



CHRISTINE LOCKERBY/WSN

LISTEN UP | Students listened to Daniel Banks, the director of the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative and a Tisch drama faculty member.

Hip-hop theater's future and ID

Leaders in the industry discuss economics and artistry

Logan Whiteside
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"Does hip-hop theater have an agenda? If so, what is it?" Daniel Banks asked last night.

Banks, the director of the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative, was moderating a panel of influential members from the theater and hip-hop communities that met in the Tisch building to discuss the future of the medium.

Students listened as the panel discussed the future and identity of hip-hop theater, with a special focus on commercialism.

Panel members disagreed about the economic issues facing the hip-hop theater scene.

"I'm more interested in creating spaces where we operate independent of economics and sustain the art," said Clyde Val-

entin, executive director of the Hip Hop Theater Festival. "Know the rules and break them when it comes to making dough."

Others said that money was crucial to the business.

"If you're serious about doing your art, you're going to have to use your art to pay your rent," said Baraka Sele, assistant vice president of programming at New Jersey Performing Arts Center. "Don't let anybody tell you you're selling out."

Panel members tried to define hip-hop theater with audience members.

"If you think about it, almost everything is hip-hop theater," associate producer Claudia Alick said.

Many participants in the roundtable said the art form

will only gain influence in the future.

Panel member and writer-performer-activist Angela Forbes said, "It can only be a hip-hop theater play that can capture the momentum, the energy and the fragmentation that's going on during the 2008 election."

Educational theater grad student Aminisha Ferdinand said she was disappointed with the student questions but impressed by the information and experience of the panel.

"I think it's amazing they got all these people together," said Ferdinand. "These are serious people in theater." ■

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