

BRIDGING THE SHORES

SEGMENT D-1: MUSIC

Producer: Halsted

Length 3:18 (with tail)

Host :19

“Church isn’t the only place where Hmong are trying out new music forms. While many still play the traditional qeej [KHENG!] or sing Laotian folk songs, younger artists born in America are experimenting with more modern styles, especially hip-hop. Gil Halsted profiles a Hmong rapper from Fresno, California, about his integration of old and new sounds.”

=====

opening ambi and fade with rap beat and qeej underneath

Meng Lee calls himself DJ MP3. He studied flute in high school but quickly decided hip hop was the musical form he wanted to use convey the Hmong story of struggling against adversity. He faced racial discrimination in school in the form of teasing chants his his classmates harassed him with.

act#1

I remember going to school the first time just hearing "ching chang chong" . It was like really the injustice was really heartbreaking. It was hard because my mom couldn't speak English they would disqualify her make fun of her or tease her.

Lee's mom now has a bachelor's degree she earned while she was raising her family. Something he says he' very proud of. That pride in the value of struggle is something that Lee tries to express through his music. He says he grew up listening to the famous hip hop star Tupac Shakur.

act#2

I really like hearing people tell struggle stories how hard it is but don't give if you give up you let'em win . It's motivation music.”

Hmong pride song

bring up music

Lee uses his music to tell the struggle story of the Hmong but he's added something to his music that other young Hmong rappers have been reluctant to do. He uses sounds of traditional Hmong instruments like the qeej.

(a little taste of qeej)

He lays down a track of qeej behind his hip hop beat and then records lyrics like these about his people's history over the top.

bring up Hmong pride song

Lee says father forced him and his brother to study the qeej but he says both of them spent only a day at a traditional music school in Fresno.

act#3

"It was very strict it was very harsh my dad took us out of it but my cousin had an instrument and I had told him to teach men how to play it and I just looped it...cause the instrument is not like a piano because it doesn't have all the notes it'll miss like a c-minor of r a d-flat so it's limited so it's hard to get the melody"

Lee says some in the Hmong community have criticized him for mixing the qeej with his rap beats. But he says he sees it as a way to blend the old with the new.

act#4

"They don't know the backbone about Hmong people that we came from genocide and we come to America and we take it for granted we don't know our parents stories our grandma's that came from Thailand. I put that out there just to give faith and hope that Hmong people are still Hmong".

Making uniquely Hmong American music is important to Lee. And for him that means rapping about the difficulty of being an immigrant.

act#5

I want music about injustice and overcoming poverty and having people realize what's really going on instead of that life that everyone claim to have but doesn't exist but only superstars or people with big money.

fade closing ambi music up then down

For bridging the shores I'm Gil Halsted, in Madison.

then up and fade out