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View from a Stool

“Where ya’ll going? We’re just about to start,” says local rapper **Miki Vale** to a couple who look like they’re leaving Vale’s weekly **Bohemian Rap City** night at Kadan. The couple politely explain that they have to split but promise to come back another night.

“Oh well,” says Vale once they’re out of earshot. “I guess we better get started.”

Such is often the case at the weekly open-mic and hip-hop night at the North Park club. Vale says that sometimes it’s packed, and sometimes there’s just a few regulars looking to hone their skills on the mic. On this particular Sunday, it seems that it’ll fall into the latter category, but it doesn’t stop anyone from performing as if the place is packed. A little more than a dozen people gather around the turntables while a group of females grind, pop and take advantage of an empty dance floor.

“Tonight is the last day of Black History Month,” announces **Queen Kandi Cole**, an L.A.-based MC who performs with Cale as the group **50/50**. “So, we’re gonna do a lot of black songs.”

“Uh, yeah, we have a lot of those,” responds a chuckling Vale before both launch into the song “Black Girls Rock.”

Throughout the course of the night, about six other rappers perform over beats provided by Vale and **DJ Niomiesoulfly**. A cowboy hat, of all things, is passed around church-collection-plate-style for donations so that 50/50 can make it to South by Southwest, where they’ve been invited to play a show with **Invincible** and **Psalm One**.

“It’s hard to find places out here to perform,” a rapper named **Deen** tells me after performing on a few tracks. He moved here about three months ago from Philadelphia, where he says there are plenty of places for local MCs to spit. And who knows what’ll happen with **Bohemian Rap City**. Open-mic nights, it seems, much like the crowd on this Sunday, are gone as quickly as they arrive in San Diego. A few clubs have tried but stopped after awhile, citing problems with the crowd and weak bar sales.

But given time to grow, **Rap City** could become a go-to destination for anyone who enjoys hip-hop, whether it’s performing or listening. Judging by the talent on this night, not to mention the vast reservoir of ignored rappers in this town, it’d be a damn shame to lose this kind of thing in its infancy.

—*Seth Combs*

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