

## FALL MUSIC AND DANCE

## SPIN MASTERS: Learn some new tricks for your track

by Hilary Klassen  
of SP Creative Features

There's a technology playground at a nearby university that allows the woman or man on the street to learn some very contemporary music skills. The opportunity to make beats, mix and scratch, create dance tracks and graffiti art, learn hip hop and DJing, is part of a community research project at the University of Regina.

When Dr. Charity Marsh completed her PhD from York University and first landed at the U of R she was asked a question that shaped her focus going forward. "Many stakeholders in the community wanted to know why young people, and more specifically indigenous youth, are drawn to hip hop culture," she says. "I was happy to take up that question in my research."

For the past seven years Dr. Marsh has been considering this complex topic. Awarded a Canada Research Chair and a grant from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI), Marsh created the Interactive Media and Performance (IMP) Labs located on the U of R campus. Many research labs in institutions across the country tend to involve only the researcher and some of their graduate students, with no one else having access. Marsh's goal was to create a space where community-based research could happen.

"I thought creating a space where people could have access to creative technologies, collaborate with artists and researchers, learn and engage in discussion around different kinds of popular music, whether it be hip hop, electronic music, the blues, and media arts practices, would work well alongside a community-based research model," says Marsh. The IMP Labs have become an accessible learning environment for participants from around the province, including those living in remote northern communities. The labs have also made the university environment less intimidating to many.

Consisting of an electronic

beat-making lab, a DJ studio and a recording and editing suite, the labs are open to the public two or three nights a week during the fall, winter, and spring terms. Research assistants are on hand to facilitate learning, collaboration and/or networking. Marsh brings in artists and scholars who can role model a world view beyond the status quo. She and her team work hard to create an environment that can break down barriers and move past inhibitions, whether it is gender stereotypes around technologies, or racist ideas typically mapped onto the genre of hip hop. "I have found hip hop is much more than what you see in the mainstream. It is a culture that offers multiple possibilities for acts of resistance, breaking down barriers, building community, and connecting local and global conversations."

Programs consist of workshops for schools, community organizations, and the broader public. The workshop and lecture series, along with the performances and community hours programs, offer people a place to try out the gear, learn about the various practices and culture, as well as a place to play. "Play is key for adults as most of us have forgotten what it means to play." Marsh has worked with many school groups and community organizations including Evan Hardy Collegiate and PAVED in Saskatoon, Common Weal and Scott Collegiate in Regina, and a number of northern communities.

Marsh says what has happened in the past seven years has gone beyond what she could have imagined. "But while some incredibly great things come out of these programs, there's a flip side in the form of ongoing stereotypes and negative assumptions about hip hop and gang culture generated by the media, institutions and government," says Marsh.

A year and a half ago, Marsh's research chair was renewed, and she received a second CFI grant. Recently she was also awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Grant, which

provides almost half a million dollars for the global indigenous hip hop research program to be conducted over the next five years. She'll bring in international youth, researchers and scholars to explore the larger questions about how hip hop and its associated arts, practices and culture have become the contemporary global protest language.

"The experiences I've had in communities and working with young people have certainly had a profound impact on the way I do research, and on how I approach the world," says Marsh. She is chronicling her findings in a book that will be available in 2015.



Consisting of an electronic beat-making lab, a DJ pod (shown here), and a recording and editing suite, the IMP labs are open to the public two or three nights a week during the fall, winter, and spring terms.

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

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