

Roseville rappers: Only Won

Chiu takes popular beat, adds positive lyrics

By Ansel Oliver
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After 15 years of rapping, Baldwin Chiu, a.k.a. Only Won, might never see the Grammys, but at least he can understand thermodynamics.

Or so say the lyrics on the song "Lyrical Engineer" on his album "Glory."

The 32-year-old Roseville rapper said he enjoys some luxuries, but any bling that's come his way is because of the money he makes as an engineer.

"Most people in the entertainment industry have a second job," Chiu said. "I'm a little more fortunate; I don't have to be a waiter or a busboy."

Whether he's rapping in South Sac or New York — he just got back from a gig for the Salvation Army in the Big Apple — or acting as an extra in Hollywood, the Roseville resident lives to share his faith and preach of making wise choices. Even his stage name, Only Won, is based in his faith.

"It means though I'm only one person, I haven't lost to the pressures of the world, but I've won, because of the only One.

"Kinda deep," he said by phone from Modesto during a consulting job. He also demonstrated some of his beat-boxing, mimicking the sound of rap percussion, that he does in only one take on the song "Only Won Track."

As he hinted, his CD, released last year, probably won't win an award, but features



COURTESY

Baldwin Chiu, a.k.a. Only Won, performs at a Laguna Chinese Baptist Church youth rally last summer. The rapper and part-time actor also has a day job as an electrical engineer.

a guy who sounds like he's having fun. He shows off his talent of fast-talking and unique rhyming sprinkled with Cantonese and Mandarin.

The seven songs range from serious, like "Desperate Cry,"

based on tough life experiences of his friends, to light-hearted, like "Lyrical Engineer," the saga of an educated rapper.

"That was my fun song," Chiu said. "In the hip-hop industry you try not to do too many goofy songs or else you end up being like Weird Al."

Chiu, who is a member of the Screen Actors Guild, was born in San Francisco and later moved to Rancho Cordova with his family. After college at Sacramento State, he worked as a semiconductor engineer at NEC Electronics in Roseville (the company even gets a shout-out in his album).

Moviegoers may have caught a glimpse of him as an intern in the film "Pursuit of Happiness," starring Will Smith. Chiu hopes to take his act on the road more, recently signing with The Music Insider, a promotions agency based in Nashville, Tenn.

A DJ in college, Chiu rapped because he liked the sound and beat of popular rap artists but not many of the lyrics. After a short hiatus, he started rapping again several years ago when members at his South Sacramento church wanted him to organize a youth hip-hop event.

He's now organizing a series of three spring-summer concerts for the New Hope Community Church in South Sacramento.

For more information, see his Web site www.onlywon.com.

— Ansel Oliver can be reached at anselo@goldcountrymedia.com.