here at the bar, where we're standing."

Martin then rhapsodized about what a "great bar" the Buckhorn is. "We get all types," said Gregoire, before taking beers to a couple of bikers at the end of the bar. "It's interesting because you get a lot of diversity. You can meet some pretty interesting people in here." Two years ago, after the last "border war" football game here, that diversity led to a brawl that "leveled the place," he said. "It was tough to break up because you couldn't tell who was doing what to who," Gregoire said. Mark Voss, a former public defender who is now the deputy county attorney in Laramie County, where Cheyenne is located, recently wrote in the *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle* that the state should be leery of hurrying McKinney toward death row just because of the public's outrage over Shepard's death.

"If jurors of serious mind are chosen in this case, they will ignore the hoopla and see this for what it truly is -- a drunken robbery gone tragically awry," he wrote. Gregoire, in the midst of turning away an order for a wine spritzer because "we're not that kind of bar," sees it differently. "I hope they hang those guys for what they did," he said.

Animal rights group strikes again, destroys lab at Western Washington

by Christine Tatum
TMS Campus
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BELLINGHAM, Wash. (TMS) — Scientists at Western Washington University are still assessing the damage recently done to an animal-research laboratory. An animal rights group linked to a number of break-ins on campuses across the country has claimed responsibility for the destruction.

The group, which calls itself the Animal Liberation Front, opposes research on animals. During the Oct. 23 break-in, members destroyed computers and months worth of research. Several offices were vandalized, and four research rabbits and 37 adult white rats -- none of which pose a health risk -- were missing. University officials said the initials "A.L.F." and slogans about "vegan power" were spray-painted on walls, computer screens and thousands of dollars in lab equipment.

The group sent a letter to an Oregon newspaper claiming responsibility for the damage, said David Doughty, assistant chief of WWU's campus police. "That an individual would react in this way is neither civil nor constructive," said Karen W. Morse, president of the university. "It is not justified in any

way. Animal research is an integral part of the research process, and we at Western comply completely with all oversight regulations."

The A.L.F. destroyed animal laboratories at the University of Minnesota in April, causing damage estimated at \$20 million. "The damage had to be extensive because money is the only thing those people understand," Katie Fedor, a spokeswoman for the group who said

"It is not justified in any way. Animal research is an integral part of the research process, and we at Western comply completely with all oversight regulations."

-Karen W. Morse,
President of Western
Washington University

she did not participate in the UM raid, told TMS Campus in April. "What happened decreased the profits collected by the farmers, whose actions are completely responsible."