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## Please, Hammer, don't hurt my bluegrass

Hammer time at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass 8 means reaching out

BY KATE IZQUIERDO  
Wednesday October 1, 2008

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It's a combination that raised more than a few eyebrows: MC Hammer performing at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass 8. We have it in our hearts to get country, but is this show for real? As it turns out, the connection is a fairly straightforward one. "I thought it was a very good idea since I've always been a very positive artist and always embraced the kids," Hammer, born Stanley Burrell, explained when I spoke to him by phone recently.

Hammer became involved with Hardly Strictly when a mutual acquaintance introduced him to festival benefactor Warren Hellman. He performs Oct. 3 during an educational program for children that is part of Daniel Pearl World Music Days. Founded in 2002 by the Daniel Pearl Foundation, Hammer is enthusiastic about his involvement in celebrating the memory of Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter killed in 2002 in Pakistan. "It is an honor to participate in anything that uplifts [Pearl's] sacrifice and his commitment," he said. Add Hammer's interest in community programs for children — he has sponsored Little League teams for more than a decade — and his appearance at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass becomes too legit for him to quit.

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Just in case you think this is the extent of Hammer's forays into the entertainment industry, think again. While the rest of us were building pages on Geocities.com, the artist formerly seen with resplendently large trousers was amassing an arsenal of tech knowledge. "Very quietly I got involved with tech all the way back in 1994," he said. "I was trying to figure out how to get my videos on the

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Internet." He visited firms like Silicon Graphics and Apple Computer, keeping an eye on QuickTime and similar applications, and now feels that video is finally ready to take center stage, describing it as "the main component of Web 2.0."

Thus the man who tried to teach Arsenio Hall to do the Chinese Typewriter is no longer simply a hip-hop artist: he has fashioned himself into an entrepreneur in high demand. Hammer has delivered a keynote speech at an Intel CEO summit, appeared on one expert panel at the TechCrunch20 Conference and yet another at the AlwaysOn and STVP conference at Stanford University — this one in the company of Chamillionaire and Mistah FAB. His connection to TechCrunch is notable, since its founder, Michael Arrington, has invested in Hammer's company, DanceJam, an online community based around all types of dance. Users can upload videos of themselves to participate in battles, learn new dances using tutorials, or browse performances uploaded by users. "The ideas that I've had the chance to crystallize, and come up with content for and build communities around, those are the things that people are looking to do today," Hammer opined.

Considering Hammer's deep immersion in the possibilities of contemporary pop culture and modern music, you might think the hip-hop artist's appearance at a bluegrass festival would faze him. He laughed. "That's why it's *Hardly* Strictly Bluegrass," he said. "I've got a song called 'Help the Children.' This is not new territory for me."

*MC Hammer performs Fri/3, 11:30 a.m., for local students and the public on the Star Stage.*

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