

Chicago DJ changes the sound of Gospel skating

By Saletta Coleman

Joe Bowen's parents often hosted Gospel skate parties when he was a kid. They were both church youth directors back in the early 1980s. Bowen recalled, "I was about 3 years old when I went to my first Gospel skate party at a rink and I just grew up listening to the music. I got my first session when I was 18 years old at Glenwood Roller Rink (in Chicago). I've played Gospel Night on Saturdays for more than 11 years."

Rinks would benefit from offering a Gospel Night because it is one of the last TRUE family sessions. In some areas of the country, teen nights and regular sets can breed issues and problems that normally don't take place during a Gospel Night session. The music lends itself to positive things; you don't have to worry about having "clean" versions of a song or having other negative content. You are not likely to have a fight on your Gospel Night.

In regard to parents of teens, Bowen shared, "When parents

attend some teen sessions, I've noticed that they sit there often in a blank stare because they might not like the music or they aren't interacting with their kids. As you know, a lot of parents just drop the kids off to a teen night because only the kids like the music." Not so with a family Gospel Night.

Clennyanna is a 9-year-old who has been skating since she was 6. Tonight she is at the rink with her dad and three cousins. "It's better than R&B because there are no bad words. I had my 8th birthday party during Gospel Night." She added, "Joe is the best DJ because he makes it fun and plays fast music."

Eight-year-old Kerston Grayson skates with her dad at two Chicago area Gospel sessions. "I go to Dr. King Center and Glenwood. I love it because I get to hang out with my family and DJ Joe plays everything I like."

On the subject of session labels, I spoke with Gospel DJ Will Green, 49, also of Chicago. Green has skated Gospel sessions in Detroit, Atlanta, Dallas and Las Vegas.



Kids love Joe's Saturday Night Gospel Skate because they get to skate with their parents, cousins and other friends.

"Gospel and Christian Night is the exact same thing," Green said.

In some cities this session called Hallelujah Night - a big no, no. Using Gospel and Christian Night is okay, but you can be even more creative. My session at USA's MLK Skating & Bowling Center has been themed "The Good Life" - an all ages, family session that plays Gospel music. Doesn't a session marketed as "Your ticket to the Good Life" sound inviting?

"I want rink owners with hip-hop and R&B sessions to consider offering a Gospel Night," challenged Green. "Gospel music has such a soulful beat. Today's recording artists in this genre produce sounds that mirror the instrumental patterns in the R&B music that's popular with young people. They

artist Aaron Sledge's song *Closer to You* plays sweet throughout the rink. I had never heard of the artist or song but I thought the sound compared to that of any TOP 40 Ne-Yo, Usher or Chris Brown R&B record I would hear at a teen or adult night session.

Green explained how the DJ, as well as the music he plays, can make a big change in a rink's numbers. "Joe's timing was perfect because we weren't drawing kids anymore. Joe's playbook of hip-hop and R&B instrumentals tied to Gospel beats is great. Songs like Too Short's *Blow the Whistle* isn't something you would expect to hear on Gospel Night - but take the instrumental music to that song and mix-in a Kirk Franklin song that has the right BPM (beats per minute for

Funtastic Novelties, Inc.

Children's toys, prizes, glow products, and more!

BRIGHT IDEAS...

THAT STICK.

4515 Industrial Road Fort Wayne, IN 46825

800-348-0888 sales@funnov.com

www.funtasticnovelties.com



DJ Joe Bowen mixes hip-hop and R&B instrumentals with Gospel for a sweet beat.

do it to sell records, of course, but because of guys like Joe Bowen - it's attracted skaters of all ages to Gospel Night."

As I was speaking with Green about beats and sounds, Bowen announced a backwards skate to a crowd of about 150 guests. Gospel

us non-dj's) and it's like ... whoa! This generation needs that element while we keep it all positive."

Bowen recalled, "I was the first DJ to take a Gospel artist like Deitrick Haddon and hip-hop artist like Juvenile and blend them together using their instrumental recordings.

I was attending a Gospel music festival and was in a room full of Gospel recording artists. The room just sort of stopped. They were surprised and shocked at the combination and really responded to it. I observed that my audience in the rink was young adults and teens so I wanted to change the dynamic of my sessions."

Chicago-based recording artists like Kanye West, Keezo Kane, DMillz and others graduated from Gospel Night sets into adult nights that they were too young to attend. "I play Gospel hip-hop because kids still come to the DJ booth asking for the Li'l Wayne and other rap artists. 'Its Gospel Night,' I tell them, but I found a way to give them the same beat with a good message," Bowen said.

How can operators play a part in helping to promote their Gospel sessions? Bowen noted, "We have seen as few as 40 people to 240 people at our Gospel sessions. You need three factors for a success: right day, right time and the right DJ. With specialty sets and adult sessions, you just can't turn on music. Their ear is more trained and they have preferences if they've come seeking that special session type." In essence, operators have to look for someone who *really knows*



Adults 'totally connect' with DJ Joe (center) and his Gospel Sessions.

music; for a Gospel DJ it is their ministry.

Monte Rollerson, 53, is a youth pastor. "I would encourage owners to identify churches in their community with large youth populations and host an open house night for them. If I were a hard-sell pastor you could win me over with great fundraising opportunities," Rollerson smiled.

Leo White, 40, of St. Louis has been skating Gospel for five years. "When I heard Joe down in Tampa last year during the Gospel brunch skate at the Soul Roll Invitational, I was hooked. I couldn't believe

his sound. I totally connected to the music. In St. Louis we have 3 Gospel sessions between Skate King and Coachlite. We've invited Joe to play for us twice now and we can't wait to have him play for us again."

Bowen suggested, "Rink owners can't be afraid of Gospel Night. They have to be creative. Particularly in your urban markets; use a prime time spot like St. Louis rinks do with their 7-11p.m. and 11p.m.-2a.m. Friday night family skate."

As for the future of Gospel skating: "I would love to see this thing grow nationwide. I have always

been local DJ, but I personally had an eye opening experience after being invited to play in Tampa for this community of traveling adult skaters last year," shared Bowen. "These folks were shocked; surprised that Christian music could sound and move them on the skate floor like their east and west coast music. I am determined to see that this sound is heard in rinks because all these style skaters and families looking for a clean alternative could move to and hear my spin on this new genre of positive living music."

Joe Bowen plays Gospel sessions at Glenwood Roller Rink, Rich City Skate, The Rink and MLK Skating & Bowling Center in Chicago. Request a FREE sample of Joe's music by just mentioning this Rinksider feature. For booking information call 773-817-9584 or email digitaldjjoe@yahoo.com. Make him a friend on myspace at myspace.com/djjoebowen

Saletta Coleman is Sales & Marketing Manager for USA's MLK Skating & Bowling Center in Chicago. Her website GetYourSk8On.com also serves as host of the annual Soul Roll Invitational Skate Jam in Tampa, Fla. Bowen will be spinning at the event, which take place January 15-19 2009. Coleman can be reached at 727-564-3357.

New & Improved Design & Performance for 2008!

CHICAGO SKATES
CREATING FUN FOR KIDS & ADULTS SINCE 1904

AVAILABLE THROUGH SOUTHEASTERN SKATE SUPPLY (GEORGIA & VIRGINIA)
RC SPORTS • MIDWEST SKATE • WESTERN SKATE • NATIONAL SKATE

National Sporting Goods, 376 Hollywood Ave, Fairfield NJ 07004, TEL: 973-779-2323, FAX: 973-779-0084, EMAIL: skater@chicaguskates.com