

Harlem Hip-Hop The Now and Later Man

Written by Robert ID1329
Sunday, 08 May 2005 08:29 -

Harlem MC Tommy Danger sits down with ThugLifeArmy.com for some insight to his contributions to hip-hop and the rap game.

Born and raised in Harlem, New York Tommy Danger is truly different; not just in his rhymes but in his approach to hip-hop.

Known as 'The Now and Later Man', Tommy is taking his skillz as a MC to a higher plane. Thru a series of mix tapes which come in 'Flavors' you can experience the growth and evolution of this extraordinary MC as he attacks the 'game' with his unusual beats and lyrics.

Tommy Danger will tell you he is far from the gangsta that is expected in today's hip-hop and rap artist, but Tommy Danger is just that – a danger to all the MC's who are running around being just like the last MC.

His 'individualism' as a MC comes across in his music and in this interview. Tommy gives his views thru experience in his live on many things in this interview. From growing up in Harlem and his first interest in Hip-Hop to a New York perspective of the passing of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.

A lot of today's MC's will tell you they are different, but as soon as you hear their music you know they are just the same MC in a different wrapper. Tommy Danger says he's different and one listen to his music let's the listener know they have actually found a MC who is truthful when they boast about being different.

Thanks to Tommy for taking time and giving us this insight to his unique approach to the rap game and being able to use his talent to take hip-hop back to where it belongs – from the street, not some corporate office.

Check out Tommy Danger's web site [HERE](#) and you can get some of the Volumes of 'Flavors' [HERE](#)

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and all the Volumes of 'Flavors' if you email Tommy at info@tommydanger.net

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Robert – Thanks for taking time to speak with us.

Tommy Danger – Thank you for having me.

Robert – I am not from NY, and the different boroughs are a little confusing to me. But when I think of Harlem I think of the eulogy of Malcolm X by Ossie Davis, where Malcolm's love for Harlem and her people were spoke of. How would you describe Harlem to someone who has never been there?

Tommy Danger – Harlem to me is the mecca of style. Within Harlem itself you can find so many sub-styles. A case in point, such as myself: You can catch me walking down the street in a 3 piece suit, swuare toed leather shoes on, and I'm in style cause I have to handle my business during the day time.

But at the same token you can catch me that same day in the afternoon or evening, with a pair of Timb's on some Sean John jeans and a white tee and a fitted cap, cause that's just how we get down.

I notice when you go to other boroughs it's like, there are very few people who can define themselves in that sense, ya know what I'm saying. But that's what I have grown to become and that is partially because of my up-bringing. It's like ya have to handle your business and make money, cause I'm not stupid; and at the same time I want to be relaxed in my environment. So I'm not going to sit on the stoop in a suit, shirt and tie whatever but I still get the same love and respect either or. And if you look at a lot of the other cats out here it's basically the same way. A lot of people handle their business but then you got the other people that really just hustle hard in the streets. So you really have to balance yourself, picking and choosing your hustle.

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I remember one time when I was up in Canada and I told someone I was from Harlem, and the first thing that they thought about was that Central Park jogger case, ya know what I'm saying? It's like 'Oh God your from Harlem and Central Park, and theirs people up there getting raped'; naw it's not like that. To me it is one of the most beautiful spots here in the states. Just because of the diversity with-in cultures and all that. It's not like how it use to be like back in the 70's or whatever or 80's where it was predominately black. You have people from France here now, people from Germany and it gives it a real nice mix, because that's reality right now.

Robert – Being born and raised in Harlem; how has Harlem and Hip-Hop changed since you were coming up?

Tommy Danger – Good question. Coming up basically I was inspired by this dude named King Cut and DJ Cheese. There's a little park that's up the street from where I live at. And these dudes are up in there smoking cheeba or something like that, and they had like boom box but it had a keyboard on top of it, and these dudes just sitting there getting high. I was about 6 – 7 years old, ya know ya see teen agers, and back then that was like when Planet Rock, (by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force), cause I live 2 blocks from where Harlem World use to be at ya know what I'm saying. So like I would see all these people and hear them talking about the club and so forth and the sound, I just use to hear that song Planet Rock and everything and I'd be like 'Damn, I really want to do this someday'. It put this feeling in me like I never felt so happy before in my life. Like no matter what's going on it's just like when hip-hop touched me, just from seeing those two dudes kicking back – they were like free styling doing something on the keys with a little drum beat playing some melodies and he was free styling – and just seeing the level of happiness. Like back then everybody was just like in a good mood. There was no ra ra, no gangsta nothing like that . It was all about how fly you looked, how many girls you had and how you got money ya know.

Where as it's to that point right now to a certain extent but it's actually taken from a totally different angle to where the whole, to me, fantasy side of it has been taken away from it. It's like if you say you got a Bentley- you really have to have a Bentley or you're not on top of your game. Or if you're saying that you're busting caps – you really have to be busting caps or what ever. Back then in those days you could basically tell a story and that's all it was. You could be a great story teller ya know what I'm saying. It's not necessarily that it had to be the truth of what you went thru, it was just about entertaining; entertaining your people, who could how a

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crowds attention the longest. Now it is like who has the most scans for their album sales and who is in what position on Billboard. The music itself, to me, is beginning to evolve, the sound of it. It's more or less just coming back to just, at least here in New York, that raw drum sound. If you listen to tracks like Common 'The Corners' with Kanye on it, and like especially the Black Album . The Samples on that album are crazy. Even if you listen to The Game album that just dropped, they really dug in the crates for that album; ya know what I'm saying. So everything is basically coming full circle right now, regardless what people say. That's the way I see it cause I listen to it really hard.

Robert – Were you influenced by Motown artists as well as early hip-hop and rap coming up?

Tommy Danger – I'd definitely have to say yes cause when I first began to sample, I basically took every 45 record my grand mother had, and that's all she really had in the crates. She had like a whole bunch of Motown artists in there. Actually when I first started sampling I would just take, like the average old school dude, take the record and play it on the record player, then record it to the tape, then keep re-winding it back to make it sound like it was looping; so I could try to do a little free style to it. But even back then if you listen to Motown artists their songs talk about their position in life; and that brings me up to the point in 'Cherry'.

Like I understand from what you said that people say it sounds different, 'Cherry' right now is more or less a reflection of what has been going on in my life. I mean I've been with several women, I have stories to tell about women, I'm far from a gangsta, I talk a lot of trash; I mean that's just me. So I'm just reflecting what comes from my heart basically. Because actually you can't compare another person when your really strong in being an individual.

Robert – Who were and are some of your greatest influences in your life; musically and socially?

Tommy Danger – Musically first and fore most Barry White. I probably sampled everything Barry White has ever made and reason being is because my father actually had given me; he has been a very avid fan of Barry White as well, all his vinyl. So I guess just growing up and always listening to Barry White then I became a teen ager and my father passed those records down to me; by the time I got ready to do some tracks of my own, I would grab that Barry White record. It was samples that needed no modification, like everything is there, it's in place. I think Barry knew that there was something called hip-hop, ya know , years way before it came out so he's like ' ya know what let me put this down so they will have something viable' and it is just a

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beautiful thing, so Barry White definitely. As far as from a hip-hop stand point I really mold my style based upon the older cats like Slick Rick, KRS-1, Rakim, Bismark, ya know people who really brought something to the table.

As far as the newer generation I have to say like Ludacris. Honestly from the new school there are very few people who stand out in a bunch because so many of them sound the same. The reason that Ludacris pops in my head is that he does things that are basically outlandish from what everyone else is doing. He's not I got the glock on the block and I'm ready to pop; all that gets redundant to me after awhile. Definitely Nas and how can I forget Ghostface Killa. Ghostface Killa is another individual who really stands out on his own. Forget what anybody else is saying and doing, he is going to do himself. And it's just basically like love me, hate me, embrace me.

Robert – I read that you once spoke at the United Nations. What topic did you speak on?

Tommy Danger – Back in the United Nations that was UNICEF for children, and basically it was back in elementary school. One of my elementary school teachers, I guess she seen something in me and she was like 'Would you like to participate in this particular program? It's like after school you have to learn how to give public speech and so forth'. I was like yea, why not. That was Miss Marshall, God bless her, and she actually just took the time to say like here is your topic, you're going to get this black and white composition note book and you're going to write down what you think about it; and anything you write in this book you are not to erase. If you don't feel as if it is something in the book that you want to express, you just put a line thru it; because you never know when you can use that idea again. And she would stand us up in front of the class and teach us about pose and eye contact and speaking clearly and so forth. And honestly that's my premise for me doing music. Even to this day when I write a song I don't tear it up or tear the page out and throw it away like if I don't like that particular line; I put a line thru it and you best believe that there will be some where down the line where I'm stuck in a song and I can flip open one of those books and it's like that line works right there. And it works with me being on the stage, and the response from that back then was just basically: I actually stood at the same podium at which the president addresses everyone else. I mean I did it for the 5th and 6th

grade and it was, actually that was my foundation. We got a lot of press from the city and we received like awards, first, second and third place. I came in second place one year, third place another year. Just growing up I think adults seeing something with in children, I mean if she didn't see something in me; I wouldn't be at the point I am now because I would have never grown past – Most people are shy and timid when it comes to crowds but that just turns me into a beast, makes me hungry.

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Robert – Being that you are a NY native, how did the passing of Biggie and Tupac affect you and your outlook on the rap and hip-hop industry?

Tommy Danger – Honestly when I got that call I was at work, the first one being BIG. I didn't believe it. I didn't believe it. And speaking truthfully like BIG, when his first album came out it took me a long time to buy into it. It was like naw you're not going to do it to me with Juicy. Ya all telling me that this guy is the jump off, he has to give me more than just Juicy. But then when he did that 'Unbelievable' with DJ Premier, I said ok this guy's serious. So when BIG passed away, I mean actually for like a good 2 years- nothing. It was damn near like music stopped in the city. I mean nothing was really poppin off; mix tapes anything. If Puff didn't really pimp out BIG's death, then there was nothing really climatic at that point in hip-hop.

And then when you go onto Tupac, I mean quite honestly, I didn't really get into Tupac until after he passed. I was one of those listeners like love to see him on TV, love to listen to him on the radio but I didn't have a Tupac album. It was one of those things where I didn't recognize how deep he was until after he passed away. And I believe a lot of other people didn't realize the message in his music until after we actually just sat back and really listened to it without all the hype around it of Death Row and so forth and so on. Just really listening to what he had to say. And even more recently from watching the documentary, I mean that brotha was just truly incredible. And what I actually seen in Tupac was, and which a lot of artists can suffer from this; Tupac was a human being. And he was saying, to me like just accept me for who I am. But people always want to make you or mold you into something that they perceive you as. Where as they just want to cuddle him and make him into some kind of street trash and that wasn't the case. Or to make him some female abuser, that wasn't the case. He loved his people. He love human beings, he loved life period.

Robert – Like Tupac said don't take one part of my life and twist it and make it my life - look at the whole thing, I am a businessman and you know that because you find me at my place of business.

Tommy Danger – In speaking on his passing up here in New York truth be told there was more of a highlight on BIGGIE's passing as opposed to Tupac, and the only reason I would say that is because of the whole 'bling-bling' era. It's like BIG and Puff they really started magnifying that when they came out with the shiny suits and everything. Right after he passed away it was like people started paying attention to that more than actually the music; where as Tupac was, truthfully speaking from the heart about music. I mean yeah he talked about 'How do you want it' and all that stuff but the majority of his records wasn't about glorifying commercial success. It was just about talking about life. And most people in New York, and I know this is probably a

general statement but it's truth be told; it's always about the money first.

Robert – So how did it all happen that you eventually got into hip-hop and wanting to be a MC?

Tommy Danger – Again leading back to that time when I seen those two dudes in the park, I started from right then and there. I never stopped, it was one of those situations where your raised to grow up and be what people expect you to be. It's like your growing up, you go to school, go to collage, graduate, get a good job, get a retirement fund and that's life. But somewhere in-between that I have always managed to make time for my music. Again, from listening to those 45 's when I was younger and recording them to tape; I still have those tapes, and this is going back to when I was like 12 yr's old, throughout jr. high school – entering local contest like Hip-Hop Against Drugs and rapping at city hall and then getting into other local competitions to where I performed at Symphony Space, and by the time I reached high school I started doing full studio recordings and doing more showcases like at The Muse and stuff like that. I actually got my first; I guess you could call it a deal because of Bruce Wayne. Bruce Wayne and I went to school together. Bruce Wayne is from Mini Mafia. Mini Mafia produced 21 Questions, they have a bunch of stuff done. So he put us onto this little label called Travel Records, me and this other guy I still work with called DJ Left;that fell thru A&R nonsense or whatever but I never stopped. Even from high school, two weeks after high school I started collage, even from collage I worked 2 jobs went to collage, I still managed to make time for my music. Had my little room set up upstairs where I would do my stuff. Even after I wound up getting this little corporate gig, I'm like 21 years old, so I'm like 'oh man I can't really show my hip-hop side of me cause I want to fit in with these people. Ya know if I come down there to wiggged out they are gonna look at me funny, ya know cause I needed to make money. So I put it on the back burner for like a year or so. And then after I realized how much I hated that job I was like 'What the hell am I doing here. What am I doing with my life, I should be doing what I love to do'. So in all that time period I've never given it up or stopped it. It may have slowed down but then it just reached a point in my life when you take a step back and look at what's going on and what direction do you want your life to go into. And what are the things you want to accomplish before you close your eyes. And I said this is something I love to do, this is something I want to do for me; so ya know what : start up the little corporation and go at it real hard. And her I am 10,000 mixed CD's later.

Robert – Would you consider yourself a rapper or a spoken word artist or an activist; or a mixture of all?

Tommy Danger – I am a stone cold MC, rapper.

Robert – Where did the title ‘The Now and Later Man’ come from?

Tommy Danger – Now and later man came about cause of me always wanting to be different and seeing other people promote themselves and giving out flyers; and I have always hated flyers. So I said ya know what I’m going to do? We went down to SOB’s one night and said I’m going to get some Now and Laters, and we are going to label the Now and Laters. That’s how we started our promotion. We just hit the street with our clip boards and asked people for their email addresses and mailing address so we could start our little mailing list and we just said we are going to drop mixed CD’s in different flavors and it actually works for me, it sticks.

Robert – Your most recent CD ‘Vol. 6 ‘Cherry Flavor’, on a project like this, which comes first the beats or the lyrics?

Tommy Danger – I would have to say the lyrics. Cause most of the time I’m always running around doing so forth and so on, so a lot of my ideas and concepts will start from the song first cause I’ll be somewhere and I’ll end up typing it into the black phone or writing it on a brown piece of paper bag or just saying a line over and over and over. Very few of my songs are actually like written sitting down in one particular place, so it’s always on the go. It’s always on the go because I’m reflecting a particular situation or just some type of motivation at that particular time.

Robert – All the other volumes in this series have ‘flavors’ to them. What is behind the flavor’s?

Tommy Danger – The flavors originally, again it just started out to be different but as it began to evolve, each flavor basically has a different style. If you take for example ‘Cherry’, with red being a sexy color, the majority of the songs on there are basically written about scenarios in dealing with women, it’s targeted more towards women. But if you look at a volume like Vol.4 ‘Orange’, I’m basically cutting everybodys head off. And just take a step back, the reason I started mix tapes is because people have this preconceived notion that to get known you should just feature on another well known DJ’s mix tape. And basically I paid this guy 500 dollars so I could feature like one 40 sec free style on his CD and he beat me out of my money. So after he did that I was like – ya know what, rather than for me to pay him that money I’m gone to do it myself.

Robert – Do you get any shine from your hometown radio stations like Hot 97 or Power 105?

Tommy Danger – Honestly I have not attempted to push anything toward any radio station what so ever. I have my own TV show; it comes on public access called Danger Vision. So I basically live in my own little world to be honest with you.

Robert – What about club DJ's, how do they react to the tracks?

Tommy Danger – I have, again just thru DJ Left, I have a couple of tracks that play; like Vol. 5 'Ease Up'. I actually have a club friendly CD that's coming out called 'The Greatest of the Great' in which DJ Left is mixing it up and I'm pretty sure that will be spinning in clubs. My grind is basically directed to the street, directly to people like you; that's just how I work it. Because I look at myself as not having to be dependent on any one particular individual. To me as long as you get in contact with that one person on an individual bases, then the ones that are actually going to spread the word about you. As opposed to me just trying to run to Flex Master Flex saying please, please, please, please and its like 60 other people there and 30 of them are his mans from when he was growing up.

Robert – How has the debate on 'sampling music' changed the mix tape scene; if at all?

Tommy Danger – You can do what ever you want on a mix tape, cause a mix tape is for promotional use only.

Robert – You touched on this but I hear you have a TV show called 'Danger Vision', is that a local show just for New Yorkers?

Tommy Danger – Right it's a local show which started out as sorta like a reality show looking at what I'm going thru on a day to day bases on my grind, supposedly to like the majors, but it is just a behind the scenes look on how we do things and how we keep the grind going and how we keep the buzz going and how we make the mix CD's and how we get in touch with the

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people. People have been very receptive to it. They like it a lot. We ask questions from the people like how you feel about this particular artist, ya know.

Robert – Well for people who are reading who live in New York where can they tune into it?

Tommy Danger – It comes on Channel 57 every Thursday at 6:00 PM, and June 24th will make one year of Danger Vision being on the air. We have produced 36 new shows we haven't even ran repeats. We really push. We do like a 'Making of the Beats' segment. We have an 'Ask Tommy' segment. On the show I'm eating Now and Laters, I cuss a lot, and I drool, and pick my nose and all kinds of wild shit. I'm just being myself most of the time.

Robert – Vol. 7 The mystery flavor is said to have a dvd to, anything you can tell us about the dvd?

Tommy Danger – The DVD will basically have a lot of free styles that people haven't seen or heard. And it will have a short documentary; probably about 30 min.'s long about how I came up and how it came about. So it's like animating what we have discussed involving different people who have helped me over the years to reach the point where I am right now.

Robert – Any clue on what the flavor is?

Tommy Danger – Ummm- then it wouldn't be a mystery. (Both laugh)

Robert – You can't blame me for trying.

Tommy Danger – Actually that is going to be hosted by DJ Action Pac. He was in XXL, he is the people choice DJ, and he's been out for a long time. He actually runs Get Money Nation. Get Money Nation is the number one street distributor for CD's up here. They push out damn near a million CD's up here.

Robert – What are some of the pro's and con's of being an independent artist?

Tommy Danger – Honestly I cannot say there is a con. There isn't any con's. The pro's are if you really focus – My music is the result of not listening to the radio and watching the TV. And I think a lot more artists should do that, so you can really become your own individual artist. Yes you listen to artists to learn from other artists but I think like regular radio and regular MTV garbage like naw, because then you become a carbon copy of what's popular. So with that being said, if you listen to every volume you can hear how the sounds evolve and you can hear like on Vol. 5 where I'm yelling at the top of my lungs on a track like 'Where The People At' to the change in Vol. 6, it's basically finding your space, finding your zone where your comfortable cause truthfully Robert the zone that I'm in nobody can touch me. Nobody can be better than me except me; because no one is going to work harder than me toward me. How can you work better at being me than me? That doesn't make sense. And that's where people make the mistake; if I would ever attempt to be like Jay-Z, even though I could say my style is a combination of De La Soul and Jay-Z, I would never try to be those two individuals; because if I do not supersede what they have done, then I have already failed. But if I show my own as Tommy Danger, that's why I am already two steps ahead of the game. It's just a matter of time.

Robert – What would be the greatest challenge being an independent artist?

Tommy Danger – The greatest challenges in New York, speaking from a general stand point; is shelf space. Because there are so many artists up here, that's why I prefer to target out of state. I send to a lot of mom and pop stores from Miami to LA. Besides that - put it this way – My first CD that we put out, we did it on a home computer with a pack of fruity loops and like 35 dollars in blank CD's and a HP printer. We pressed up 200 CD's and ran around to every mix tape spot and put it out there. I just got struck with a bolt of lighting like what are you waiting for. I was listening to this cat from the Diplomats, and I really like the Diplomats cause they are from the home town; this dude named JR Ryda and I was sitting there listening to his CD and I said like I'm better than this dude. I'm like is this the future of what we have to listen to? And I'm like I got to do something. I can't let it go down like that ya know. So I was like well forget it. I went out and got some other peoples instrumentals whatever and that's just how it started. So if you listen to the first 4 volumes, you'll hear quite a few industry beats. But again it is a good zone to be into cause everything goes in levels and phases. Once you find your voice and how to record and whats your production style then you'll just be performing on the stage.

Robert – So if a person orders 1 thru 7; if they put 1 on and as they play them, they can watch

you progress into the person you are now?

Tommy Danger – Exactly.

Robert – Whose music do you listen to, who is in your player now?

Tommy Danger – Whats in my player right now, Big L – ‘Platinum Plus’, um definitely got Ludacris in there. I like 50 Cent despite what people say. But I like the first album not the second album to much. Well it’s considered the last album before this album, which is actually his second album. The first album they actually shelved. Jay-Z Black album. I listen to The Game so much in the car that I’m actually tired of it, so I don’t even want to hear it any more. There are a lot of underground cats like other people in my family like Illa Ghee. Illa Ghee was on a track with The Alchemist called ‘Hold You Down’. I stay in the under under ground rack.

Robert – Besides yourself, who do you see as hot on in the game now?

Tommy Danger – I’m looking forward to Common’s album. There aren’t that many, ya know like that make ya want to throw the tapes in the machine when you hear them like ‘Damn what he just say’, like let me spin that back type stuff. Everybody is just like a one two three and this is me. Because they listen to the radio and watch the TV and they feel this is what it is now. There is a difference in being simple and being clever. To many people are simple and not clever. Jay-Z is clever, Cameron is simple.

Robert – Well with the Vol. 6 ‘Cherry’ just out and talk about Vol. 7 the mystery flavor and the dvd; what else can we look for from Tommy Danger in the near future?

Tommy Danger – In between that you have ‘The Greatest of the Great’. That is going to be a compilation of Vol.’s 1 thru 7 with the highlights in it. We are looking at shooting a video for ‘3 Shots’, that’s the track from ‘Cherry’ with Prodigy of Mobb Deep and Illa Ghee on it. I’m also doing a track with Scrape Iron out of Louisiana, We are going to do a showcase of just our camp and do it like that and just grind it hard. Keep hitting the streets and keep the buzz going out there. My goal right now in doing this, cause my cousin always said you have to have a

purpose; and my purpose is to create a whole new world of MC's.

Robert – Are all the flavor volumes available off your web site?

Tommy Danger – Right now if you go to CD Baby.com you can get Vol.'s 2,5,and 6. But if anyone wants the others they can email me at info@tommydanger.net I got all the Vol.'s here.

Robert – Is there anything we failed to touch on or any shout outs you have?

Tommy Danger – Just shouting out – I'm doing it real strong and hard for the East. I actually didn't want to take that title but I feel that it's necessary. You have a lot of people who are carbon copies and they want to be gangsta rappers and all that. I can just be Tommy Danger and I am going to knock down so many doors, I'm going to knock down so many toy soldiers it's unbelievable. And the vibe I am getting from the people, I know I am going in the right direction.

And let it be know also – you can listen to all my CD's, all of my CD's and there is a rule of thumb when I'm working with other cats; you can make 90% of your CD about fantasy but 10% of your CD has to be about giving something back to the people. So if you listen to songs like 'Off The Block', there always has to be that one track that is sorta like food for thought, so there is always a deeper message under what I'm saying, ya know what I'm saying.

Robert – So I should re-listen to that track?

Tommy Danger – Yes. (Robert – 'I appreciate that'.)

Robert – Well we wish you all the best and we will be watching out for you. Keep us up on what's going on with you, you are one kool peep and it has been a blessing sharing time with you.

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Tommy Danger – Thank you RB.

Robert – Kool – Peace—