



# hipo

## Round-up

### WORDSWORTH

Bringin' It Back — That Old New York Rap

**A** number of urban media outlets have recently been proclaiming that hip-hop is on the brink of a revolution. Why? Perhaps it's because socially conscious rap has found its way into the mainstream through the likes of Kanye West and even — believe it or not — Jadakiss. Rumor even has it that similar-minded artists such as Pharoahe Monch and Talib Kweli have expressed interest in signing to major labels like Shady Records and Roc-A-Fella. However, anybody who's followed hip-hop since its earliest years knows that this isn't revolution — it's a return to form. Just ask Lyricist Lounge All-Star Wordsworth, who's in this game to bring back that golden age of 1994.

Though he is just now releasing his solo debut set, *Mirror Music* — which features the likes of legendary rapper Masta Ace, Wordsworth has already made a name for himself all over the hip-hop scene and beyond. If you consider yourself a big fan of A Tribe Called Quest and Black Star (AKA Mos Def and Talib Kweli), then you have already heard this Brooklyn-bred MC's intelligent lyricism. As an English Language and Literature major at the State University of New York Old Westbury, Worth would turn in papers and writing assignments written in lyrical verse. He took this skill to the next level when he, along with then-partner Punchline, spit their insightful heat at a 1997 Lyricist Lounge showcase. This won them the respect of Tribe's very own Q-Tip, who got them to lace Tribe's "Rock Rock, Ya'll." Following that breakthrough, Word kept busy, dropping verse after super lyrical verse on other artists' projects before being tapped for MTV's groundbreaking sketch comedy series, *The Lyricist Lounge Show*, which Wordsworth co-created, scripted and starred in. Now, in 2004, Wordsworth has jumped to the frontline of hip-hop — not only releasing his solo debut chock full of that east coast-sounding/golden era-styled soul-sampling, but also going on the attack against President Bush with the *Slam Bush National Rhyme Contest*. This blazin' hot MC realizes that there's much more to life than girls, guns, drugs, clubs and expensive brand names, stating that *Mirror Music* is simply a "reflection of everything we go through as people."



## OH NO

### The Other Jackson Family Continues Making Headlines

**I**t is sort of funny how when a mainstream label aims for an experimental sound, they go for a relatively abstract underground vibe that indie labels tend to prefer. However, when an underground label aims for an experimental sound, they go for a relatively straightforward vibe that mainstream labels tend to prefer. Such is the case with Oxnard, California native Oh No, whose debut on indie super label Stones Throw Records, comes off much less abstract than the music of his

labelmates (including older brother Madlib) and delivers a mostly hard-hitting and gritty hip-hop set in a more traditional vein.

"Madlib is real abstract," Oh No says of his older brother. "And I have that too, but I prefer to give the people what they want... Not everything, of course, but if they really hungry, I'll give 'em everything." Like his critically lauded sibling, Oh No is the son of '70s soul singer Otis Jackson and nephew of legendary jazz trumpeter, Jan Faddis. Though growing up around the smooth sounds of jazz surely factored into his music-making ambitions, it was actually his love of Run DMC, De La Soul, Tribe and Gang Starr that played a large part in the development of his overall sound and message, which ranges from club bangers to intelligent, introspective cuts. He began foolin' around with his older brother's SP 1200 and Casio SK as early as five years-old, which obviously drew laughter from Madlib. But now, nearly 20 years later, he's a well-trained beat-maker and rhyme-sayer who only draws laughter when he drops a punch line in a battle rap. Having already worked with the likes of legendary rappers AG (of Shawbiz & AG), Wise Intelligent (of Poor Righteous Teachers) and CL Smooth (sans Pete Rock), and laced cuts for Acrobatix, Murs and Mr. Lif, all Oh No has to do is sit back and await the praise he's bound to receive for his mind-blowing Stones Throw debut. A soul-singer, trumpeter and two hip-hop geniuses — maybe this is the Jackson family the world should be watching.

## MAROONS

### Ambushing the Music Industry

**I**n the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Spain's freed and runaway African slaves in Jamaica began forming their own powerful colonies. Runaway African slaves of the British quickly joined these colonies as well, dubbing themselves the "Maroons" — short for the Spanish word *cimarrón* (translation: wild or savage). These fugitive slaves were all over the West Indies and Guyana, and before long had grown so large in number that they were able to revolt against the European settlers who held them captive. In an age where artists are virtually held captive by label execs and bound to practically criminal recording contracts, MC Lateef the Truth

Speaker and mix-master Chief Xcel have decided to enter a Maroon War against the music industry with their debut disc, *Ambush*.

"The Maroons are still inspiring," Xcel enthuses. "They were Africans who refused to be enslaved. To us as Black men trying to be responsible and accountable, they represent freedom and independence." As members of the seminal indie hip-hop collective, SoleSides, Lateef and Xcel set out to celebrate their creative freedom along with the likes of distinguished underground artists Gift of Gab (who, with Xcel, comprises the groundbreaking hip-hop duo, Blackalicious), DJ Shadow and Lyrics Born — all through their very own label, Quannum Projects. "That's been our whole approach to music, the industry and to ourselves," adds Lateef.

"To create without being watered down by what society or popular culture dictates, to be able to speak our minds from a place of our own integrity." As the Maroons, Lateef and Xcel are continuing this approach as the two longtime friends create music of significance. They hope to revive the aesthetic of the Harlem Renaissance, Black Arts Movement and the filmmakers, musicians and writers of the late '80s/early '90s hip-hop explosion by making art that connects to the people's experiences and emotions. Musically, they're bringing together jazz, samba, choranga, dub and funk, but keepin' it gritty. "We wanted the record to be hard," explains Lateef, "to reflect where we're from and how we approach this." The music industry is a battlefield and with this *Ambush*, Quannum is practicing their own brand of Maroon warfare.





## DIESEL TRUCKERS

Keith's Still Cruisin' Down Hip-Hop's Interstate Highway

**W**henever there's a new Kool Keith project on the horizon, fans of this legendary schizophrenic, multi-personality Bronx MC tend to wonder just where he'll take his Bellevue-worthy shtick next. He's already gone from South Bronx street rapper (Ultramagnetic MCs) and creepy extraterrestrial, time-traveling gynecologist (Dr. Octagon) to intergalactic rock star (Black Elvis). What else could he possibly do? With Keith Thornton, anything is a possibility. So, when he and producer/DJ Kutmaster Kurt took to the road in an 18-wheeler as "thug truckers," it seemed to make perfect sense. Well, sorta.

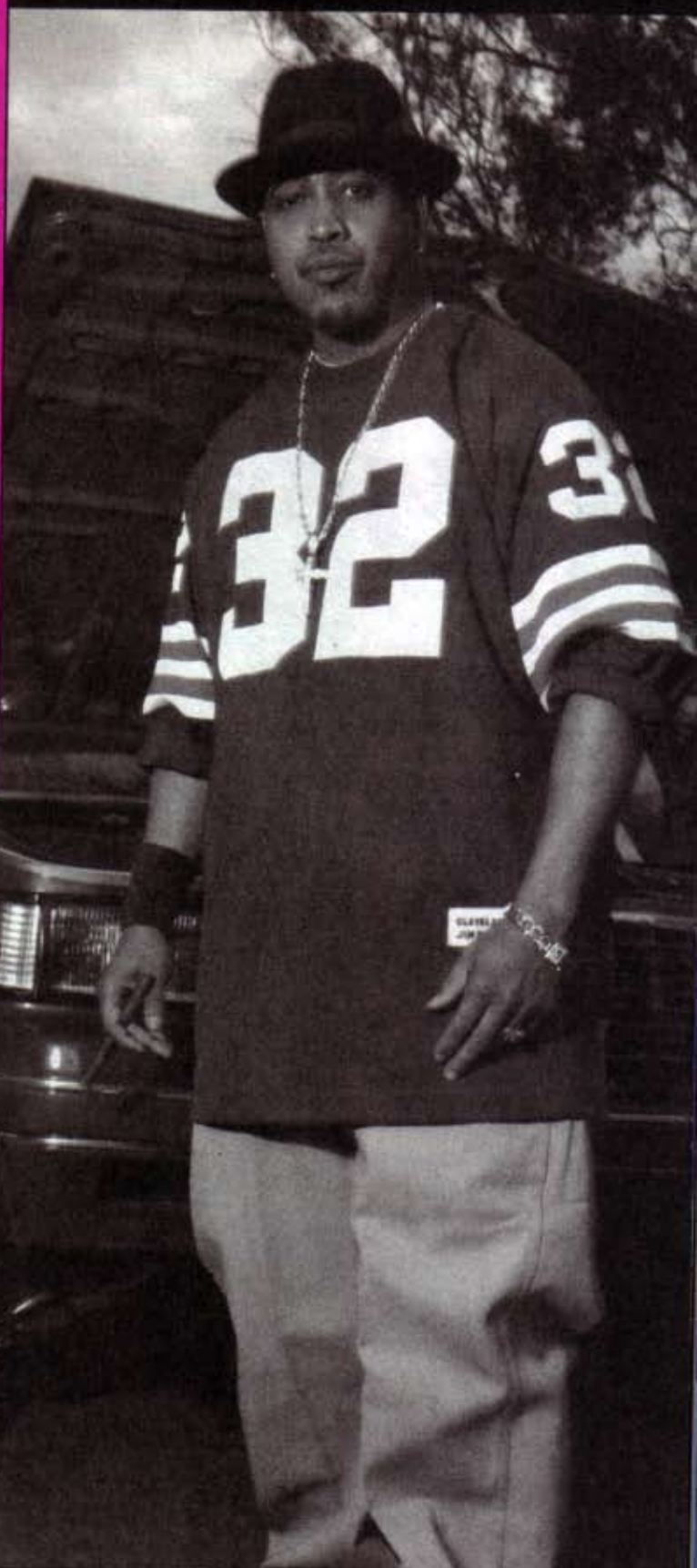
As his second project in just a few months, Keith has finally returned to form (if there ever was such a thing) and has created one of his finest LPs in recent memory. His ather 2004 project, *Theo Undatakerz*, found Keith taking up the role of "Reverend Tom" in what *should've* been a hilarious horror-rap circus. However, bland beats and dull rhymes made that release a certified dud on arrival. This failure gives *Diesel Truckers* a dual-purpose. First off, Keith needed to come back with some heat before people wrote him off once and for all. Secondly, he and Kurt wanted to prove that truckers don't only listen to country and rock. Throughout the LP, the pair gets involved in epic highway chases—wild situations only a cross-country warrior could land himself in. When Keith drops the trucker persona, he laces Kurt's slammin' beats with some of that pure hip-hop—the likes of which only an Ultramagnetic MC could spit. He's battlin' the industry (even seemingly takin' a subtle shot at OutKast's *Andra*), reminiscing about his youth as he namedrops typically forgotten legends of the game and, of course, it wouldn't be a classic Keith joint without some of his signature sex-lingo. Whether in the far reaches of the galaxy or burning rubber down the interstate, it's clear that Mr. Thornton hasn't jackknifed just yet.

## MELLOWMAN ACE

The Original Latin MC Has Come to Get Paid

Since the very beginning of this little thing we call hip-hop, there's always been a significant Latino presence. DJ Charlie Chase of the Cold Crush Brothers was a Bronx-bred Latino and as far as the rest of the hip-hop culture goes, many (some may even argue that a majority of the earliest) graffiti artists and b-boys hailed from Latino families. However, as the culture progressed, Latinos mostly remained underground in the hip-hop world until the mammoth Christopher Rios (AKA Big Pun) was "discovered" by Fat Joe. However, though Pun definitely put Latinos on the hip-hop map as possible moneymakers, the Latino presence still isn't very strong. Mellow Man Ace (rightfully) calls himself the "Godfather of Latin Hip-Hop" and has returned from a four-year hiatus to let the hip-hop public know that Latino MCs are indeed a force to be reckoned with.

Those of you unfamiliar with the rapper born Ulpiano Sergio Reyes should know that his struggle was very different than most of his peers. He was born under communism in Cuba and was literally his family's ticket out of the Castro-ruled country. After making the move from Cuba to Miami, his family would bring him to New Jersey before they settled on South Gate, California's Cypress Avenue. He began his hip-hop life as a member of the quartet DVX (Devastating Vocal Xcellence) with his brother Senen Reyes (Sen Dog), Lawrence Muggerud (DJ Muggs) and Louis Freese (B-Real). If any of those names sound familiar, it's because after Mellowman went solo, the three remaining members of his group went on to form the veteran rap act, Cypress Hill. His first LP, *Escape From Cuba* featured the bi-lingual hit single, "Mentiroso." That was way back in 1989. Since then, he's only released two LPs up until now with *Vengo A Cobrar* (translation: I've Come to Get Paid). At the very least, this Mellowman is proud that he's been able to represent Latinos — even being inducted into the Hip-Hop Hall of Fame and being able to push on with his bi-lingual antics. Mellowman sums up his hip-hop career best: "I was ecstatic to realize I could fulfill my dreams and represent for my Latino people all in one!"



## k-os

### Being Preachy Doesn't Mean Being Boring

Just because a hip-hop artist comes strong with a message, doesn't mean that he's going to be weak in the talent department. This holds absolutely true for the Toronto native MC, k-os (pronounced: chaos). In fact, if it weren't that this socially aware lyricist is a foreigner (read: Canadian), he probably would have taken home more than just "International Album of the Year" for his debut, *Exit*, at the 2003 Source Awards. In fact, his talent and message has been so well received that he's been invited by the likes of India.Arie, The Roots, Nelly Furtado and De La Soul to join them on their respective tours. This kind of attention is exactly what k-os needs to promote his latest, *Joyful Rebellion*.

"Hip-hop is an abandoned ship, and its vanguards are moving on to other things," believes the Canadian MC. "Everyone wants to be a rock star, because they don't know how to take hip-hop to the next level." Taking it to the next level is exactly what this rapper, producer and singer does best. On his debut, he fused his message-filled raps with live instrumentation, traditional beats and singing—earning him comparisons to Lauryn Hill. Born Kheaven Brereton and raised by Jehovah Witness parents who raised him in locations such as Toronto and Trinidad, his influences are all over the map. He's dipped into reggae, soul and even flamenco. The man can pretty much do it all and rarely settles into any one genre, preferring to push the boundaries. With his sophomore effort, Kheaven has dropped the single, "B-Boy Stance"—a simple BOB-driven track that's a "rap reclamation" paying homage to the Golden Age of hip-hop. Other tracks are laced with acoustic guitars, tables, classical strings and live drum kicks. If his second time out is as acclaimed as his first, k-os will certainly find a new legion of fans backing his joyful rebellion.

