

## In the Spotlight: Tracy's true MC

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by Justin Lafferty/ TP staff

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Hammer pants are once again en vogue.

The style of pants made popular by rapper and Tracy resident MC Hammer nearly 20 years ago have been flaunted by models on runways today.

Dior makes the baggy trousers, now called “harem pants.” So do Burberry and Ralph Lauren, which sells a silk women’s pair for more than \$1,500.

The “super dope homeboy from the Oaktown” has gone uptown. However, his influence is felt by more than the fashion world.

Now, Hammer (born Stanley Burrell), speaks on behalf of social media in front of Intel, Harvard and Stanford.

For most of his outings, Hammer, 47, has traded in gold chains and his trademark baggy pants for a suit and tie. His favorite microphone now limits him to 140 characters. Instead of backup dancers, he’s sharing stages with Facebook wunderkind Mark Zuckerberg and Apple CEO Steve Jobs.

Hammer loves Twitter.

“The platforms go far beyond just minimalist use,” he said. “They’re used for very major media movements, and that’s my usage of it. I’m an original early adopter from the inception of social media. I have a very firm understanding of the platforms and their applications.”

Hammer was the keynote speaker at the 2008 Intel Capital CEO Summit in San Francisco and also attended the Google Zeitgeist and the Wall Street Journal’s D: All Things Digital conference that year.

Other guests at the three-day conference? Jobs, Zuckerberg, Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer from Microsoft and Michael Dell of Dell Computers.

In February, Hammer spoke to the Harvard Business School about social media. In March, he addressed the MIT/Stanford Venture Lab about using technology to promote music. On May 17, he’ll talk at Stanford University about branding.

With outlets like Twitter and his YouTube-like Web site DanceJam.com, Hammer can cut out the middleman and go directly to his fans. He said he’s been working in

social media since 1994, trying to get music videos onto the then-primitive Internet.

“I would rather control my persona than to put my life or my persona in the hands of others,” he told the Harvard Crimson, the college’s student newspaper, in February.

For Hammer, Twitter is perfect. The micro-blogging service allows him to broadcast what he wants to say and nothing more. He responds directly to fans, tweets back to other rappers, talks about his favorite baseball team (the Oakland A’s) and provides continuous updates on his life.

That need to control translates into other media outlets, too. For the past four months, A&E has been filming a reality show about the rapper’s day-to-day life, called “Hammer Time.” It will be aired Sundays, starting June 14.

Hammer said that he had constantly turned down requests for reality shows and movies over the past few years. What changed?

“I had a specific idea of what show I would do if I entertained doing a reality show,” he said. “I would have to be the creator and executive producer of the show. And I would have to be able to portray the type of family image that is in line with who I am.”

Hammer said he wanted to put out something like a modern-day “Cosby Show,” if Bill could still cut a rug into his late 40s. The show follows Hammer, his wife, Stephanie Burrell, and their six kids.

“Hammer is an incredibly busy, energetic guy who’s always on,” said Rob Buchta, the show’s supervising producer. “I don’t know when the guy sleeps. When those cameras came on, he’s like a ball of fire.”

Buchta said that Hammer would provide him with an itinerary of what his family would do each day. The producer would pick family outings that he’d like to shoot, like one of Akeiba’s recitals or Jamaris’ football practices, and Hammer would give the final thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

“Hammer Time” also gives an inside look at his music company, Full Blast Music, and its three rap acts — Dasit, Pleasure Ellis and the Stooge Playaz.

And Hammer’s not done making music, himself. Since his first album in 1987, “Feel My Power,” he’s released nine albums — the latest in 2006, “Look Look Look.”

Hammer, who started rapping and dancing after watching James Brown perform at the Apollo Theatre in New York, has another album coming out this summer, “DanceJamTheMusic.”

“I’ve already recorded like 200 songs,” he said. “So over the next five years, I’ll drop at least two albums a year. I’m doin’ music that makes you move, music that

makes you dance, music that makes you provoke thoughts, makes you think.”

None of his more recent albums have had the same breakthrough power of 1990’s “Please Hammer Don’t Hurt ’Em,” which featured “U Can’t Touch This.” That year, it sold more than 10 million copies and hit the top spot on the Billboard 200, a list of what’s hot in music.

Now, Hammer enjoys a slightly more laid-back lifestyle. He moved to Tracy 12 years ago and lives in a quiet neighborhood.

“It was time for a change,” he said. “Tracy has been the place to go fishing. I’ve always known it and I always used to come here. At some point, it was like, where do you want to move? Tracy.”

• *In the Spotlight* is a weekly profile in *Our Town*. To nominate someone to be *In the Spotlight* or to comment on this week’s column, contact *Our Town* Editor Justin Lafferty at 830-4269 or [jlafferty@tracypress.com](mailto:jlafferty@tracypress.com). **Meet MC Hammer**

- Real name: Stanley Burrell
- Age: 47
- How long in Tracy: 12 years
- Born: Oakland
- Work: Rapper, founder of DanceJam.com
- Albums: 10, with one more coming out this year
- Education: McClymonds High School, Oakland
- Family: Wife, Stephanie; kids: Akeiba, 21; Jamaris, 18; Sarah, 15; Stanley Jr., 13; Jeremiah, 11; Samuel ,3
- Get connected: [twitter.com/MCHammer](https://twitter.com/MCHammer)

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