

rap Roundup

WORDS BY ANTHONY Q. CASASNOVAS

ZION-I Still True & Livin'

“We had interest from Atlantic, Sony, Def Jam and other majors coming in and they were really interested in the guys,” says Zion-I manager Robert W. Collins. “But the fact is, Zion-I wanted to finally do a record on their own, free from any label or marketing constraints. A record that showed everyone what they were capable of.” After two critically-acclaimed albums from this Bay Area duo of MC Zion and producer/DJ Amp Live, there’s no doubting that they could’ve taken their career in a direction that guarantees monetary gain. However, there’s more to this music than blatantly commercial beats and rhymes.

“Since this album (*True & Livin’*) is coming out on our label,” explains MC Zion, “it is the exact record we wanted to make. We didn’t cater to a particular fan-base or any aspect of the industry.” What this means for hip-hop fans is that this time around, gone are the more experimental drum ‘n’ bass cuts (though there’s still a couple of more electronic-sounding beats for the diehards) and in their place more organic jazz/blues-oriented beats. “This is the type of production that I have always wanted to do,” says an excited Amp Live. Fusing gritty samples, live instrumentation and verses from the likes of Talib Kweli, Blackalicious’ Gift of Gab and Del Tha Funkie Homosapien, Zion-I proves that no matter how indie, they know how to keep it alive.

Straight From Their Rhyme Book:

*“There’s a stranger in my home, infiltrating my throne/
Start messing with my crib, won’t leave me alone/
There’s a stranger, it’s danger, the stranger’s pop-culture/
When you’re feeling hot, when you’re not, she’s a vulture”*
— from “Stranger In My Home”

IMPOSSEBULLS

This "Virtual Rap Squad" Don't Need No (Slave) Education

Chuck D was always an innovator. With his legendary group Public Enemy, he proved that hip-hop could be a platform for politics that actually managed to crossover to mainstream rock audiences. He was also a pioneer who took his abrasive brand of politically-fueled hip-hop to the World Wide Web. In doing so, he created The EnemyBoard — a community forum where fans and activists could practice their freedom of speech amongst each other. It was through this board that the five members of The Impossibulls met each other and Chuck D.

Thus began the experiment: group member C-Doc figured that using the power of the internet and the convenience of MP3s, a producer could send beats to an emcee, who'd

then send his cappella tracks back to the producer for mixing. The experiment resulted in The Impossibulls' cut, "We Don't Need You." The track was a testament to their experiment and along with Chuck D and Professor Griff, they verbally assassinated the entire music industry. Finding a home on Chuck D's SlamJamz record label, they went on to record a self-titled album. Members Marcus J. Gilligan, Tirade, C-Doc, Pvt. Militant and DJ President Ike have vowed to follow in the footsteps of Public Enemy, KRS-One, The Native Tongues, Dead Prez and other socially conscious hip-hop collectives. Their latest release, *Slave Education* continues to prove that hip-hop is a powerful vehicle for change and enlightenment.



Straight From Their Rhyme Book:

*"So now you gonna tell me that the war is won and what's done is done/
And all good for little Bush, I been there before/
Got a letter from the government slid underneath my front door/
The poor get f**ked while the rich sit amused/
And what's left of the Bill of Rights get pimped and abused"*

— from "Circle of Lies"



QUASIMOTO

The Alter-Ego Returns...

In the comic book universe, superheroes and villains tend to have a secret identity. Occasionally, a new secret identity will take up the role of a hero. For example, there have been many "mild-mannered" men who've worn the Flash costume or used the Green Lantern's ring. Batman has gone through a number of different Robins. However, in the hip-hop universe, there's a tendency for rappers to take up more aliases than even Jennifer Garner knows what to do with. Who knows what ODB was calling himself the day he unfortunately passed? West Coast rapper/super producer Otis Jackson Jr. (AKA Madlib, Jaylib, Madvillian and Yesterday's New Quintet) has finally returned as his most celebrated alter-ego Quasimoto.

Lord Quas was unleashed in 2000 on the seminal album, *The Unseen*. As his press release so clearly states, people didn't know how to categorize his voice and flow: "Was it a tree-blazin' ghetto chipmunk? A cartoon Martian?" What the underground hip-hop world knew was that they loved the combination of Madlib's superb production and Quas' high-pitched/nasal vocals – which Madlib actually created by recording his own vocals and speeding up the tape. What does this all mean? Well, fellow hip-hop cadet, it means you should stay tuned to *The Further Adventures of Lord Quas*.

Straight From His Rhyme Book:

*"Get on the freeway, yo it's after dark/
Letting all kinds of speeding cars pass/Just so they can
harass our black @ss's/The Police pulling us over for no
reason/Searching the car, like it's n#gg@ hunting season"*
– from "Low Class Conspiracy"





PIGEON JOHN

Singin' The Blues

It requires a special kind of talent to be able to rock practically any type of music crowd. Just how Blink-182 would probably have a hard time getting an auditorium full of inner-city kids interested in their performance, it'd probably be just as hard for Mobb Deep to get a bunch of suburbanites noddin' their heads. West Coast underground artist Pigeon John has successfully walked that line, getting both hip-hoppers and punkers to rock out at his shows — but the man still sings the blues.

His career started at the center of the West Coast's underground scene — a spot called Good Life. It's here where the likes of the Freestyle Fellowship and The Pharcyde got their big breaks. He admits to being both applauded and booed off stage — experiences he believes have helped hone his skill as an artist.

Musically, he's always been smashing stereotypes by incorporating his influences (everything from the Beatles to De La Soul) and creating music that blends hilarious hip-hop heartbreak and singing. He's made it onto games such as *Project Gotham* and *NBA Inside Drive*, while his indie debut, *Pigeon John is Clueless* went on to sell five-digits. His latest release, *Pigeon John Sings The Blues* finds the artist continuing his diverse stylings, making music that is safe for both the hip-hop scene and punk rockers alike.

Straight From His Rhyme Book:

"I'm just another rapper trying to make the hands clapper/Be in Teen Bop magazine, that's what I'm after/But lately things ain't doing too well/Trying to excel, but still in my Tercel/And one light's broke, the other don't work/So I can't take my girl out at night, yo what a jerk" — from "High School Reunion" BB