NEXT LEVEL

Mongolia

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About

NEXT LEVEL is an initiative of the U.S. Department of State, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Meridian International Center. Its mission is to use hip hop music and dance to foster cross-cultural creative exchange in diverse communities.

Next Level works with U.S. embassies and consulates to create two-week residencies that reach underserved communities and youth. Teams of four American hip hop artist-educators, in collaboration with local organizations and musicians, facilitate workshops, lecture-demonstrations, and master classes, as well as formal and informal live performances. All activities are designed to promote the mutual sharing of knowledge, values, perspectives, and respect between local populations and American artists. Workshops, which span several hours each day, emphasize the development of musical and entrepreneurial skills and promote conflict prevention strategies. A final public performance concludes each residency, and professional-grade musical equipment is donated to local partners to encourage continued learning and growth.

Since 2014, Next Level has organized successful exchange programs in Algeria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Nigeria, Senegal, Serbia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe, as well as U.S. residencies for teams of artists from those countries.

In 2019-2020, Next Level will visit Jordan, Russia, Mongolia, Ethiopia, Peru, Bolivia, and Nepal.

connect:

Team Mongolia

September 16-28, 2019

aaron DJ A-L ladley

Stuntman

Excess

A. Billi Free

Ali rizvi

Kane smego

DJ A-L

Aaron Ladley
beatmaker

Aaron "DJ A-L" Ladley is a world-renowned artist and a touring DJ who has shared the stage with Public Enemy, George Clinton, and DJ Qbert, as well as produced artists such as Camp Lo, Rodney O, Sadat X, and many more. For decades, DJ A-L has worked towards earning himself the right to be regarded as a highly talented, respected, and recommended DJ and producer in his local music scene and beyond.

DJ A-L is a cultural visionary off stage by regularly teaching music classes as well as mentoring up-and-coming artists throughout his home base in Denver, CO. With a deep gratitude for his accomplishments and a genuine love for his craft, DJ A-L possesses a passion and work ethic that will continue to shape his sound and guide his career for years to come.

connect:

Stuntman

dancer

Stuntman began dancing in 1993 and in 1996 was introduced to breakdancing. Throughout the late 90s Stuntman traveled the U.S. competing, and performing hip hop. In 2000, “Stunts” joined the internationally recognized Style Elements Crew, and was a member of the USA All-Star team that competed in Paris and London, as well as performed in Mexico and Europe. He has published articles and prints in magazines such as *The Source*, *Dancers Delight* (Japan), *Show and Prove*, *SP*, and *Vibe*.

In 2002, Stuntman began teaching various classes in Phoenix, AZ, through the local Furious Styles Crew and became a staff member of the Let’s Dance camp at Arizona State University. He has also taught and tutored middle-school youth through the non-profit After School All-Stars. He is currently an active member of Style Elements Crew and Furious Styles Crew and runs OSA clothing company.

connect:

EXCESS

dj

Excess is a pioneer in the world of scratch music. He was the 2000 International Turntablist Federation (ITF) U.S. Advancement Class Champion and Western Hemisphere Scratching Champion. Excess refuses to adhere to musical boundaries and is in constant search of new and innovative ways to blur the lines between music production, musical genres, and performance.

Excess' artistry behind the turntables has earned numerous accolades throughout his career, including features in *URB* magazine's "Next 100" issue, which featured the top 100 up-and-coming electronic musicians and entertainers of the year, as well as being featured in numerous publications including *Newsweek*, *Scratch*, *The Source*, *XXL*, and Fader.

connect:

A. Billi Free

mc

A. Billi Free is a city-bred, desert-based vocalist, emcee, DJ, and beatmaker. Her sound is rooted in an eclectic blend of hip hop, soul, and electronica. A. Billi Free began her performance career in Chicago, providing vocals for various hip hop and world music outfits while completing her BA in Latin American/Latino Studies and working as a Student Development Coordinator and Community Advocate for DePaul University's Steans Center for Community Based Service Learning. She has spent the last decade in the deserts of the Southwest fusing elements of both the city and the border into her sound. Her upcoming full-length album *I Luma*, on Tokyo Dawn Records, is a testament to change outside of ourselves by seeking change inside.

connect:

Ali

Ali Rizvi
videographer

Ali I. Rizvi is a Pulitzer Prize-winning, Emmy-nominated creative, and critically acclaimed documentary filmmaker based out of Washington, D.C. Rizvi tells nonfiction and fiction stories of diversity from around the world. As a filmmaker first, his goal is always to listen first, but to also gently interrogate the valuable out of the mundane. In the past, he's worked with major brands and artists, and on major journalism projects at ESPN, Disney, MTV, ABC, McClatchy Video Lab, Nat Geo, and more. Rizvi holds a bachelor's degree from University of Houston-Downtown, and a master's degree in Digital Cinema from DePaul University.

connect:

KANE SMEGO

site manager

Kane Smego, Next Level's Associate Director, is an international touring spoken word poet, emcee, educator, and National Poetry Slam finalist. He is an alumnus of Next Level Zimbabwe, and he has served as the site manager for NL programs in Thailand, Brazil, Morocco, Cambodia, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic.

As a recording artist, Kane has featured on Grammy Award-winner King Mez's debut album *My Everlasting Zeal*, and topped the Spotify Viral 50 billboard in May 2017 featuring on the song "North Cack" with G Yamazawa. The music video for the song appeared on BET Jams, and went on to win Best Music Video at the Hip Hop Film Festival in Harlem, NY.

Kane's one-man show, *Temples of Lung and Air*, fuses rap, poetry, beatboxing, and storytelling in a work of Hip Hop theater. The show premiered at Playmakers Repertory Company in 2018 and was selected to be feature at the United Solo Festival in NYC in October 2019. A native of Durham, NC, Kane currently resides in Los Angeles, CA.

connect:

Partners

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs promotes international mutual understanding through a wide range of academic, cultural, private-sector, professional, and sports exchange programs. These international exchanges engage youth, students, educators, artists, athletes, and emerging leaders in many fields in the United States and in more than 160 countries. Alumni of ECA exchanges comprise over one million people around the world, including more than 50 Nobel Laureates and more than 320 current or former heads of state and government.

The Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill empowers faculty to achieve their full potential by creating community and cultivating leadership. The IAH supports its mission through its Faculty Fellows Program by sponsoring conferences, lectures, and public conversations. The Institute trains and supports current and emerging university leaders through the Academic Leadership Program. The Institute promotes community through its Faculty Programs that build mentoring networks for faculty at all stages of their academic careers.

MERIDIAN
INTERNATIONAL CENTER

For over 55 years, Meridian International Center has been preparing U.S. and international leaders to meet global challenges and opportunities through exchange, culture, and training. The Meridian Center for Cultural Diplomacy (MCCD) harnesses culture – visual art, music, dance, cuisine, and film – to engage audiences around the world through compelling exhibitions, exchanges, forums, public-private partnerships, educational initiatives, and community outreach, resulting in individuals and communities finding common ground, forging more stable relationships, and fostering genuine respect.