

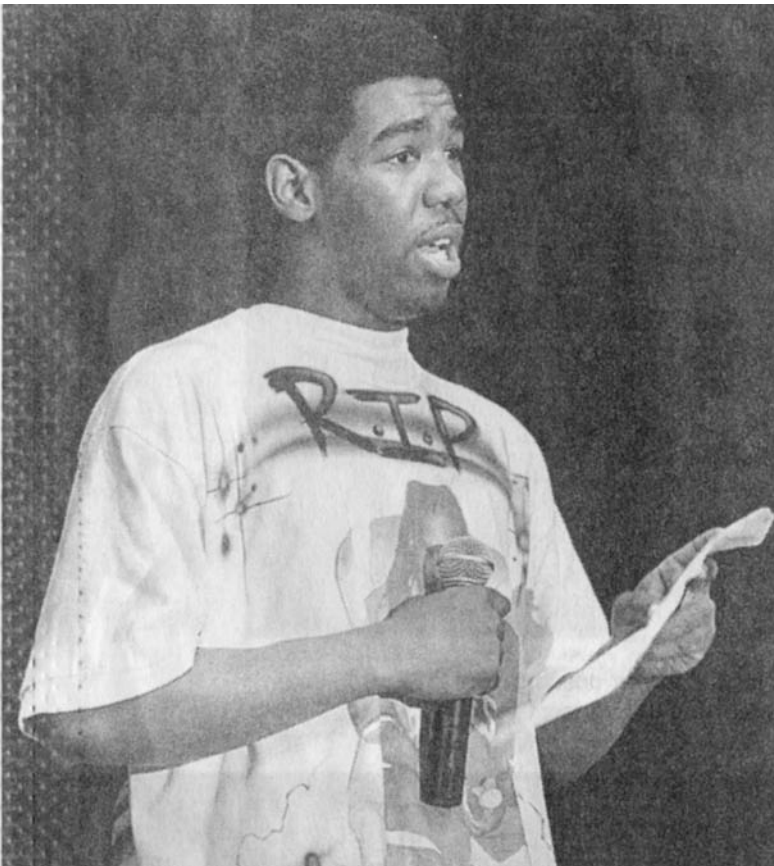
Young and talented join hands against violence

All Stars Project showcases budding stars

BY CARLY ROTHMAN Star-Ledger Staff

Tre Ace has been rapping since he was 12 years old, when his teenage neighbors brought a karaoke machine onto their porch. His first rap was called "Retaliation," and told a story about the danger of neighborhood gang violence. But Ace, who turns 21 this month, said he now "tries not to be so negative" in his raps.

On Saturday, he joined 87 other performers



Al-Tariq reads a poem of his at the talent show.



PHOTOS BY JIM PATHE/THE STAR-LEDGER

The Star-Ledger

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in an anti-violence talent show at Barringer High School. The show was sponsored by the All Stars Project, which for 25 years has provided various performance-based programs for inner city youth in New York and New Jersey.

"Because we're growing up in poor commu-



Christina Veras, 14, had the audience swaying and clapping with her rendition of Mariah Carey's "Hero."

nities where there's a lot of violence and depression, young people don't have a lot of time to have fun," said Gloria Strickland, director of the New Jersey Program of the All Stars Project.

The All Stars Talent Show Network hosts shows three times annually in Newark. Volunteers canvass neighborhoods and area malls to find performers. Everyone who auditions can participate, this year drawing performers ranging in age from 6 to 20. After the auditions, the

Michaelah Valentine, 9, performs with the Jazz Drill Team at the anti-violence youth talent show at Barringer High School. The show was sponsored by the All Stars Project, which for 25 years has provided various performance-based programs for inner city youth in New York and New Jersey.

performers attend a performance workshop to build a sense of ensemble.

"This is a talent show that is not about talent,"

Strickland said. "It's about becoming a more creative human being."

The grand prize of \$300 and a trophy went to A-Game, a dance group of high school students from Irvington. First, second, and third prizes also were given out in each of 14 categories.

At the auditions, participants were asked to write poems or stories expressing their visions for a better community. In these pieces, performers spoke out

against the recent violence in Newark, and several called directly on state and local politicians to provide them with more fun things to do after school and more safe places to do them.

Christina Veras, 14, a first-time performer whose rendition of Mariah Carey's song "Hero" had the audience swaying and clapping along, said she longed for a community "where you can go outside and not worry about what color you're wearing."

Jean Smiley McNair, director of the Jazz Drill Team in Newark, wore a jacket bearing the image of her adult daughter Sugar, who was shot and killed by her boyfriend in January. McNair said she has been organizing local drill teams for more than 35 years to help keep girls off the streets.

"Drug dealers recruit kids, and I recruit kids too," she said.

The performers' statements were compiled into a booklet that was distributed to audience members on Saturday. When mayor-elect

A SELECTION OF STUDENT'S POEMS

Following page

Cory Booker stopped by to applaud the performers, Strickland presented him with his very own copy.

"Check this out to see what young people want," she said. "It appears they're asking a little bit of you."



Leann Martin sings at the show.

Children's Letters and poems

Dear Cory Booker,

Cory Booker, I wanted to know if you as the mayor can help in the streets so the kids can have a better place to live. It's hard for kids growing up right now because we do not feel safe in the street enough to be able to play or walk to the store or even get a seat on our porch. And us as kids should be able to be free with no worries. So if the streets are safe than we will be safe.

— *Saniya R., 10, Newark*

The streets is terrible
It ain't even comparable
To the others
Walking into the life of a drug dealer
You ask do I stay or do I go is the question
For the ones you know
Now days it's all about gang bangin and clips
poppin
What happen to the good old days
Where you could wear any color and not have
your body dropping.

Stop the violence
Stop the shooting
Stop the gangbanging
And all the polluting
Stop the hatin
Stop the fighting
Stop the people who love to be violent
Just stop because its ridiculous
If only you knew what my community was like
You would say the same thing....It's ridiculous!

— *Jaliah L., 14, Newark*

I wake up in the morning
With the sun shining on my face,
The birds are singing and the
Butterflies flying every place.
I look out the window to get a breath of fresh air,
oh what a view,
There's no crackhead there.
The streets are clean, if you know what I mean.
No more fussing and fighting while stores have
normal prices. We need love, hugs, and no more
drugs

To walk the streets and look professionally.
What I'm trying to say is, it's the people's duty to
make a better community.

— *Queen P., 11, Newark*

We need more things to do.
Whether it be me or you.
Like working, dancing or singing
Not all the time listening to cop cars ringing
We need to be safe and sound
Not lying on the ground

— *Brandon Y., 15, Newark*

What a better community looks like to me is no
gangs and killings and for people to have enough
sense to stop pollution.

— *Hakima W., 10, Irvington*

When I think of a better community, I think of a
community where all of the community members
are living together in harmony. A better commu-
nity would have no killings. Every person would
have mutual respect for another. There would be
no gangs or gang members and that would be be-
cause our children would all belong to caring re-
sponsible families. The community would have
no drug dealers, because the community members
would ensure by taking a strong solid opposition
to drugs in the community. All of our babies
would be given free daycare centers so that their
parents could work. A better community would
have lots of after-school programs for our youth
there by ensuring that they are not so bored that
they have nothing to do but get in trouble. We
would have youth teenage district leaders who
would sit in on council meetings to voice their in-
put thus alerting the council of problems and con-
cerns facing our youth. We would also have a
strong input from our spiritual leaders who would
attend council meetings voicing their concerns for
a better community. Finally I would have unlim-
ited assistance for our senior citizens.

— *Marie H., 17, Irvington*