

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Group of Talented IEKHS Students To Unveil 'Conscious Hip Hop' Video at St. Thomas Gala on Wednesday

Art / **Published On September 03, 2019 11:50 PM /**

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Flightz. Heat Wave. Journey. Lyrical.

Remember these names. They are four budding producers, songwriters, vocalists, choreographers -- young artists that any parent, teacher or friend, anywhere in world would be extraordinarily proud of. And it just so happens they are four of our own.

The Ivanna Eudora Kean High School students were the first to participate in a new nonprofit, youth program called 12 Miles Up (It's the stratosphere. No storms up there.

Just peace and calm). Their work will premiere for a St. Thomas audience on Wednesday, Sept. 4, at the 12 Miles Up Video Release Gala. The event will feature a Red Carpet photo shoot for the video stars from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. at the Rotary Club East of St. Thomas, located in the upper level of the Red Hook Plaza.

If you want to attend, RSVP with Marilyn Holmes at 340-334-9573. Attire is island elegant. Starting at 7 p.m., attendees will have a chance to learn about the program, meet the students, and watch the video drop.

The 12 Miles Up program was created by IEKHS english teacher Monique Schmidt, and is supported by Rotary East of St. Thomas, the 521 Studios on St. Thomas and Earthtone Entertainment. The program is designed to “harness the power of youth culture and youth voices” to create positive change in the Virgin Islands.



Lyrical and Heat Wave

Seventeen-year-old Reynoldo Burley, who goes by Heat Wave, 16-year-old Tamera Laurent (Lyrical), Jade Durrant (Journey), 16-years-old, and Dayaan Foster (Flightz), also 16, wrote, produced and choreographed the 12 Miles Up song and music video that is refreshing in its awareness and solutions-seeking insights into the Virgin Islands community.

Over four weeks this summer, the students learned about conflict resolution through the 12 Miles Up program. They then wrote an original song and created a music video to spark thought, conversation and change in the territory. The aim is to uplift students academically, culturally and spiritually, while promoting self-expression and conflict resolution through creation of conscious hip hop.

"We focused on community awareness, what is happening in our community in the USVI," said Heat Wave, who was the primary songwriter for the "12 Miles Up." The song is, in part, about solving problems. There are many ways to come to a problem. There is not just one. ... So think. Think before you do something."



Journey and Flightz

When IEKHS's Ms. Schmidt arrived in the territory about four years ago — she had taught in Washington DC public schools, on Native American reservations and in war-torn Rwanda — she had heard some not so stellar stories about the school system in the V.I. What she found, instead, were “super-talented students. ... The students ... there is so much natural talent here. We need programs like 12 Miles Up to change perspectives, and change community perspectives of students.... They have so much potential, so much talent right here.”

Merle Fenton of the 521 Studios, where the song was recorded, said she most appreciates that Journey, Flightz, Lyrical and Heat Wave found a program that lent itself to their artistic dreams and talents. “There are a lot of youth on this island that don't have that opportunity,” Ms. Fenton said.

“One of the biggest things that I learned through this program is that it only really takes one person to make a change in our community,” Jade said. “What's very important is that when you have people who believe in you and believe in what you want to do, it makes everything easier.”



Lyrical

Danta Warren, head of Earthtone Entertainment, volunteered his time to produce the 12 Miles Up video and to, otherwise, offer counsel about the music industry. "When I saw these kids and their passion for their music, I wanted to be a part of it, lend some advice and show them how they can do this on their own and stay in control of their destiny. ... I have a passion of music. When I see kids who want to learn about the business, who are passionate about the business ... I just want to help."



Heat Wave

Architect Jerryn McCray, a member of the 12 Miles Up board of directors, agreed. “The 12 Miles Up students will hopefully leverage their experience with music production to gain access to future educational opportunities in digital media,” he said. “Hip hop has grown to be recognized as a common vernacular between black people of a certain age bracket. I was raised in the height of what’s now considered ‘Old School.’ Still, our students’ themes are very familiar and translate very clearly across generations. It’s particularly refreshing to hear a local musical overlay to their sound.”

A preview of the 12 Miles Up music video is available on this YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1vccTvygMc