H
arlem, a cultural bea-
con for black America, can be said to be the cradle of much of the world’s most accessible aesthetics of the last 100 years. Hip-hop, which includes a number of artistic mediums, such as rap music, b-boy dancing and graffiti art, is the most recent musical genre with roots in Harlem to gain colossal popular culture worldwide—generating more than $10 billion a year. But hip-hop, like Harlem, has undergone such change in the last 30 years that some believe the more visible portions of its contemporary themes no longer reflect the realities of urban American culture.

In the spirit of getting local youth in touch with the roots of hip-hop and its ongoing relationship with Harlem, a local nonprofit group called the Global Artists Coalition (GAC) held a two-day symposium and interactive exhibition on campus entitled ‘A Celebration of Harlem Hip-Hop History.’ GAC, founded in 2002 by Terry Nelson, works to reach and inspire young people and aspiring artists through hip-hop, while safeguarding its beginnings through education. The event was held in the Saison Room of Lerner Hall on May 19, and featured experts from several corners of the hip-hop world, critics, scholars, record producers and emcees.

‘There is more to New York City hip-hop history than what is reported in the popular press and our mission is to let people experience and understand this history, music, and culture first-hand,’ said Nelson.

Introducing the symposium Curtis Sherrod, GAC member and co-producer of the event, presented the idea that hip-hop, although often considered to have its origins in the South Bronx, was interwoven throughout the history of Harlem. A notable panelist in the group was Paul Winley, who, though not widely known, was a pioneering producer who is credited with pioneering the genre’s first female rappers (his daughters, Poullete and Tanya Winley). These artists were the only female rappers that have come to be known as the break record. Speaking publicly for the first time, Winley brought a perspective little heralded in the hip-hop community: a seminal voice with respect and understanding for the hip-hop sound and its tonal emphasis, and which galvanized the hip-hop sound and influenced almost all musical genres that came after it—gave a demonstration of his skills at the event.

‘This conference was a great opportunity to work with an organization that is reaching young people in the community around a subject that captures their attention,’ said Marcia Sells, assistant vice president of planning, who helped organize the event. ‘The celebration was a success,’ said Nelson. ‘[That] hip-hop is a unifying force for youth and adults, something that I can take from this moment onward, we hope they continue to learn and question popular assumptions about hip-hop. The members of the first hip-hop generation are having children, and we want our children to know the true spirit and history behind the culture. We demonstrated hip-hop can be presented without always having to appeal to the lowest common denominator.’

Celebrate Harlem’s Hip-Hop History

By Colin Morris

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rian Fallon, at left, director of the Columbia University Medical Center Lyme Disease Research Center, joined Meg Cabot, author of The Princess Diaries, Pat Smith, president of the Lyme Disease Association; Amy Tan, author of The Joy Luck Club; and (seated) Jordan Fisher Smith, pack researcher and author of Nature Noir, for a literacy with Lyme, a public education effort by well-known authors suffering from Lyme Disease. The authors are dedicated to raising awareness of the disease and funds for the Lyme Disease Research Center at CUMC, the first and only such center in the nation.

Tan said that having Lyme Disease feels like you stayed up all night for several nights running a marathon and have the flu. The best-selling author suffered these debilitating symptoms for four years before her doctors thought to test for Lyme—and even then the inaccurate test came up negative. The disease affected her cognitive ability, and all but completely halted her writing career (GUMC). Lyme can be treated with depression and phobias that kept her from leaving the house. Finally, correctly diagnosed with Lyme Disease and treated with antibiotics, Tan is back to skiing and traveling, and most important—writing.

According to Fallon, Tan’s case is not unusual, as doctors frequently fail to recognize the disease’s symptoms and use outdated diagnostic testing. Although the disease is spread by ticks and thought to exist primarily in wooded communities, it is prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe. It would be of concern to urban dwellers as well as people living in the suburbs and country. Each year up to 24,000 new cases of Lyme Disease are reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which estimates that only 10 percent of cases that meet its surveillance criteria are actually reported.