

Kool Keith 'Black Elvis Hip-Hop's First Rock Star

Written by Davey D ID2750

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Kool Keith-'You Can't Keep Wearing Afros From 1985' By Davey D

One of Hip Hop's most colorful and sometimes eccentric figures is the one and only Kool Keith from the landmark group The Ultramagnetic MCs. This Bronx born native, with his youthful vibe and complex rhyme flow leaves many people believing that he's a new jack who recently stepped into the game. On the contrary, Keith has been rapping about how he was a '20 year vet' back in the 80s.

I know I got my first Ultramagnetic album 'Critical Beatdown' back in '87-'88, hence that should give you an idea of his longevity. It also speaks to just how far ahead of the curve Keith was when you consider the type of flow and rhyme style he was bringing to the table in '88 when many of us first heard songs like 'Ego Tripping'. In short Kool Keith has been putting in work.

We recently sat down and spoke with the man who likes to call himself 'Black Elvis-Hip Hop's first Rock Star' and asked him how he managed to keep himself relevant in an industry that is constantly changing and looking for the 'next big thing'.

Keith noted that unlike most artists he has always made it a point to keep abreast of new fashion trends and the new rap styles people were bringing to the game. It's not that he adapts to everything, but that awareness allows him to adjust his own game so he can better connect and grow with his large fan base. He said that if you don't stay relevant you will fall off in a big way. "You can't keep wearing Afros from 1985", he said.

As for his complex rhyme flow, which many liken to that of Wu-Tang's Ghostface, Keith said that it was one he didn't expect to stick. He says that he was experimenting with flows and that he was glad to see it come back around like a boomerang and be appreciated so many years later.

During our interview Keith talked about the current state of Hip Hop in New York. He acknowledged that the birthplace of Hip Hop is going through a drought. He attributed that to two things. First, a lot of other cities have seriously stepped up their game and emcees from those areas are making music that has widespread appeal. He also noted that way too many New Yorkers tend to be territorial in a world that is increasingly global. In short the refusal to

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embrace what other areas were bringing to the table has come back to haunt the Big Apple.

Keith went on to add, that many New York emcees simply don't have the freedom to go out and build because they are locked into contracts with various labels in the recording industry which is headquartered there. He says all these things have added up and caused people in New York to panic and now people are jumping onto the southern vibe and whatever else they feel will be the next 'hot thing.

We also spoke to Keith about his zany Hip Hop personas including Dr. Doom, Dr Octagon, Reverend Tom and Black Elvis to name a few. I asked him if he was influenced by Funk Godfather George Clinton who in years prior was known for donning multiple personalities.

Keith admitted that he definitely peeped what Clinton had done during his hey day. However, Keith added to that concept and took it to the next level in what he described as a 'daredevil' sort of way. He noted that the key difference between him and Clinton was that he formed numerous groups and became a part of them. In Keith's case he actually took on the new personas and was basically on his own.

We went more into depth about a favorite character called Black Elvis. Keith explained that it was his way of indicating to the world that he was a Black rock star and that he had always worked and collaborated with rockers. He also noted that over the years he has attracted a large rock audience and Black Elvis was another way in which he could connect.

Finally we talked about some of Kool Keith's upcoming projects. He said that he is currently working with a Spanish band that is along the lines of Latin Freestyle vibe ala Expose and Cover Girls that was extremely popular during the mid 80s

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