



SHORT TAKES



TYE TRIBBETT & G.A.

Tye Tribbett and his clique are on a mission. This mission involves rising above the confines of their genre and allowing the masses to hear their sound through pop outlets that may typically be greeted with raised eyebrows of confusion and concern by their devout followers. Mr. Tribbett and his team of talented vocalists, Greater Anointing, are gospel artists on the verge of widespread music success. And though some platinum recordings and airtime on mainstream radio would be exactly the type of opportunity any artist could hope for, Tye makes clear that his agenda is simply to "spread the message of hope, the message of Christ, the message of love."

There's a reason that Tye is so interested in spreading the message of his Lord: he's the son of a preacher man — and, for that matter, a preacher woman. It was growing up in his father's church that led young Tye to a life of music. "I've been playing all my life," he explains. "Before I knew my ABC's, I knew the ABC's on the keys." The home base for this musical journey resided in the family's Camden, New Jersey residence. When Tye wasn't in the church, it was nearly guaranteed that he was jamming in his family's garage.

Along with his brother Terry, Tye transformed that garage into a rudimentary rehearsal room. Though it served their purposes just fine, the room began to attract both local musicians and established "players" from Philadelphia and Baltimore. However, as a motivated teen, this was never enough. "We made so much music in the garage that I started putting words to the music," he recalls, "and then I just needed a choir to deliver the songs, the message."

It wouldn't be long until Tye assembled his group, Greater Anointing. In 1996, the group consisted of friends who simply wanted to make great music. To their own surprise, the great music they began making found itself the winner of the national *Gospel Choir Awards Competition*. This victory prompted Grammy Award-winning songwriter/producer David Foster to introduce the group to country singer Faith Hill. Four years later, she'd have this youthful group of dancing and singing Christians join her on tour.

This move changed the way Tye viewed gospel music and inspired him to go about his craft a bit differently. "I was a gospel guy with a choir on a country tour," he remembers. "I started writing differently. I saw that you could reach all kinds of people. So I switched up my style of writing, because I thought these people needed to hear the message too."

From that moment, Tye and his group have toured within the gospel industry, but have also won over new and diverse crowds through their tours with the likes of R&B crooner Musiq, and sharing the stage with artists ranging from Destiny's Child and India.Arie, to Vanessa Williams and John Mellencamp. They've since branched out into hip-hop with their appearance on Common's eclectic *Electric Circus* and made their way into the pop world via Justin Timberlake's "Cry Me A River." Their debut LP, *Life*, features this cross-genre influence with live music, uptempo jams and traditional gospel. Tye describes their music as "M.U.D." or music un-defined. "The Holy Spirit is water and we're the dust of the earth," he explains. "Together, that makes us mud. As long as the Holy Spirit is in us, just like clay, he can make us be 'hip-hop.' He can make us 'pop.' He can make us 'country.' He can make us anything." — A.Q.C. ☆

PLANT LIFE

The phrase "History Repeats Itself" should be the motto for our generation. To an extent, it seems as if a current slice of our American life tastes very similar to that of the late '60s/early '70s. There's a major war going on, massive demonstrations and protests, and a return to politically charged music. On top of all of this, the music coming out of urban locales is no longer just the rap and R&B we've grown accustomed to. Just like the musical pioneers of the Vietnam War era, there are certain urban music artists who have gone the way of the hybrid — mixing everything from hip-hop, soul, rock and fully glorified, in-your-face, hard-break, bass-thumpin' funk. Joining this creative tour de force is the barrier-breaking quartet, Plant Life.

The seed (yes, that's a pun) of Plant Life came from the hip-hop group, The Animal Pharm. This underground crew from Los Angeles dropped a number of EPs and 12" singles throughout the West Coast in the mid-'90s. By 1999, they hit their peak with the West Coast all-star underground collaboration, "You Will Lose," which featured acclaimed artists Aceyalone, Spontaneous and DJ Drez. Shortly afterwards, The Animal Pharm hit the brakes and decided to go on hiatus for two years as each of the members went on to work on their solo projects.

As the group's producer, Panda One had received plenty of hype for his eclectic style and the popular tracks he produced for the likes of Medusa and Buffalo Daughter. However, now that he was able to work on his own, he wanted to come up with something completely new. "At first, I wasn't even sure that what we were doing was anything different than what I had always been doing," says Panda. "It wasn't until we had finished that everyone started telling us that what we were doing was some different sh*t!" He locked himself up in the studio with vocalist Jack Splash and the two began to create the foundation for what would become Plant Life. Though produced with a hip-hop aesthetic, the music is difficult to pinpoint. Jack Splash's vocals are far from what could be considered "rapping," and with the addition of live instrumentation and DJing, the sound comes off like some sort of new progressive breed of funk music.

"There is a movement going on. It's not necessarily a cohesive movement, but it is definitely a movement," Splash explains. "Some of the best emcees like Mos Def, Cee-Lo, Andre 3000, Medusa, Pharoahe Monch, Lauryn Hill and my crew have been spreading our wings and delivering messages in a style that's not really considered rap anymore." On their debut CD, *The Return of Jack Splash*, Jack stresses that Plant Life's music is a love movement that came as a response to the madness that was going on in the world around him. Backed by vocalists Dena Deadly and Rashida, he prefers to not think of himself as a "singer" but as a "vibist" and cites artists ranging from Hendrix and Bowie, to Prince and even the Cure's Robert Smith as his major influences.

This up-and-coming group has already received tons of buzz from the likes of Mos Def, Cee-Lo and Slum Village's Baatin, but as Jack explains, this is no popularity contest: "All we really want to do is contribute some serious positivity to the world of music, and if some beautiful ladies shake their 'sses in the process, then I think we did our job!" — A.Q.C. ☆