

May 11, 2007, Friday

Film in Review; The Hip Hop Project

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

Opens today nationwide
Directed by Matt Ruskin
90 minutes

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Lured by the prospect of recording a hip-hop album, the youngsters experience four years of instruction in self-esteem, self-discipline and the importance of education, a curriculum Mr. Rolle likes to call "the principles of living." With humor and empathy, the movie observes their evolution from rough-and-ready rhyimers to serious musicians learning to rap about more than fast cars and loose women. A charismatic young man known as Cannon raps about watching his mother die of multiple sclerosis, while the resourceful Princess channels the memory of her abortion into lyrics as raw as the feelings that inspired them.

One especially revelatory segment shadows Mr. Rolle as he attempts to reconcile with the mother who abandoned him. As they struggle to communicate across a chasm of long-held resentment, the importance of Mr. Rolle's work requires no further illumination. JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

"The Hip Hop Project" is rated PG-13 (Parents strongly cautioned). It has strong language and controversial themes.