

Group to Address Local Hip-Hop Tensions

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Hip-hop artists gained a new voice in city government with the formation of a new committee to address the community's tenuous relationship with area venues.

The Madison Arts Commission's Hip-Hop Ad Hoc Committee was created in response to the discouragement felt by hip-hop artists throughout the city in recent years, according to Anthony Brown, chair of the committee and commission member. The committee will focus on addressing the complex relationship between the city and the local hip-hop community, he said.

Hip-hop artists and consumers faced a shortage of opportunities for the genre in recent months after several venues throughout the city chose to stop hosting regional and local shows, Brown said.

One such venue, The Frequency, announced on its Facebook page it would no longer book hip-hop acts as a way of reducing the danger posed to employees and patrons. The announcement was in response to a shot fired outside the club after a fight that broke out after a show in late January, the post said.

While he does not blame the venues, Brown said he is discouraged hip-hop is disappearing in the city. Hip-hop artists who make their living performing their work have to travel outside Madison to put on shows, he added.

Madison Arts Program Administrator Karin Wolf said the committee is important because many artists feel there are not enough opportunities for them to showcase their talents in the city.

"An entire genre of music has to find a place to exist outside Madison," Brown said. "That alone is a problem."

Brown said the committee will act as a liaison for anyone who has a stake in hip-hop. The committee aims to establish a dialogue between the city and the hip-hop community to strengthen the relationship between these two groups, he said.

To achieve this, the committee plans to focus on education and outreach throughout the city, Brown said.

He added the committee wants to incorporate a variety of different people throughout the city in its discussions on these issues. He said they are looking for college students who are consumers of hip-hop or engaged in the culture to come forward and help solve the problems the genre faces.

"In a democracy, all forms of expression are encouraged, tolerated and embraced," Wolf said. "If people in our community do not feel they can express themselves, we should be concerned about that."

Wolf said the committee may face a challenge because it must work the narrow scope of the Madison Arts Commission. She explained police issues regarding hip-hop may be brought up in the discussions of the committee. However, she said the commission does not have the authority to address that type of issue.

While the committee cannot make The Frequency or other venues reinstate hip-hop shows, Wolf explained it could make use of grants to do things like bring hip-hop artists to the Overture Center for the Arts.

“The committee needs to come up with a plan to actually affect change within the abilities of the [Madison Arts] commission,” Wolf said.

Brown recognized the committee is taking on a large topic. The problems with hip-hop are not going to be solved overnight, he said.

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