It wasn’t long ago that Jerome Waller was a fixture on the campus of The College of William & Mary. Waller, who graduated in 2013, attended classes, studied in the library, and relaxed in the college’s iconic Sunken Garden. While keeping his focus on his studies—lest he disappoint his mother—he always found time to attend hip hop events on campus, even performing at a few. In April, Waller returned to his alma mater as a hip hop performer, joining over 100 students in Swem Library’s 2nd Annual Hip Hop Collection Celebration.

“I wasn’t as much of an artist while I was here because I was trying to grind out a degree. Now that I finally got the degree, I can maybe go dream chasing a little bit,” Waller said.

Raised in Virginia Beach, Waller first realized his passion for music in the church. Starting off by playing a number of instruments, it wasn’t long before he found himself obsessed with hip hop. Although he always considered a career in rap, it wasn’t until his years at William & Mary that he decided to pursue his dream. In 2011, Waller linked up with longtime friends Stephen Archer (aka Ceazthekid), and Keith Taylor (aka Adum West) to create the hip hop group the Mile High Club.

Now known in the music world as J.B. da Pilot, Waller has been collaborating with artists such as Cyhi the prince, Phil Ade’ and Skyzoo. His return for the celebration was a homecoming of sorts for him, an opportunity to mark the past while anticipating the future.

“It wasn’t that long ago that I was in Swem pulling all-nighters,” Waller said. “As an alum, I always feel like it’s important to come back. This was an experience, to say the least of my time here, so it’s just nice to come back and reminisce a little bit and also look forward to all of the great things that are coming.”

Last year the College officially launched the William & Mary Hip Hop Collection. It’s only the fifth such collection in the nation, and is the only one devoted to chronicling Virginia’s hip hop culture and history. Since its foundation, the collection has grown to include hundreds of items and has enjoyed visits from students, faculty, staff, and community members to access the materials.

Joining Waller for the outdoor performances were J’sar, Intalek, the Virginia Grind Family and Handles. J’sar, or Justin Saar, attended last year’s celebration and was eager to return to William & Mary.

“Hip hop is like the red-headed stepchild of music and to see Wil...
liam & Mary, such a prestigious college, actually honor our culture, I just had to be a part of it,” said Saar.

Other event activities included live outdoor performances, mural art by W&M visiting instructor John Lee, a reception and a display of collection artifacts.

J. P. Aleman, co-captain of W&M’s SMILES Crew, joined his fellow crew members dancing to the sounds of DJ Bee of Fresh Radio as he spun records in the library’s Botetourt Gallery.

“We’re here today because b-boying is hip hop. It’s one of the five elements of hip hop, which are DJ-ing, MC-ing, graffiti, b-boying and then knowledge,” said Aleman. “Asked if we would like to perform here, we were like, ‘Of course! It’s for hip hop!’ We were pretty excited.”

The idea for the collection came from the research of Kevin Kosanovich, an American studies doctoral candidate and a student employee at Swem Library. In preparing his dissertation, which examines the history of hip hop in the Bronx, Kevin used the resources of Cornell University’s hip hop collection. His involvement with Cornell’s archive sparked a desire to see more of hip hop’s wider history preserved.

The collection includes oral histories committed to documenting Virginia’s hip hop past, as well as recordings of hip hop music, publications, and materials created by Virginia and Virginia-based artists, groups and businesses. Additionally, the collection documents the origins and impact of hip hop culture on college campuses throughout the state. Kosanovich currently serves as the curator of the collection.

Included in the collection are items such as SMILES Crew’s first boombox, a cassette tape of Mighty MC’s recordings and a Blendz award. The collection includes contributions by Magoo, Larry Live and Big B of the Boodah Brothers.

The Annual Hip Hop Celebration was designed to bring attention to W&M’s Hip Hop Collection, as well as to highlight issues surrounding hip hop culture and history. Two panel discussions were held during the day, bringing together musicians, professors, entrepreneurs, producers and a host of radio personalities.

For more information about the William & Mary Hip Hop Collection, readers may contact Swem Library’s Special Collections at spcoll@wm.edu.
Items from the William & Mary Hip Hop Collection on display. The collection has grown since its establishment last year to include several hundred items.

The Mid Atlantic Library Alliance, or MALiA, is a consortium of over 150 public, academic, school, and special libraries. Originally founded in southwestern Virginia, the organization has grown to include libraries throughout Virginia as well as member institutions in North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. MALiA is open to all libraries, regardless of location, and we welcome new members at any time.