

These musical streets: Berto Ramon

By Bethel Swift

Chicago Editor



Chicago—When Berto Ramon rocked the Metro and won the Emergenza USA final in Chicago on July 8, they showed that they aren't just one of the biggest hip-hop bands in Chicago, but potentially, one of the best.

To fans of the ten-piece band, the win is proof of what they already know: Berto Ramon is bringing a fresh sound to the music industry – and music lovers are responding to it. Earlier this year, Berto Ramon was one of five finalists in the V-cast “Calling All Bands” competition, where they stood out from over 4,000

other entries. They've played the likes of the Puerto Rican Festival and the club Double Door and they've traveled North America.

In the almost three years the band has been together, they've changed a keyboard player, lost a singer and picked up a second MC (Jus J). They get their name from Berto (aka Esteban Shedd), lead MC and originator of the group. Shedd says he came up with the name after using it for a character in one of his poems. Moises Pacheco (guitar) says the band toyed with the name Berto Ramon and the Broke Poets, but decided that it sounded “too long and too cheesy.”

Pacheco and Shedd acknowledge that the band's music has matured since those early days. “Our sound is definitely more organized,” says Pacheco. “When we first started out, we didn't practice much and when we played together, it was just noise. We started practicing and got to know each others sound.”

The first 12 songs that they took on the road were electric beats, which they would adapt for live performance. Shedd describes their new sound as “eclectic hip-hop”, and says it combines a lot of different elements, including rock, Latin influences and jazz. “Now our music just comes from being together,” says Shedd. Each musician writes his own music for each song. Their lyrics flow easily from Spanish to English and their melodies push the limits of classical



and modern instruments. All of this works together to create a sound that is best described as “a Chicago street corner put to music.”

Surprisingly, most of the band members initially came together for a one-time gig. Shedd, who was actively involved in the music industry at the time, knew of a good opportunity for a band to perform. He and Loren Laluz (percussion) rounded up enough friends to form a seven or

eight-piece band. As more opportunities came up, it became clear that the band members were reaching a much larger and more diverse audience together, than they could separately.

“We feel blessed,” says LaLuz. “We know it is just the Lord and he takes where he wants us to go.”

Winning the Midwestern USA finals, meant Berto Ramon was going to Germany, to compete against 20 bands from around the world. This time the stakes were even higher, and it seemed that the cards were all stacked against them. Emergenza was offering an all expense paid album, tour and promotion to the band that could win the hearts of the judges in Rothenberg. Once in London, however, the band ran into more than their share of unexpected complications: The government had just announced the thwarting of a terrorist plan to blow-up planes headed to the United States from London, and Heathrow Airport cancelled all flights for that Friday. As they were loading the bands equipment into their ‘plan B’ method of transportation, a truck ran into their bus, delaying the band another three hours and forcing them to give up their slot.



Their hour to shine came at 1 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, with no sound check, no keyboards (blown out by previous performers) and very little sleep. Still, the band made the best of the opportunity and turned in a performance that excited both the judges and the other performers.

When the international results were announced, Berto Ramon was in fourth place. The position enabled them to perform in front of more than 20,000 people at the final concert in Germany and will allow them to a place in the Best of Emergenza Tour, when it comes to the Midwest.

Shedd says he knows that the stage is different when they perform, because they are offering a positive message with their music. “The way the spirit and mood of the place changed was

amazing,” says Shedd. “A lot of people came up to us afterward and said when we played, it was like a dark place turned light.”

On September 30, Berto Ramon will play at the Congress Theater along with distinct gospel voice, Martha Munizzi.

***For more information on Berto Ramon check them out at: www.bertoramon.com or www.myspace.com/bertoramon.**

Berto Ramon Music

Above photos: top two, Berto Ramon performing & bottom, The Crew: Front, and then left to right in: Oca, keyboard; Jus J, Vocals; Chino Rok, violin; LoLo, percussion; Opio, bass; Fuser, drums; Moe, guitar; Johnny Bravo, percussion; Berto, vocals; Moral One, DJ.