

## MEDELLIN RECAP

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Presented to Partners of the Americas, Florida Chapter

Greetings Members of Partners,

Last week I returned from my 12 day stay in Medellin. I would first like to thank everyone from the Partners of America, Florida Chapter and Headquarters for making this trip possible. Thank you for your approval in sponsoring my flight and for entrusting me with carrying on the Partners vision of volunteer service and collaboration.

As I mentioned when I initially proposed this trip, my good friend Daniela Sanchez, whom I met in 2010 in Medellin during my first exchange with La Lengua De Mi Barrio, has been working directly for the Secretary of Culture in Medellin for the past year. For years Daniela has been doing amazing work organizing activists and artists in throughout Medellin and currently assists in helping local grassroots organizations find funding for community projects and events. She was the one who actually encouraged me to return to Medellin and learn more about her work and how I could get involved. Much of my success during this trip is attributed to her diligence and dedication to making it happen. Daniela's work with the Secretary of Culture has been primarily focused on the UVAs and Casa De Las Culturas of Medellín. To give a little educational background, there are a total of 7 UVA's and 7 Casa De La Cultural throughout the city.

UVAs (Unidades de Vida Articulada) are apart of a city project where the Mayor's Office of Medellin, the INDER and EPM have articulated within the community an aim to build and adapt public spaces to strengthen the assembly of community around life and equity, through recreation, culture and community participation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWNyYHot6A>

Casa De Las Culturas (Culture Houses) in Medellin are public scenarios for development, learning, enjoyment, coexistence and artistic and cultural management.

<https://www.medellinjovent.com/conoce-las-casas-de-la-cultura-de-medellin-989>

A new concept introduced to the UVAs and Culture Houses in recent years is the recording studio. State of the art, fully equipped, and free to the community, workshops are held every week ranging from music instrumentation, sound engineering, artist development, and music business. During my stay, I visited 5 Culture Houses and 2 UVAs. The purpose of my trip was to conduct songwriting and recording workshops, share my experiences working with PATH in Miami, and learn more about how these recording studios are impacting the communities around them.

## **Here's a detailed look of what took place while I was there:**

**Wednesday May 16th** was my first day in Medellin and that evening I was invited to a special cooking and music session called Cocinas Convergentes at Corporación Una Vida. Nick named, Casa Tranquillo or the Chill House, we met with an incredible chef who has used his love for food and people to create magical experiences that bring together the community free of charge. The night was a full vegetarian diner celebration which ended in a live musical performance by me.

**Thursday May 17th** was the first official day on the tour and we started it off with an all day recording session at the Casa de Cultura in Manrique. We met with musician and music director Magio, who introduced us to his the space and his students. First we had an open discussion about the sounds of Colombia and the influences of African culture still found in the music of today. Next we broke up the workshop into 3 groups: live instrumentation, percussion, and song writers, and spread out in different rooms to work on the song simultaneously. After a few hours we came back together in the studio to put all the pieces together. It was a great experience for me as I helped to guide the direction of the song while discussing song writing processes with the writers and learning to play a few new rhythms with traditional Colombian percussion.

**Friday May 18th** was an album release party and concert event at Teatro Lido. This theatre is over 50 years old and one of the oldest theaters in Medellin. Students from several of the studios at the UVAs and Casa De Las Culturas performed original music for the concert. The show was a diverse mix of Rock Music, Hip Hop, Electronic Music and Caribbean Trip Trop. Majority of the artists were mentored by producers like Magio and other music directors I would later meet in the days to come.

**Saturday May 19th** I was given a tour through San Antonio de Prado in the South West of Medellin which ended at the UVA El Paraiso. After getting a tour of the UVA and how they exist to serve the community, we met with David, producer and music director of the recording studio at El Paraiso. We had an open cypher with the students who came to the workshop, which essentially means we got into a circle and shared our music with one another. We had several jam sessions producing songs with live beatboxing, singing, rapping, guitar, and percussion.

**Monday May 21st** was an another all day recording workshop at Teatro Al aire Libre de Pedregal with producer and music director Lupa. Lupa is a well known Colombian Hip Hop artist who is considered a legend and mentor throughout the Medellin Hip Hop scene. His main focus at Teatro Al Aire Libre is to equip artists with knowledge of the music industry and how to build a prosperous career as an indie artist. We talked about what it takes to be a pro, how to produce your own sound, finishing projects and how get into performing and touring. The second half of the day was spent collaborating on the writing, production, and recording of an original song.

**Tuesday May 22th** was a get together with the KGP Hip Hop School at Casa De Cultura El Estancias. El Estancias doesn't have a recording studio yet, but offers a number of classes for youth interested in classical music instrumentation as well as graffiti and Hip Hop dance. With the students of KGP, we discussed misconceptions, ignorance, and identity within the Medellin Hip Hop scene and how the evolution of Rap music in the US has affected Hip Hop culture in Colombia. At the end of our discussion we had a really dope impromptu jam session which incorporated freestyling, beatboxing, and a live viola player.

**Wednesday May 23rd** was a blessing because I got to reunite with an old time friend, Jeihhco Castaño from La Comuna 13. In 2010, Jeihhco was organizing a huge festival called Revolucion Sin Muertos (Revolution without Deaths). Introduced through Ruth Kathryn, he invited me to stay a night at his house in C13. It was a surreal experience walking through his neighborhood with military soldiers posted on top of the houses armed with M16s as he shared with me stories of war and survival.

Years later La Comuna 13 is a very different place and after much international recognition and support from artists like Jay-Z and Beyonce, Jeihhco is now the director of "Casa de Hip Hop Kolacho", an independently funded Culture House of Hip Hop. Casa Kolacho are the organizers of the increasingly popular graffiti tours through Comuna 13, telling the history of the conflict and how youth who have survived the violence are using Hip Hop ideology and culture to transform the image and conditions of their community. Their motto, which is also a popular song by Jeihhco Hip Hop Group C15, is "Aqui Si Hay Amor." Their mission is for the outside world to see that even here, in what was considered one of the most violent barrios in Colombia, there is love. Later that evening I had the opportunity to return to Casa De Cultura Manrique to sit on a panel discussion about Communitarianism and Collective Music Production with producers Magio and Felipe. It was a great opportunity to share my experience working in the studios, while engaging in dialogue with the community about the common issues affecting artists in Medellin and Miami and the creative processes we use to overcome them.

**Thursday May 23rd** was the last leg of the tour and we spent the evening with producer and music director Felipe at the Institución Educativa José Acevedo y Gómez in La Comuna 15. I didn't realize until we got there that I had actually visited this center during my first trip in 2010. I got a chance to tour the new updates of the 4 floor facility, which included dozens of young people filled in rooms for bboy dancing and choreography, songwriting and music production, wall to wall green screens for video and photography, as well as a brand new state of the art recording studio with a separate for live recording. This particular studio was by far the most impressive, the largest of all the studios, and the newest, being built only recently within the last year. Felipe and I talked about his struggles with getting artists in this particular studio and how to help create a culture of professionalism and innovation that helps artists grow in their crafts and careers.

## **So Whats Next?**

My time in Medellin, though it ignited amazing ideas and experiences, flew by in a instant. I'm incredibly grateful for a time well spent, but it was clear there were more artists to meet, collaborations to create, and music to make. I was honored to receive such positive feedback from everyone, I believe there is a greater story to tell and with more time I would love to help tell it. The consensus from the music directors, the producers, and the students was all the same: when can Sekajipo return and for a longer stay? What I've proposed to Daniela and the Secretary of Culture, and would also like to propose to Partners, is supporting me in a 3 month "Artist in Residency" in Medellin. Within this extended time frame I would like to spend one week in each of the community studios, recording a collaboration album featuring local artists of Medellin. In addition I would love to capture the making of this album on film. I believe an initiative like this would not only build deeper relationships between the artists of the UVAs and Culture Houses but also open doors for future collaborations for the La Lengua De Mi Barrio/Partners chapters in Colombia and the U.S. If Parners is interested in supporting me, I'm open to discussing how this collaboration can happen during the next chapter meeting in June.

In conclusion, I want to again give a special thanks to everyone at the Partners of the Americas Headquarters and Florida Chapter, PATH Hip Hop Academy, Daniela Sanchez, my photographer and interpreter Marcel Cano, and all the gracious souls of Medellin who made my stay the memorable experience yet.

Gracias Por Todo,

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