

Musician Trades in Gangsta Rap to Preach Christ

✖ A former member of the rap group Three 6 Mafia is on a mission to win youth to Christ.

Delmar “Mr. Del” Lawrence says God has given him a vision to use hip-hop to evangelize youth culture. He recently released a CD project, *Thrilla*, and leads a hip-hop influenced church, City of Refuge in Memphis, Tenn. But Lawrence admits that following Christ was not always his aim.

As a member of Three 6 Mafia, which was well-known for its profane lyrics, Lawrence was a rising rap star with money, fame and a gold record—all before the age of 21. After being on tour for nearly a year, Lawrence made a return trip to Memphis to surprise his family. Arriving on a Sunday morning, he made a stop at his home church, not knowing that he would leave that service a changed man.

“I heard God speak to me during service, and He gave me a vision of what He wanted me to do,” Lawrence said. “Based on that experience, I decided to give my life to God right then and there.”

Lawrence says God showed him that he was called to become a leader in the Christian hip-hop movement and use rap music to reach youth around the globe. “Sometimes, hip-hop can be connected to violence, and that is what a lot of the music portrays,” he said. “But I saw peace in the presence of the music; it was my mission to bring it to the light.”

Despite his good intentions, his former group members were not so accepting of his calling. Lawrence said the group’s sales started to slow after his departure, and the members blamed him. “They took my salvation personal, but not in a positive way,” he said. “I guess they felt I was trying to bring the

group down, when I really wanted to see them come to Christ.”

He said he started to receive death threats. “There was a hit put out on my life,” Lawrence said. “I left Memphis for six months. I just had to get out of the city.”

Lawrence took refuge in Chattanooga, Tenn., where he says he was able to focus on studying the Bible and form the covenant that would set the stage for his return to music.

“I had a friend who was a pastor at a local church in Chattanooga,” Lawrence said. “He took me in; we studied the Bible; I felt safe. ... My entire time in Chattanooga, I was writing songs, waiting for the moment to record what the Lord has given me.”

But Lawrence says he knew his calling was in Memphis. “I felt I had to go back home,” he said. “At that time I still had my gun for protection, but God told me I didn’t need it. I believed what He told me, and I sold my gun to a local pawnshop. I only had God’s Word for protection.”

Once settled back in Memphis, Lawrence began to work on his music. With a fan base from his Three6Mafia days, he was well-received locally and began to reach people with a sound infused with the slow bass line of Southern hip-hop. He sold his music from church to church and ministered in the streets.

“I sold my music through the hustle mentality I learned from the secular realm. I would travel from church to church, from conference to conference, believing in what God told me. I never had any doubt that the music would catch on.”

Today he leads his own label, Dedicated Music Group, which recently signed a distribution partnership with the giant Universal Music. He believes the label and his church are signs that God is fulfilling the vision he gave him.

With plans to build a permanent facility for City of Refuge,

Lawrence has begun to focus again on youth in his hometown. "I want the youth to see they can have fun and still represent Christ," Lawrence said. "It does not matter what you did the night before; I am giving this word and I want these people to feel the love of Christ in their lives."