



steppenwolf

PRESS RELEASE

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Steppenwolf's Traffic presents *Blues/Hip-Hop Intersection*,
a free performance in Millennium Park
July 30, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

Multi-Cultural, Multi-Generational Event Celebrates Chicago's Musical Legacy

Chicago—**Steppenwolf's Traffic Series** celebrates the rich blues legacy of Chicago and its parallels to hip-hop in *Blues/Hip-Hop Intersection*, a free, one-night-only live musical event, in partnership with Chicago Public Radio. The performance, hosted by Chicago harmonica legend **Billy Branch** and Steppenwolf's newly-appointed Producer of Cultural Intersections, **Sylvia Ewing**, plays in **Millennium Park's Jay Pritzker Pavilion**, on **Monday, July 30, 2007 at 6:30 p.m.**

Combining performance, poetry and perspective for a multi-generational audience, *Blues/Hip-Hop Intersection* is hosted by hometown harmonica hero Billy Branch and award-winning journalist Sylvia Ewing. Branch's group **The Sons of Blues** and the following Chicago-based performers will be featured: Hip Hop poet/singer **Avery R. Young**; poetry slam veterans **Kevin Coval** and **Idris Goodwin**; MC's **BeatMonstas**, **Butter**, **Itch 13**, **Sense**, **Amina Norman-Hawkins** and **FM Supreme**; vocalist **Mae Koen**; harmonicist **Russ Green**; and hip-hop artist **Ugochi**.

"Theater is an opportunity to entertain and educate and find new ways to look at the world. This is our chance to show that the Blues is a relevant vibrant art form and hip-hop is more than controversial music videos and questionable lyrics," comments co-host and director **Sylvia Ewing**

Billy Branch, Co-host and Musical Director, is an internationally recognized two-time Grammy nominee and currently sits on the Grammy Board of Governors. He is an Emmy Award winner and recipient of multiple Blues Foundation Awards. He is a blues harmonica player and has performed on over 100 records with legends like B.B. King, Muddy Waters, KoKo Taylor and Albert King. A native Chicagoan, he has brought the blues to audiences in South America, Central America, Europe, Australia and Asia. Billy formed The Sons of Blues (S.O.B.s) featuring musicians who were sons of famous blues artists. He continues to pass on the blues tradition with his Blues in the Schools programs, which he has taught in the Chicago school system for over 20 years. The City of Chicago honored the 30th Anniversary of Billy Branch and the S.O.B.'s at the 2007 Chicago Blues Festival. In addition, Branch is the University of Illinois Alumni Association's 2007 recipient of its highest honor, the Alumni Achievement Award, acknowledging his distinguished international achievement as a musician and performer.

Sylvia Ewing, Co-host and Director, is the Producer of Cultural Intersections at Steppenwolf, including the *Traffic* series. She has worked with Chicago Public Radio as a freelance producer of Town Hall meetings and other *Chicago Matters* programming since the early nineties; she also served as a producer on *Eight Forty-Eight*. She is a former producer and correspondent for *Chicago Tonight* and *Art Beat*. As a freelance journalist, she has contributed to *Chicago Parent*, *N'Digo*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* and *South*

Africa Now, as well as the radio stations WMAQ and WVON. She is a part-time professor at Columbia College Chicago.

Avery Young, hip-hop vocalist, spoken word artist, and accomplished singer, has worked with Roy Ayers and has appeared on HBO, BET, MTV and VH1 and for the past two years has been featured with Dance Africa. His style of writing and performance, labeled “Sunday Mornin’ Jook-Joint,” blends spoken word, jazz, gospel and chant. He edited *Abstractvision* and is a columnist for *Say What Magazine*, and is currently working on an album of original music. He was featured at this year’s Hip Hop Theatre Festival and is the winner of the Illinois Arts Fellowship Award.

Kevin Coval, spoken word artist, has performed on four continents in seven countries including The Parliament of World’s Religions in South Africa, The African Hip-Hop Festival in England and St. Xavier’s in India. He serves as an artistic consultant and performs on HBO’s *Def Poetry Jam*. He has contributed to *The Spoken Word Revolution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *C-SPAN* and *WBEZ*. Kevin is the co-founder of The Chicago Teen Poetry Festival and is the artistic director of Young Chicago Authors. He is the author of *Slingshots (A Hip Hop Poetica)* and advisor to *The Spoken Word Revolution: Redux*. Rick Kogan of *The Chicago Tribune* said Coval is the “voice of the new Chicago...should stand up there with the work of Carl Sandburg, and I don’t say that lightly.”

Idris Goodwin, hip-hop vocalist, spoken word, playwright, was named one of the most influential people in Chicago under 30 by *UR Magazine*. Idris is the co-founder and instructor of Hermit Arts, a Chicago-based creative collective committed to original performance work. In 2004, he was awarded a NEA/TCG Playwright in Residence grant to explore hip-hop aesthetics with Free Street Programs. Idris has been a guest lecturer at School of the Art Institute, DePaul University, Columbia College, Yale and Sarah Lawrence.

Amina Norman-Hawkins, spoken word artist, is a poet performer emcee and promoter who has been featured at venues from the Jazz Oasis to the Hot House. She is the founder of the Chicago Hip-Hop Initiative.

BeatMonstas, hip-hop vocalists, are former students of Columbia College, and include emcees Noble Dru, Nipples Tha Pimp, Diamond Back and Phashara. The group, formed in 2003, has an aggressive rap flow unlike any in today’s hip-hop culture. Their album *3rd Weapon Full Length* was released in 2005.

Butter, Butter – Hip-hop vocalist, spoken word, DJ, is a high school educator and musician who devotes his time outside of the classroom to promote young artists, writers and DJs. He has shared the stage with Donald Byrd, opened for Nikki Giovanni, facilitated community murals, recorded with Galapagos4, and competed in National Poetry Slams. His 10-piece, hip-hop band Vertikal is currently playing in the U.S. Finals of the Emergenza International Music Festival.

Itch 13, hip-hop DJ, has played numerous local venues, including the city-wide poetry slam *Louder Than A Bomb*. He is known for playing in clubs as well as flowing with poets and MCs.

Sense, hip-hop vocalist, poet, comes out of Young Chicago Authors and was a finalist in the World Crew team. The 18-year-old has performed in venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art’s Hip Hop Festival, The Lyricist Lounge and the Center for Inner City Studies.

(S.O.B.s) The Sons of Blues is Billy Branch’s band of world-class musicians and includes Minoru Maruyama on guitar, Ariyo on piano, Nick Charles on bass and Moses Rutues on drums and vocals.

Mae Koen, blues vocalist, toured with Aretha Franklin from 1997-2000, and has also appeared with Mariah Carey, Shania Twain, Gloria Estefan, Celine Dion and Carole King. Locally, she performs with the Bobby Schiff Band and the jazz group VocalPoynt.

Russ Green, harmonica and vocalist, can be heard on the Chicago Blues Harmonica Project. His first desire

was to recreate the sounds of Jimi Hendrix on guitar. Unable to afford the instrument, Green learned harmonica, and became greatly influenced by legends Sugar Blue, Billy Branch and Buddy Guy.

Ugochi, hip-hop and spoken word artist, has performed her individualized form of sound power in cities across America, as well as Paris, London and Amsterdam. Her musical reverberation, part Afrobeat and part Chi-town soul, has been coined Afro-Soul. She has been featured on WTTW and WXRT and has performed with Common, Eric Benet and John Legend. In 2001, she was selected as a finalist in HBO's *Def Poetry Jam* and performed in Dance Africa Chicago 2001. The Chicago Music Awards classified her as Best African Entertainer 2005. Her latest album, *AfriC Suttafly*, was released in 2005.

FM Supreme, hip-hop and spoken word artist, is a 17-year-old MC/poet/activist. At the age of 12, the Chicago native became the youngest member in the local rap group "Da Pak." She has worked with local organizations including Kuumba Lynx and Young Chicago Authors and has performed at venues including Hot House, Metro, Spoken Word Café, Museum of Contemporary Art, and DuSable Museum.

Located in downtown Chicago on Michigan Avenue between Randolph and Monroe Streets, the **24.5-acre Millennium Park** is an unprecedented center for world-class art, music, architecture and landscape design.

Among the park's prominent features are the Frank Gehry-designed Jay Pritzker Pavilion, the most sophisticated outdoor concert venue of its kind in the United States; the interactive Crown Fountain by Jaume Plensa; the contemporary Lurie Garden designed by the team of Kathryn Gustafson, Piet Oudolf and Robert Israel; and Anish Kapoor's hugely popular Cloud Gate sculpture.

As part of its Blockbuster Week at Millennium Park, Steppenwolf's *Traffic* Series, will present ***I Sing America*** on **Thursday, September 6, at 6:30 p.m.** The program will pair Steppenwolf Artistic Director Martha Lavey and other ensemble members with Chicago Children's Choir in poetry and song during this celebration of American citizenship and the loving and fiery conversation our country has with its artists.

For more information about Millennium Park, visit www.millenniumpark.org or call 312-742-1168.

Kraft Foods Inc. is the exclusive sponsor of *Blues/Hip-Hop Intersection* at Millennium Park. To delight the audience, Kraft is giving away samples of its popular *Country Time* "On the Go" lemonade flavor drink mix. *Country Time* is America's leading all-family lemonade.

Steppenwolf's *Traffic* series brings together artists of all disciplines and casts them as storytellers in one night only presentations on the Steppenwolf stage. *Traffic* provides an intimate and unique intersection of language, lyrics, poetry and music, creating a fresh perspective on expressing the American story. Chicago Public Radio (WBEZ, 91.5 FM) re-broadcasts the *Traffic* events as part of its partnership with Steppenwolf.

Blues Hip-Hop Intersection will be recorded for future broadcast on WBEZ, 91.5 FM.

Committed to the principle of ensemble performance through the collaboration of a company of actors, directors and playwrights, Steppenwolf Theatre Company's mission is to advance the vitality and diversity of American theater by nurturing artists, encouraging repeatable creative relationships and contributing new works to the national canon. The company, formed in 1976 by a collective of actors, is dedicated to perpetuating an ethic of mutual respect and the development of artists through on-going group work. Steppenwolf has grown into an internationally renowned company of forty-one artists whose talents include acting, directing, playwrighting, filmmaking and textual adaptation.

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