

Kosher rap: Y-Love. Y not?

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HE'S dodged bullets on the street and his mother died of a cocaine overdose when he was 26, but there ain't nothing gangster about Y-Love's rap - it's all Kosher.

Paving the way for a path not yet trodden, New York's only known black ultra-Orthodox Jewish hip-hopper has been shaking up the scene in America, spitting faith-based rhymes in a mixture of English, Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish.

"I hope that Jewish hip-hop will be a genre, because let's be realistic: three Christian categories in the Grammy awards and we can't even get one?" said 29-year-old Y-Love, who heads to the East Brunswick Club this week.

Born to Christian parents - a Puerto Rican mother and an Ethiopian father, who died of cancer when he was 15 - Yitz Jordon's faith has been forged in hardship.

"I went to a funeral every six weeks in 2004 for friends overdosing on drugs, drunk-driving, and was shot at in high school for 'acting too white'," he said.

"The combination of these events would make one think I would not choose Torah as the lifestyle that I would want to live."

But choose he did. Drawn to Judaism as a child, Jordon dropped out of college at 21 and moved to the Jewish stronghold of Brooklyn where he converted. "The insidious lie that "Jew equals white" is something which I consider myself diametrically opposed to ... and the idea that one can (and will) find God everywhere from the Western Wall to the mp3 player is something else which I think can save modern religion."

An early devotee to heavy metal and punk rock, Y-Love's hook up to hip-hop surprisingly didn't happen in New York, but in yeshiva in Jerusalem, when he and a fellow hip-hop loving student began memorizing Talmudic texts via rap.

"Hip-hop was not a new thing to me - I grew up in Baltimore, the birthplace of club music - but the way that the Scriptures came to life when put to a sick beat was something that I could not just dismiss.

"Music is - and Scripture and Talmud both attest to this - the ideal way to learn a complex set of cases is when your mind connects to something you enjoy, when your soul and heart are involved the mind works better. "Hip-hop is not an exception - the lyrical style of hip-hop lends itself to covering large amounts of text and ideas in small amounts of time."

Even though his religion is overt, Jordan's combination of ethereal scripture with gritty social consciousness has street cred with the hip-hop elite. Hip-hop magazines XXL pronounced his music "kosher", and URB said he was "making listeners check themselves before they spiritually wreck themselves".

As well as his gig, Y-Love will spread the word at a workshop this week in Fitzroy with 30 young MCs, vocalists, and beatmakers from diverse cultural backgrounds as part of Multicultural Arts Victoria's Fresh programme.

"I hope that the hip-hop industry in general will realize that all negative envelopes have been pushed," he said.

"Eminem killed his ex-wife in a track which featured her blood gurgling up through her throat. "Hip-hop needs to move in a different, more positive direction."

Y-Love plays the East Brunswick club on Saturday (June 13). Bookings on eastbrunswickclub.com

<http://www.wherelive.com.au>

