



SHERRY LAVARS/STAFF

CANADIAN Dirk "Baba" Brinkman performs at Skyline High School in Oakland on Wednesday. Brinkman recites Chaucer tales as rap songs.

Chaucer rapper puts literary works to music

By Quynh Tran
STAFF WRITER

More than 500 students from English and performing arts classes at Skyline High School were treated to a performance by hip-hop Chaucer rapper Dirk "Baba" Brinkman this week.

Brinkman, 26, put to music literary classics the "Pardoner's Tale" and the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and rhymed along.

Rappers aren't looking at classical work like Chaucer's for their material, Brinkman said, but the similarities are there.

Ancient Anglo-Saxon forms and today's rap rhythms both use

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— Dirk "Baba" Brinkman, hip-hop Chaucer rapper

verses and couplets that end in rhyme, he said, and create poetry intended for oral expressions.

"Baba's taking 14th century Chaucer and making it accessible and cool," said Chris Kelly, a

Skyline social science teacher who invited the Vancouver-based performer to the school.

Brinkman began writing his one-man show "The Rap Canterbury Tales" four years ago and since has toured around the world with a recent stop at the San Francisco Fringe Festival last fall.

"If you can translate Chaucer into rap, you can translate anything into rap," he said Wednesday.

Rap is broadening its base from New York City to everywhere, he said. "Kids around the English-speaking world have to

study Chaucer and lots of them are into rap."

One interested student was Skyline senior and rapper Gordon Battles. While some students checked their text-messages and whispered to friends, Battles listened closely to Brinkman's words.

"I think he is very creative and talented for bringing 'The Canterbury Tales' to rap," he said.

Battles has read the Wife of Bath's tale and saw similar themes in today's popular culture. In Chaucer's version, the wife tells of her relationships

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Rapper

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with six husbands and her struggle and use of sexual manipulation to gain control over them.

"It does relate to hip-hop," he said. The wife portrays the society we live in, he said, just like

his music.

The aspiring music producer has been rapping since seventh grade and uses the motto "Dug-out" as his theme. His group, the Blockhittaz, rap about their experiences on the streets and how they are trying to "dig out" from their beginnings.

"We talk about our environ-

ment — the streets, housing, (President) Bush," he said, "what we feel in our heart."

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Etcetera Theatre 020 7482 4857

265 Camden High St (above the Oxford Arms), Camden.

Such Art Such Beauty by Graham Billing, directed by Lucy Anne Linger. Tue-Sat 7.30pm, Sun 6.30pm. £10, concs £8.

► Feb 6. See Preview

The Rap Canterbury Tales Tue►

Created by Baba Brinkman. Tue-Sat

9.30pm, Sun 8.30pm. £7. ► Feb 6.

The Edinburgh festival mega-hit play

London before a tour to schools.