Artist Spotlight

Lyrispect tells where she gets her inspiration

By Dana L. Oliver

When did you fall in love with spoken word?

I fell in love with spoken-word almost instantly. I was about sixteen in high school at Baltimore School for the Arts. A friend introduced me to this sista who was a spoken-word artist and we became good friends right away. She was slightly older, so by being around her I think I started to subconsciously soak up everything that she did/was into. She loved hip hop, so I started watching rap city. And here I am, page-poet/writer/actress, all my life (since I was like six, seriously) wanting to get on the mic. Between hearing her and having her take me to open mics and see her spit, she definitely wet my appetite for it. She showed me the ropes, told me never to do a piece until it was memorized and challenged me constantly, to be better than I was. She played the devil's advocate. She kinda wound me up and turned me loose.

Where did the name "Lyrispect" come from?

I wrote up a proposal for an event that would showcase the best lyrical talent that the Baltimore School for the Arts had to offer. I was trying to think of a title for the event that would really embody the diversity of the talent in the show. Lyri-verb, Verbi-what, Lyri-Spect! Eureka! A Lyrical Spectrum showing lyrical aspects with lyrical respect. Lyri...spect. Come see the Lyrics. Ok, well the powers that be passed on my idea because insularity kept them from seeing my vision. So I decided to take on the name myself. I had worked for it, and it was too good to go to waste.

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How would you define your art?

I would say that my art, like my love, is amorphous. There is lyricism, realism, idealism, theater, spontaneity, humor, profundity beautiful sadness, sensuality, ambiguity and its come from all across the world, from every person I've ever known, from every emotion I've ever felt, every book I've ever read, every conversation I've ever had, it will be inherently Me. I give birth every time I open my mouth.

Who are some of the individuals who have influenced you?

The poet I knew when I was a kid, Unique, the Heaven Sent had a lot to do with my beginnings, my approach to live art and whether she knows it or not she really readied me for the world, according to spoken word. She was like my Sensei.

Clearly, Jessica Care Moore has much to do with getting me off the spoken word ground and getting me to writing my own live pieces. I have a deep and profound admiration and adoration for Saul Williams. He is not from here/earth and I love it because neither am I. If I could just live inside his mind and make love to his imagination all day, I would. But for now, I'll just settle for a CD, a book and a hot toddy.

There are other poets that I have the utmost revere for like Sonia Sanchez, whose grace and skill and mastery leaves me humbled in her presence and Amiri Baraka, raw and pure and powerful.

Even more so than individuals, I am influenced by music and life. Life is all the inspiration you need to make art. One of my favorite artists of all time is Me'shell N'degeocello because she's a poet for real, unabashed, unapologetic, social, political, spiritual and celebratory love and life. I love that, it's so refreshing.

As a Renaissance woman--actress, lyricist, and poet--which art form tends to move you the most?

The language moves me, and that's all of me. If I had to choose, I mean really choose, I would have to say I love being a lyricist because language is so powerful if handled properly. I have fun playing with words and metaphors. When I am approaching a piece, one of the things I think about is how I can make last week's spaghetti taste like a gourmet meal, better yet how can I make it taste like soul food? Many artists are talking about the same thing in the same way, and these are relevant issues. But how can I bring it to you in such a way that its gonna make you wanna get off your ass and be forced to move, be forced to swallow your apathy and feel, to think about it in such a way that there's no going back? Writing is definitely where it's at, but actually getting to speak it, to relay it, to be felt and change minds and opinions, to be that catalyst... it is the greatest gift.

What are three words that illustrate Lyrispect?

Three words that illustrate "Lyrispect"... Explosive, Underestimated, Love.