



Yahkhayal Yashra'al and Howard Shelton trade rhymes during a recent 775 Street Cypher in downtown Reno.

PHOTO/MARK EARNEST

Free style

775 Street Cyphers

On a recent summer night near the

Space Whale sculpture in downtown Reno, a group of rappers were passing rhymes around while a handful of hip-hop fans watched. At one point, a recent high school grad named Howard Shelton (a.k.a. Low Key) did a freestyle, followed closely by a more seasoned MC named Yahkhayal Yashra'al (a.k.a. Mr. Slim).

This is what 775 Street Cyphers is all about. Organized by two longtime hip-hop musicians, Jacob Robinson (rapper Pisco One) and Lonny Noble (DJ Morefiend), the cyphers are spontaneous performances as gritty and infectious as the earliest days of hip hop, but with modern style well represented.

The cyphers attracted Yashra'al soon after he moved from Michigan to Reno four months ago. He said he's been an MC all his life and loves what the cyphers are doing to build community.

"It brings the best out of you, especially when we all get together," Yashra'al said. "I mean, look at us. You probably wouldn't see none of us hanging out together, but when it comes to hip-hop, look at what we can do."

He was very encouraging of Shelton, age 18, who has been rapping for three years and in public for just one.

"The main thing that gets me out here is the thrill I get," Shelton said. "I feel such an adrenaline rush but, like, mixed with anxiety. But, when I can control that anxiety, I just have a blast and have more fun with it."

Both the cyphers and its offshoot—an 18-and-up open mic at The Rack every first Tuesday of the month—thrive on this dichotomy of youth and experience, but side by side and supportive.

"For the open mic, it starts at 8 p.m. with the instrumentals and then goes till 11

and never stops—it's just a constant flow," said Dan Hubbard, owner of One Vision Entertainment. That production company puts on the open mic with Robinson and Noble, who work for One Vision as production managers.

"It's more of an open format instead of a structure," Noble said of both events. "Everyone can participate and share between one another, so if they want to do something they've been wanting to practice in front of people, this is a way from them to have the courage to do that and not be judged or looked down upon."

"Everyone really respects each other, respects the next MC," Robinson said. Later on, he added that "when I was 18, I never had anything like this. I was sitting in the Sparks High School bathroom trying to write raps and wondering how to do this."

The open mic format has been missing from Reno for more than four years, when the cypher duo hosted one at the former Rueben's club. The Street Cyphers, though, just started earlier this year, and they have roots in the earliest days of hip-hop in '70s New York.

"That's how it started: guys on the corner rapping to each other," said Robinson.

The cyphers sometimes feature breakdancing and graffiti art, too. That open policy and encouragement is a part of what makes the overall Reno resurgence of hip-hop tick.

"I'm starting to see a lot more new faces in the community," Noble said. "A lot more kids are just being inspired by social media, or maybe their classmates, or maybe they see us on the streets doing what we are doing. It's nice to see the next generation wanting to be involved." □

The next open mic is from 8–11 p.m. on Oct. 1 at The Rack, 111 N. Virginia St. Learn more about these events at facebook.com/renohiphopenmic or join the group: facebook.com/groups/775streetcypher.

RENO NV

OFFBEAT

MUSIC FESTIVAL

2019

“STAY & PLAY”

MULTIVENUE • 100+ PERFORMANCES

OCTOBER 3-5

TICKETS ON SALE

OFFBEATRENO.COM

OUR SPONSORS

10TORR PEP Frank future kind WNL L&M ACCESS

Reno Tahoe Rubik Reno Sparks Tahoe Reno News & Review c2studios