

Davey D Speaks with Chicago Hip Hop Pioneer Twista

Written by Davey D ID3390

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We sat down and spoke with Chicago Hip Hop pioneer Twista the other day and spoke to him about everything under the sun, from his long history in the game, to Chicago politics to the art of emceeing. It was an insightful and engaging discussion.

We kicked things off by talking about Twista's history in the game. He goes back to the mid 80s when Chi-town which was mostly known for House Music was struggling just to get local venues to allow Hip Hop shows. He recalls doing all those early talent shows when local artists and activists seriously pushed to knock down some of the barriers. He acknowledged pioneers like Jitu of the group Ten Tray as being a key figure in that early movement.

Twista spoke about the direct influence House music or as they call in the Chi-Juke music had on him. He noted that his fast paced rhyme style and cadence was designed to flow over house and hip house beats. He talked fondly of key figures in the Hip House scene like Fast Eddie, Kool Rock Steady and Tyree. He also talked about the Factory Nightclub which was the Mecca for House music. Twista noted that many of his family members frequented the house scene and that it will forever be a part of him. In fact on his new album, he pays tribute to House on one of his songs. He also spoke about getting beats from artists like Fast Eddie and how artists like Missy Elliot were obviously influenced by House.

We switched gears and spoke about the geographical layout of the city and how that plays a role in terms of style. Twista is from the Westside which many consider "country" as opposed to the Southside which is a bit more cosmopolitan. He explained that many of the artists from the Southside tended to incorporate influences from other areas into their music. Hence when you hear a Kanye or Common, you can hear a style that has a lot more traditional "Hip Hop traits".

"The Westside is a bit more secluded and as a result people developed their own style and brand of Hip Hop", Twista noted.

He attributes his westside upbringing as a major influence in his approach toward Hip Hop. He says that now that Chicago is experiencing a Renaissance of sorts, he wishes to be a bridge. He currently has started a label and has reached back to involve a lot of local cats so that they too can get their shine.

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We talked about the slow down in the industry and the decline of rap album sales. Twista said that part of the reason the industry is suffering is because many of its key players refused to stay up on the technology. They wanted to fight it instead of joining it and figuring out ways to make it work for them. Twista said if there's any advice he'd like to pass on to up and coming artists is for them to seek out and involve yourself with the people who are inventing these new devices.

He also added that the new technology has contributed to slumping album sales in this way. Its not so much from digital downloading as it is that it allows anyone and everyone with little or no talent to get into the game. The end result has been an oversaturation of mediocre product.

He went on to comment about Hip Hop maturing and that it was great that Jay-Z came out and made it ok for artists to still be in the game over 30. He explained that a kid who grew up only listening to songs about getting cash and hustling may now hear a Jay-Z record and know that its also cool to buy a house and get good credit, because at age 30 something Jay-Z is rapping about those things. He noted that its important to allow Hip Hop to grow up.

We got into a deep conversation about emceeing and what it means to be a good emcee in 2007. Twista explained that when he was younger he wanted to show off his skillz and leave people impressed with his speed raps. As he got older he said it became more important to make sure people could hear what he was saying. Hence he changed up his rhythm.

He elaborated by noting that most people thinks he raps real fast, but a good part of it is an illusion. The trick is in how you ride the rhythm. he demonstrated his technique and it was clear that by him spitting with a certain rhythm that he actually sounds a lot faster then he really is. He said a good emcee has good rhythm-that's the key to rising above the rest.

We got into a discussion about politics and Twista commented on some of the oppressive situations facing folks in Chicago especially in the areas of police brutality. He said he saw a lot of things coming down the pipe and that as an artists its important for him and other to make at the very least small gestures. He said keeping things simple and to the point can go along ways with his audience and that all artists should take time out to talk to their audience and help educate them while at the same time getting educated.

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He also noted that while his music is street oriented that people should not be too quick to judge. he noted that there's a viable audience out there and that many times the conversation is between him as the artists and those fans and that what he's spitting may not be for particular groups of people.

He went on to note that its important for artists to remain creative and continuously challenge themselves. he said he wants to do collaborations with artists like Lupe Fiasco because they are on opposite ends of the spectrum and it would force them to really tap into their creative genius.

He concluded by saying the best advice he could give to people is to surround yourself with positive people.

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