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Starting from scratch: Lessons in DJ'ing

CELESTE SMITH

The boys play music videos in the living room, listen to music in their bedrooms, and write their own rhythms on the family PlayStation. So a constant thumping beat is always in the background at Anthony Crawford's southwest Mecklenburg home in Berewick.

His three sons just love music.

No wonder word about a DJ camp sponsored by Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, called "With These Hands Mix Academy," caught Crawford's attention. And his sons, Kameron Bandy, 14; Antoine Crawford, 14; and Anthony Crawford, 16, all loved the idea.

There were risks, though. Would Crawford ever find peace and quiet again?

"All I do is hear music," said Crawford, 37, with a laugh. "All. Night. Long."

But Crawford, who works ground maintenance for park and rec, contributes to his sons' addiction. Young Kameron picked up New Edition and Boyz II Men from Dad, who still listens to those '80s and '90s R&B groups. Anthony totes around a jet black iPod, loaded with 94 songs so far. That's when he's not creating raps -- Crawford often comes home from work to find him writing out something.

"I'm a lyricist," the younger Anthony said. "I write life stories...I give it to someone else and they can rap about it."

Antoine's MP3 player has 160 songs. Dad, no techno slouch, owns two iPods loaded with "a little bit of everything" -- country, rock, R&B, jazz.

That appreciation of music forms a good basis for the DJ camp, notes instructor Donald Parker, who goes by D.J. S.L.ICE (for St. Louis Ice.)

At camp this week at the Phillip O. Berry Recreation Center in west Charlotte, the boys had to learn fundamentals first.

It isn't just rubbing records back and forth to produce a repetitive sound. The boys learned that DJs note the section they want to scratch and repeat by marking it off on the record label. A slip cover on the turntable lets them spin records in the opposite direction.

By the time they got to try it, Anthony already picked out his name for the week -- DJ Dread Head.

"If I was to ever DJ," said Anthony, who started wearing dreadlocks last fall, "that would have to be my name."

Heavy base beats filled the room as Anthony took a round at the turntables, using one hand to scratch and keeping the other on the mixer -- loaded with knobs and levers to control volume.

While Anthony broke out into a smile while at work, Antoine kept his expression cool and serious. "The scratching is really hard," said the aspiring rapper.

Kameron's turn marked a change from what he used to try at home, "kind of" scratching with CDs, moving them back and forth in the CD player.

Now Kameron knows better. The best part, he said, was learning "all the parts of the equipment, and the basics of DJ'ing."

To keep all this up, the boys have asked Dad for their own dual turntable set with mixer.

And Crawford has already agreed.

With one condition on where the boys hang out when using all this stuff.