

# Diversity still rules at TPF

## Head-Roc, rocks the stage at the 30th Festival

PHOTOS AND STORY  
BY JAMES K. SANBORN

When Bob Dylan went electric at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, folk-traditionalists jeered and booed him off stage. More than 40 years later Head-Roc, Takoma Park resident and political hip-hop artist, was met by a very different crowd at the 30th Takoma Park Folk Festival.

After a half-hour set that touched on issues ranging from racism to the Iraq war and pleaded with the audience to radicalize politics by rejecting Democrats

Adler said there was initially some debate but nothing he would classify as resistance.

The primary concern surrounded the interpretation of 'live performance' which is at the very heart of folk music and the festival. Even dance instructors at the festival are required to teach with live instrumentation rather than pre-recorded music.

Under consideration were eight to 10 hip-hop artists Adler said, but Storm the Unpredictable - an artist who performed last year - and Head-Roc best fit the

artists. He described this year's experience as positive and said, if invited back, he will return.

Although a departure from what is traditionally considered folk music, Larson said the hip-hop performers they selected follow in its tradition through their emphasis on political content and storytelling.

Head-Roc described his brand of hip-hop as politically and socially conscious music intended to make people think.

"I don't contribute to that machine", he said of the commercial music industry



if they are true to the folk tradition in their content and emphasis on live performance.

The festival is constructed in an organic way which allows it to be ever changing, he said. Members of the community shape its content. All it takes is a volunteer with an idea and a lot of energy to bring new genres into the mix.

"Above all, we want a music and arts event that brings the community together", Adler said, stressing the equal importance of the arts, crafts and community tabling along side musical performances.

The diversity Hip-hop adds seems to be helping. Typical festival attendants have included fans of folk music and local families looking for a place to take their children on a Sunday. That left out what Adler described as a third younger segment of the community which, before the incorporation of hip-hop, may have been uninterested or unaware of the festival.

Days after the 30th festival ended, the all-volunteer festival staff continues their labor of love, working to compose a music



and Republicans alike, he was mobbed by young fans vying for autographs.

This is only the second year the festival has incorporated hip-hop. Head-Roc's performance was met with enthusiasm, thus opening a new chapter in the festival's history.

"When defining folk music in the past we had always considered 'all acoustic' as a minimum criterion, but naturally folk music changes over time", said Pam Larson, co-chair of the festival's Program Committee charged with selecting performers.

"It seems like we are keeping up with the times and reaching out to other audiences", she said of hip-hop's recent addition.

Kevin Adler, festival chairman, credited Derek Hill of the Program Committee with the idea to incorporate hip-hop since last year.

According to Adler, when Hill first made the proposition he said folk music meant the music folks are making. Over time, he argued, that had come to include hip-hop.

bill when considering attributes of live performance and the content and message of their music.

Just rapping over multiple recorded tracks wasn't enough Adler said. For this reason, other performers did not make the cut.

Head-Roc, however, incorporated all aspects of folk performance said Larson. Those include storytelling, dance, and live instrumentation through the use of the turn table as an instrument.

Head-Roc, who considered performing at last year's festival, said he met some resistance because of the emphasis on live instrumentation. He did not make the cut but Storm did.

Head-Roc, who has played other festivals for more than 10 years, did not take this as a snub. In fact, he attended last year's festival and said he enjoyed it so much he was excited when asked to perform this year.

"I love doing festivals", he said adding that they are great forums for independent



which he feels lacks meaningful substance. "I can defend the music I do without a problem. It's about creating dialogue not making people comfortable. I make information-music".

According to Adler, hip-hop could pave the way for other forms of electronic music

CD of selected performances.

"Normally we are now sending out thank you notes and are almost done", Adler said, but he hopes this year's extra effort to produce a CD will, "add permanence to this milestone event".