

## Skateboarders on the Ground, Bikers in the Air, Rappers at the Mike



Gabriele Stabile for The New York Times

Hollywood Holt, a Chicago rapper, rallied the distracted audience at the Afro-Punk Festival. By JON CARAMANICA

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On Monday, Day 4 of the Fourth Annual Afro-Punk Festival, the skateboarders made the most noise. Mostly small and sinewy, of varying races, unhelmeted and riding uniformly weathered boards, they moved in a swarm around the skate park in the parking lot across the street from the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#), performing the occasional trick, but mostly scooting around aimlessly, grateful for a place to while away the evening.

That the music on Monday night seemed an afterthought was no slight to the lineup, a collection of young rappers — Shala., Proton and Hollywood Holt — with eccentric style and a good sense of humor (which they needed, given how tough it was to draw attention away from the extreme sports taking place just a few feet away).

This has been the biggest Afro-Punk Festival yet — 10 days, 40 bands, 15 films — and growth has taken its toll. Early Afro-Punk events in previous years were always notably diverse in sound, and “Afro-Punk” the documentary, which has been making the film festival rounds for years and was released on DVD in 2006, features

artists from several musical backgrounds.

This one is even more varied, but a bigger umbrella leaves more room for huddling. The lineups this year have been segmented perhaps a little too neatly by category: rappers were mostly relegated to Sunday and Monday nights; Tuesday’s lineup tended toward hardcore, metal and punk; and bands featuring women dominate the bill this Friday night. For a festival that thrives on encouraging difference, these arrangements feel rigid.

So there was little room for surprise on Monday, especially given the thin, distracted crowd. Shala., from Chicago, echoed the festival’s overall call for inclusion, introducing “I Ain’t Goin,” a grinding electro-industrial number, by bemoaning his alienation from hip-hop’s mainstream.

“I can’t see myself,” he complained. “I can’t see my sisters.” After “The Great Chicago Winter,” an upbeat ode to cocaine, he told those who were paying attention: “This is what we do. We go around the country and we bother you.”

Proton, an effortlessly genial Atlanta duo, had better luck, with a combination of levity and formalism. “Mighty Cold”

was sharp and bruising, and “Magazine Dreamz” was appealingly salacious, name-dropping an unexpected range of crush-worthy women, from the reality television starlet Kim Kardashian to the alternative singer Santogold. ([Michelle Obama](#) was mentioned too, though less favorably.)

The crowd laughed, but retained its indifference. Hollywood Holt, an indefatigable rapper from Chicago who closed the show, was determined to bridge the gap. With clever Clipse samples (“Caked Up”), beats influenced by his hometown’s native juke music (“Bang That”) and nods to Chicago gang culture (“Swerve N Lean”) — and an absolute lack of gravity — he brought the 100 or so onlookers together for the first time all night, even jumping into the crowd to breakdance.

And the energy persisted, even afterward. Security personnel had covered up the makeshift street course with tarps, but a gaggle of kids stuck around anyway, practicing their kick-flips, waiting to be told to go home.