

Get A Grip – The Concert

By: Jillina Baxter

TROY, NY – Albany’s own actor/film director, Kevin Craig West, comes home to put on a benefit concert for his upcoming film, “Get a Grip” at Revolution Hall in Troy. The concert showcased a number of artists who appear on the “Get a Grip” Soundtrack as well as in the film. Performers included actor/singer, Ed “Preacherman” Holley, Alternative bands, Thrust and Mass Chaos, poet, Liza Jessie Peterson, Jive Recording Artist, Jason Downs, and Maya Azucena.

The jolly Ed Holley took the stage around 7:45pm. He began with “Be Careful What You Wish For” followed by “Preacherman”, “3,000 Years” and “Rain”. Holley’s voice which is a mixture of Curtis Mayfield, a bit of Bilal with an inkling of Ronald Isley was inviting and exciting to listen to. He ended his set with 2 songs from the “Get a Grip” Soundtrack “Negroes Stay Crunchy in Milk” and and “Show ‘Em Your Smile”. I caught up with Ed Holley outside of the venue and talked with him about his acting and music input on the “Get a Grip” Soundtrack:

JB:	So how do you feel after that incredible performance?
EH:	I’m fine. I just got finished performing at Revolution Hall. I had a great time. It’s a wonderful space and it’s filled with a lot of wonderful people. I was just happy to express myself.
JB:	How did you become a part of the movie, “Get A Grip”?
EH:	Actually, the writer of the movie, Renton Kirk and the director, Kevin West happen to be friends of mine. I’ve worked with them and Renton who wrote the script was like Ed you have to be in this thing, man. This is you, this is you and that’s my boy so I said yeah.
JB:	Can you describe the character you play in the movie?
EH:	“Get A Grip” is a coming of age movie. Basically I play Renton’s best friend, Mort. Renton’s character is Travis and basically I support him in mostly everything he does, but we’re all trying to find ourselves. Trying to get over that hump that line when you stop being a kid and start being an adult and I guess that’s the whole concept of “Get A Grip”. So that’s what I do, I support him. I go through my own personal struggles with spirituality and getting my act together. In the end, you know, we all find our place and that’s what it’s all about.
JB:	You have 2 songs on the soundtrack and what are they?
EH:	They are “Negroes Stay Crunchy in Milk” and “Show ‘Em Your Smile”.
JB:	Elaborate on the title of “Negroes Stay Crunchy in Milk” How did you come up with that?
EH:	A good friend of mine and I were talking long distance, my best friend, actually, and we were talking about the 3/5th concession. Some states didn’t have that large population, but had slave population. In the South, they said Black people are 3/5ths of a man and that’s like 60%. I was like no we’re a little bit better than that so I changed mine to 5/8ths. When were talking about that I was like that’s still on the books and that’s messed up. “5/8ths of a man you claim I am” came to right to mind and I was like hey, I gotta call you back. 10 minutes later I was finished writing “Negroes Stay Crunchy in

	Milk.”
JB:	What about “Show ‘Em Your Smile”?
EH:	That was actually one of the first songs I wrote for the EP “Negroes Stay Crunchy in Milk”. It’s just the personal experiences, people get on your nerves, they lie, they cheat, but if you feel like you’re a chosen person and you keep God in your heart, all you gotta do is show them your smile and everything else is gonna work out. So that’s the line “for those who try to use you try confuse you and others that misuse you don’t worry, they just forgotten how to have fun.” It’s really about realizing that it’s not all about you like in the line, “you’re just a passenger on this bus.” In this life sometimes your maker, your creator however you wish to talk about him or her, uses you to help other people in their lives and that’s what the song is about. It’s realizing we’re apart of the human race. We’re black, we’re white and we all have our separate issues and our separate battles, but in the end, it’s about us getting together and getting to a point a together instead of all this separatism.
JB:	You did a few more songs in your set. Is there an Ed Holley CD in the works?
EH:	Yes, I have an EP coming. I’m going to re-record. Basically what’s been happening is that I’ve been trying to find money to get it done. I scraped and saved and got a 9-song demo. All the record companies said the same thing it needs more production. So that’s what I’m looking for money to get the production. In this day and age nobody wants to really help you especially when you’re trying to do something different. If I was doing something that was always on the radio, in fact, I could have had a deal almost 7 years ago just from singing. But I got called to do this and that’s why I choose to go my route. The first song was “Be Careful What You Wish For” and that’s about generally in life anything and especially singing. Through my travels I’ve seen a lot of people who claim they wanted to be mega stars, but there’s a lot. When you see people made at the paparazzi, the flashing cameras, this is what you asked for. So don’t punch out a guy ‘because you don’t have any privacy. You have a 12-room mansion with gates and you can be private in there all day, but when you expose your soul to the world, the world is gonna want to touch you. “Preacherman”, to be honest, I went into the studio one night and I was feeling kind of nasty. He turned on the click track and I write a lot of my songs through channeling I guess being caught up in the spirit and decided I was going to express myself in that way. “3,000 Years” is about history and how history constantly repeats itself. I kind of feel like I’m an old soul and again one day, the spirits came and said listen I got something I want you to sing. I sang it and what was crazy about it was it done in one take 4 minutes and 4 seconds later. “Let It Rain”. I have 7 preachers in my family so I come from a very A.M.E. Baptist, very religious family. Everybody is basically a preacher or a musician. My stage name as a singer is Preacherman so that was kind of a tribute to them and spreading the word that’s not oppressive in a sense, because people don’t want to hear that anymore. It’s not really all about religion it’s about the

	conscious belief in general. So “Let It Rain” is letting people know that after the rain, the sun will shine again so it’s gonna be ok.
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The statuesque poetess, Liza Jessie Peterson, wowed the audience with her “Waitress Poem” which hit home with some of those in attendance. She recited another poem about eating an ice cream cone that would have the ladies who are likely to lick a cone in public think twice.

JB:	So how was this experience for you?
LJP:	This is great. This is my first time here in Troy, NY. I love it up here, it’s nice.
JB:	People may have seen you on Russell Simmon’s Def Poetry, but how did you get started performing spoken word?
LJP:	I got started with the whole spoken word scene from writing in my journal. I stated performing at the Nuyorican Poet’s Café. Then I got cast in the film, “Slam” and from there it’s just been snowballing.
JB:	You have a part in the film, “Get A Grip”. Describe your character.
LJP:	My role in “Get A Grip” I play a psychic. She’s a little zany, supernatural, eclectic.
JB:	What has been your best experience thus far doing spoken word?
LJP:	Traveling, meeting so many people.
JB:	Who are some of the more well-known spoken word artists that you’ve shared the stage with?
LJP:	Sonja Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Mums, Saul Williams. I’ve been doing this for so long it’s countless.
JB:	Do you have any upcoming projects in the form of a spoken word book or perhaps a CD?
LJP:	Not necessarily a spoken word CD or a book, though, that is in the works, but my primary project right now is my latest one-woman show that’s in pre-production right now.
JB:	So you’ll be able to catch your show in NYC?
LJP:	Yeah, in NYC and I will be touring to several prisons in Upstate, NY in the meantime.
JB:	What words of encouragement would you like to share with an upcoming spoken word artist?
LJP:	Read, write and get to open mic.

Before Maya Azucena performance, I went over to where she was standing and introduced myself. Dressed in blue acid washed jeans, white tube top and hair accented with a white flower, the soul songstress smiled greeting me with a big hug and kiss. She said, “Thanks so much for supporting my project and I loved the CD review.” We discussed her music and her involvement in the “Get a Grip” project.

MA:	Thank you so much for supporting my music. It really means so much to me.
JB:	Well of course. So let’s talk about the album “Maya Who?!”
MA:	Maya Who? M-a-y-a like the Mayan Indians and who like who? It’s my first record.

JB:	In reference to “The Get A Grip” Soundtrack, you have 2 songs on the CD which are?
MA:	“Right Way” and the other song the director chose, “Like No Other” and I’ll be performing them both tonight. They’re both songs which are kind of like a love song that come from a ballad place.
JB:	How did you get started as a singer?
MA:	Since I was 4 yrs. old I’ve known I wanted to do something in the arts. I was a little kid and I’d be singing in front of everybody. As time passed on I also studied voice at The Performing Arts School in NYC and I studied classically. Then not long after I felt like God impressed upon my heart that my calling is in music and so I started writing music. I formed a band and started performing all around. I started in NYC and I’ve been performing in different cities around the U.S. and developing a following. When I completed the CD, it helped me be exposed to a greater audience, because the CD can go places that the band can’t. Now I have fans and radio play in London, Germany, Paris, Japan. You know it’s just one step at a time.
JB:	You have another song on your CD which was included on another movie soundtrack.
MA:	Oh yeah, that’s right. Vivica A. Fox produced this movie called “Motives”. It’s a really cool love triangle, betrayal, murder mystery movie and you can rent it at any Block Buster or buy at Best Buy. One of my tunes sums up the finale of the whole movie like when all the plot is being revealed they played my song, “Still Searchin’” and I’m gonna do that tonight, too.
JB:	You want to talk anymore about your album and the listener’s expectations?
MA:	For people who are now just hearing about me, I’m still an independent artist and it’s really amazing, because I’m starting to see how if you put your mind to it and you really work, your fan base and what you’re trying to do will increase if you stick with it. I will encourage people who never heard of me before to just peep it. Go on-line, listen to a little bit of it, and stay in touch. I’m touring around and I will likely come back here and play again. I’m already starting to think about the next CD, but for this CD, it still has a lot of life to it and I want people to try it and if they like it. download it.
JB:	Who are some of your musical mentors?
MA:	I can say my major influences would be like Earth, Wind and Fire, Stevie Wonder, Prince. Vocally speaking, Ella Fitzgerald, Mahalia Jackson, Chaka Khan, like classic, real voices. And the songwriting, I just come from that old school place like you’re talking about issues, but it’s still Pop at the same time. Like Earth, Wind and Fire talks about everything from your destiny to social change, but they do it in such a way that the music itself still grabs you and keeps you. Stevie Wonder and Prince are both really good at that and they inspire me as songwriters.
JB:	So what advice do you have for an artist starting out and trying to make a career of singing?

MA:	One of things that I would encourage especially because the music industry is very topsy-turvy right now, I would encourage young artists to be artists and what I mean by that is be in love with what you do and do it from your heart. Try to worry less about having approval from the music industry, because the music industry is gonna try to cut you down if you don't sound exactly like everything else that's on the radio and they will do everything they can to take away your originality. So it's important, I feel that if it's coming from your heart, to just keep at it and play for people, not just for industry people. Don't worry about demos make finished records. Make records that you think are good, that you care about and get out there and play for people, because you don't need permission to be you and you don't need permission to be an artist. You just need to do what you love and put it in front of people and you will get people responding and supporting you. I think that's the healthiest way to have a long career.
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Maya Azucena started off set with a song she says she made up on the spot. Accompanied by her band and chanting "freedom" over and over, Maya said, "This song is dedicated to people in other countries being destroyed for no reason and to Kevin Craig West." Maya morphed into songs from her CD "Maya Who?" She sang "Too Much" which is on the "Get a Grip" Soundtrack. When she sang, "Giving You My All", she encouraged people from the audience to get on the dance floor. A few couples flocked to the floor and then she broke into a rendition of CeCe Peniston's "Finally" and it occurred to me that who she reminds me of more than Chaka Khan. Maya moved into Marvin Gaye's "Mercy, Mercy Me" followed by "The Right Way" which is also on the soundtrack. She sang another song, "Junk Yard Jewel" which was a lovely tune and wondered why this song isn't on her CD. Maya had the audience moving and grooving to "G*hetto". There was no topping her show-stopping performance of "Still Searchin'". Before she took her bows, Maya asked could she do one more song and accompanied by only a guitarist strumming, she sang "Hallelujah" what I kept referring to as "The Shrek Song". Maya was magnificent and what a way to end the show.

For more information about "Get A Grip" the movie and/or soundtrack, go to www.GetaGrip-theMovie.com.