

Platform offers alternative venue for inspirational artists  
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RALEIGH - At 11, Jakayla Hart was transitioning from the custody of her biological parents to a new home.

"I needed therapy," said the 16-year-old senior at Durham Academy. "Writing was the only therapy I could afford because it was free."

Hart has turned that therapy into the art of spoken word, and recently shared her talent at The Platform, a new outlet for artists to gain exposure by entertaining local, family-friendly audiences in places that inspire.

This month's event was held at Hope Café, a Christian-themed coffeehouse that showcases local art, music, multimedia, books and unique gifts. There also is live music, book readings, discussion groups and Sunday worship.

The Platform, which will be held at various venues the third Thursday of each month, was created by Christopher Terrell, a singer and songwriter interested in transforming his own career from its R&B/hip-hop foundation to gospel roots - with an added twist: a forum to bring other artists to the forefront, too.

In a society and an entertainment industry sullied by the "crabs in a barrel mentality" or "haters," Terrell said, "I didn't want to be that person."

In February 2010, Terrell launched Christopher Terrell & The New Journey Project, a band that allows him to continue writing and recording, while sharing the stage with other artists hungry to entertain. The Platform is an extension of that effort. "I want to expose artists and people who are really trying to do something, and expose other people to what they do," Terrell said.

September's The Platform will return to Hope Café, although Terrell also plans to host the event at other venues.

Last week, Hart presented "The Journey," a spoken word piece through which "I take the audience on a ride from the lowest point to the highest point I've experienced," she said. It's a journey that includes everything from spiritual battles, sexual abuse and gang violence to religious freedom and liberation, Hart said.

And she was pleased to have a place to share, saying venues for spoken word are rare. "Mr. Terrell has offered a place where not only is my art form accepted, but it's appreciated," Hart said.

The Platform will air on RTN's Body of Christ Central, which airs Tuesday and Sunday nights at 9 p.m. on Time Warner Cable.

Terrell, a Raleigh native, left the area in the early 1990s for the Big Apple to pursue a music career hinged on R&B and hip-hop. Once in New York, he endured "a roller-coaster ride" of both turmoil and triumph, and ultimately

scored as the writer of "Struggle No More," a lead song performed by Musiq Soulchild, Jaheem and Anthony Hamilton on the soundtrack of Tyler Perry's 2007 big-screen hit, "Daddy's Little Girls."

In 2006, the husband and father of three returned to Raleigh ready to leave the music industry behind altogether; a bit fearful of the stigma often hurled toward R&B singers who go gospel. "I just sang on the praise team at our church and in the choir," Terrell said. "That fulfilled me, but God approved me to go forward."

Terrell is nearing release of a new album with The New Journey Project; music he says is neither traditional nor contemporary gospel. "It's versatile; something a lot of people can relate to, music you can vibe to; be yourself."

It's in keeping with his motto, "It's cool to love God," and his passion for R&B "as long as it's respectable."

Diane Y. Washington, a gospel singer who lives near Fayetteville, also performed at The Platform. "It was relaxed, but it was a spiritual atmosphere," Washington, 43, said. "I'm still talking about it in this area."

Washington, who performed original songs from her May album, "It's Not Over - Live," said she's always impressed by opportunities to share her music among non-judgmental audiences and non-competitive fellow artists.

"It's about sharing our art, our ministry," she said. "They should open this up in every city. It's a wonderful way to spend a Thursday evening."

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