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(by) Scott Gordon (<http://artsextract.com/author/sgordon/>)

03 PM | 21 Feb

Not the best, not the worst, and occasionally I curse

(<http://artsextract.com/2014/02/21/best-worst-occasionally-curse/>)

(<http://ArtsExtract.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/hhsurvey11.jpg>)

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The City of Madison Arts Commission formed a hip-hop subcommittee about a year ago (http://host.madison.com/daily-cardinal/news/city/city-committee-aims-to-debunk-hip-hop-myth/article_29ca05c2-a7ea-11e2-83cf-001a4bcf887a.html), and the group is awaiting results from this web survey (https://survey.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6uia1SSpln2SEXH) (put together not by MAC itself but by Madison Media Institute) to gather information about Madisonians' attitudes about and interest in hip-hop. I would encourage you to take the survey if you're interested in seeing hip

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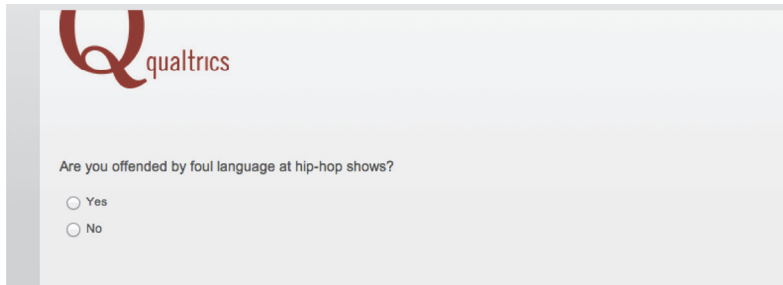
EPISODE 76: IF THERE WERE GOING TO BE A STEREOTYPICAL HIGH NOON SHOW... (HTTP://ARTSEXTRACT.COM P=2689) 2 May 2014



MADISON ARTIST LIBBY ROSA ON HER GALLERY NIGHT SHOW, (P=2682) ([HTTP://ARTSEXTRACT.COM P=2682](http://artsextract.com/?p=2682))

-hop enjoy a healthier presence in the city, and by “healthier presence” I mean not having to treat hip-hop as some kind of bullshit problem issue merely because a few foolish individuals occasionally start fights while attending hip-hop shows. It’s a tiresome cycle and I applaud the artists, community members, and officials who are trying to break it. That said, I couldn’t help but roll my eyes at a few questions on the survey, which reveal that even the well-intentioned among us treat hip-hop in a loaded way.

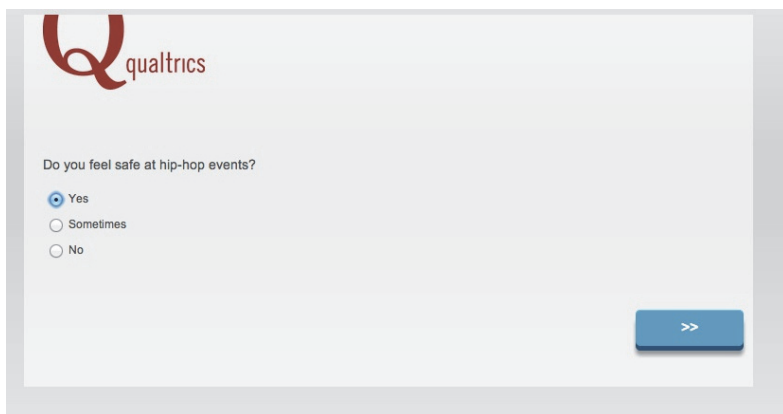
There’s this question:



(<http://ArtsExtract.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/hhsurvey2.png>)

“Are you offended by foul language at hip-hop shows?” Answer choices: yes/no. Um, we’re adults and if we’re even *having* this conversation then presumably we know that there are swears in this world and that they happen in hip-hop at times and that’s just life. We know that hip-hop acts range from no profanity to delightful torrents of it, just as in most genres. Why is this even a question?

There’s also this question:



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“Do you feel safe at hip-hop events?” Answer choices: yes/sometimes/no. Now, granted, at some of the hip-hop shows where violence has occurred in recent years, there have been legitimate questions as to whether the promoter handled security well. But it’s still a skewed-sounding question, and it gets us back to this insane fallacy in which the musical or cultural aspect of a hip-hop event is somehow more linked to possible violence than it would be at any other kind of show. I mean, I’ve seen people get thrown out of a Pelican show for fighting, but nobody asked me whether I felt safe at post-rock shows, because that would be a stupid question. I admittedly felt a bit unsafe when DMC played at Taste of Madison last year, but only because of the plethora of horrid food around me. So, OK, there is a legit concern embedded in this question, but it does reinforce the deep-seated problems with this whole debate. And just a small adjustment would make this question a lot more fruitful, for instance, an open-ended question like “What could be done to make your experiences at hip-hop shows in Madison more comfortable and enjoyable?” That way, people could bring up any safety concerns and offer constructive suggestions. Or just broaden the question: “Do you feel safe at Madison music events generally?”

The people involved in this committee are in it to help, so I realize they’re not trying to be offensive or reductive. One of the artists on the ad hoc subcommittee, Anthony Lamarr, makes music with local MCs, and MAC member and MMI Associate Dean told Isthmus last year (<http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=39384>) that we need “a concerted effort to take the villainy out of the music.” But even setting that aside, and even admitting that I’m overreacting to questions that we can’t avoid asking in *some* form, these questions make the survey feel clumsy and devoid of nuance, and make for an awkward way to bring more people into the conversation. And at worst, it may make hip-hop artists and audiences feel even more misunderstood, scapegoated, and left out of a conversation that’s supposed to be about them.

Still, this isn’t reason enough to dismiss the survey or this effort in general. The goal is to “determine if there are barriers for hip hop artists or audiences in Madison,” says City of Madison Arts Program Administrator Karin Wolf. “When the survey is finished and MMI puts together the results, it is my understanding that they will share that with MAC and MAC may use their findings to help them develop recommendations for the Mayor’s Office and Common Council.” Of course, we know there are barriers and that city government can be a bit slow when it comes to having frank discussions about the arts, but there’s a lot we can learn here going forward. Let’s also be careful not to trip the conversation up with poorly chosen words.

[Correction added 2/21/14: Initially this post erroneously referred to the Chris Taylor on the MAC as State Rep. Chris Taylor. It has been changed to reflect that the MAC member named Chris Taylor is not the legislator but an Associate Dean at MMI.]

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