

Hip Hop Legends Wu Tang Come Full Circle w 8 Diagrams

Written by Robert ID3252

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Legendary multi-platinum hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan go back to their roots with 8 Diagrams, their first new album in six years, on Steve Rifkind's SRC label through Universal Records to come out this summer. The band released their very first album, Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers), on Rifkind's groundbreaking Loud Records nearly 15 years ago and went on to carve out one of the most distinctive catalogs in hip-hop, its nine members going on to success not only in music, but also acting, scoring films, video games and clothing lines.

"This is the perfect time for us to come back, the stars are aligned," says one of the band's three founders, RZA, who started the group with GZA and the late Ol' Dirty Bastard, adding six other members from Brooklyn and Staten Island, including hip hop notables Method Man, Raekwon the Chef, Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, Masta Killa and U-God, taking their name from one of their beloved Hong Kong martial arts films. "It's like when we first started with Steve. We put out real hip-hop at a time when it was turning into pop or R&B. We brought the focus back to the music in its rawest form, without studio polish or radio hooks."

The roots of Wu-Tang's reunion took place last year, when the band was rapturously received at a rare live performance in California before more than 10,000 fans.

"The energy is just like it was, and it's needed in our industry same as back then," says Rifkind, who started SRC after Loud and has broken such acts as David Banner and more recently, Akon, into multi-platinum sellers.

Rifkind and RZA also pioneered corporate and label synergy by bringing in major corporations to sponsor individual artists within the hip-hop community. "Over the last few years, the group has developed a whole new fan base of 20-year-olds and even younger who've never even seen them play."

From the start, Wu-Tang Clan represented a hip-hop collective, its individual members all pursuing individual careers, then coming back to their base. The group's 1997 breakthrough, the two-CD Wu-Tang Forever, set a record for hip-hop acts by selling 600k in its first week, debuting at #1 on its way to 4 million in U.S. sales. "Although there have been other releases by solo members on different labels," said Rifkind and RZA, "this is a conjunction of creative and corporate thinking by the whole group."

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Since then, RZA has acted in several films, including Jim Jarmusch's *Coffee and Cigarettes* and *Derailed*, as well as composing the score for *Ghost Dog*, *Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2*, *Soul Plane*, *Barbershop 2* and *Blade Trinity*. Method Man acted in both feature films and TV, while GZA, Raekwon and Ghostface Killah have all put out successful solo albums.

8 Diagrams, also named after a kung fu epic, will be the first group recording since the death of Ol' Dirty Bastard in Nov. 2004, and RZA promises the new album will include a performance of O.D.B. "in his rawest form" from the vault "which will show you why he was considered one of the illest MCs ever." There is also a tribute song to O.D.B. titled, "Life Changes," that has been in the can for awhile. "Hopefully, it will provide some closure for the fans," says RZA.

RZA insists Wu-Tang Clan's return coincides with their desire to win over fans who've been disappointed with the recent direction of hip-hop, just as it was when they began.

"People want something that gives them an adrenaline rush," says RZA. "We're here to supply that fix. How could hip-hop be dead if Wu-Tang is forever?"

"We're here to revive the spirit and the economics and bring in a wave of energy that has lately dissipated."