

Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest



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1. Rapper Substantial rocks at the outdoor festival.
2. Singer Keisha "CrY" Prince with Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander.
Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman
3. Singer Chaquis Maliq.
Photo by hadijah Ali-Coleman
4. Soul singer Jua.
Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman
5. Rapper Cool Cee Brown performing on the Liberated Muse stage at the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest.
Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman



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6 Miss District Columbia Teen, Ivana Grace.
7 A DC metro father and his family at the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest.
Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman
8 Deidre Gantt of the Ward 7 Arts Collaborative hosting the Spoken Word segment of the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest, "Flowing by the River."
Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman



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northeast flair

The Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

If you based your opinion about the East of the River area solely on morning news coverage carried by the big media stations, chances are you would believe that all evening activity in the area involved gun shootings and criminal activity. Rarely do the positive and normal everyday activities make the mainstream media's headline news. Luckily, news sensationalism did not deter over 500 people from visiting Marvin Gaye Park, located in Northeast on Division Avenue, to attend the first-ever Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest on July 26. The all-day music festival began at 11 a.m. and continued into the evening until 8 p.m.

Many were surprised that the organizing group, Liberated Muse Productions, chose Marvin Gaye Park for the event. The park, formerly named Watts-Branch Park, has been dubbed "Needle Park" in recent years because of its high presence of drug users and recovering addicts. Festival Director Maceo Thomas, a realtor and writer who lives in Southeast less than 10 minutes away from the park, commented that the park's history played an important role in the decision to select it as the location.

"Marvin Gaye Park is a beautiful park site despite its history, and its turnaround is indicative of the spirit of the area. It's all about renewal and community building and growing," said Thomas. "It's time people who live in the [Deanwood] area surrounding the park and those from other parts of DC and the metro area realize that Marvin Gaye Park is a viable site for prominent events."

The all-day music festival boasted 19 music acts that ranged from neo-soul music and jazz to organic hip-hop backed by live instruments. Rapper Cool Cee Brown, a native of the Brentwood area in Northeast was one of the performers who dazzled the crowd during his midday performance that included a rendition of his male anthem "Because."

"He was one of my favorite acts," said one 20-something female festival-goer who traveled from Prince George's County to attend the fest. She and others who enjoyed Brown's performance learned of the insightful rapper by reading his daily blog (www.coolceebrown.blogspot.com). In his blog, he shares entertaining anecdotes about his dating life and daily interactions with people.

Local Celebrities, Community Organizations & Small Business Owners

The festival had a very large turnout of nonprofits such as Interstages, World, Life and Beats, Child Youth Investment Trust Corporation, Higher Achievement, Planned Parenthood and the Peace Corp. The organizations engaged festival-goers in activities

ranging from face painting to chess.

The newly crowned Miss District of Columbia Teen, Ivana Grace, was present to meet and greet folk as was Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander who made a grand entrance in a monster truck. At-Large Councilmember Kwame Brown and candidates for DC Council Michael Brown and Villareal Johnson had people on site campaigning for them as well.

Small-business owners abounded at the festival which was created with the intention to connect festival-goers with products, services and entertainment geared toward a young professional market. Mimi's Boutique Mix, LNB Interior Design, Veg to Go and BK's Hot Spot were just a few of the businesses who were on site to promote and sell their wares.

In addition to performing for the crowd, performers had their CDs on sale in the festival's Music Marketplace. Manned by festival volunteers Stephan Cox, Keba Sandidge and Nakisha McLaurin, the marketplace offered a variety of CDs, books and paraphernalia from up-and-coming authors such as poet Marquita Siler, urban sci-fi writer Robert Johnson and community activist Devin Walker and vocalists Rogiers, Chaquis Maliq and the popular hip-hop MC Substantial. Substantial ended the day as the highest seller of his music.

"He's really talented, but he's fine most of all," said one female fan of Substantial who asked to remain anonymous.

Others were enamored with all of the aspects of the festival and didn't hesitate to let festival organizers know.

"I had such a great time at the Hip Hop Soul Fest, [the organizers] really should be proud," said Nia McLean. "I think it was awesome, and I am already looking forward to next year."

Was the Fest a Success?

With planning beginning as late as April of this year and with no startup money, grant or corporate support, the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest was funded by vendor fees and sales of the festival's compilation CD. Thomas is grateful for the number of vendors, performers and nonprofits who chose to participate and the in-kind donations from media outlets like East of the River and the Washington Informer for advertisement. Because of public support, Thomas believes that the festival was a success.

"This was our first effort, and we did it," he said. "We created a platform for musicians from DC, we created an arts venue in an area that is often overlooked, and we linked businesses and community organizations with their audience. Yes, the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest was a success." ★

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