

The Wisdom of Chali 2Na-Jurassic 5 Is No Joke

Written by Davey D ID2760

Thursday, 22 June 2006 00:07 -

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Everybody knows Chali 2na. He's not hard to miss. For those who don't know, if you manage to score a ticket the frequently sold out Jurassic 5 shows, you'll see in the middle of the stage standing alongside group members Zaakir, Akil, Mark 7even and DJ Nu-Mark. On first glance you'll think he's a basketball player who needs to be working the boards with the likes of Shaq and Kobe, but once he speaks, you'll know that he's part of that elite pantheon of emcees who anchor down their respective crews with that booming baritone voice. He joins the ranks of Melle-Mel, Chuck D, Michael Franti and Ludacris to name a few. When he speaks people listen. His voice commands respect. His wisdom keeps you engaged. If that's not enough, he's one of the most down to earth likeable people you will meet.

We sat down with Mr. 2na and talked to him about a number of topics starting with the origins of J5. He recounted the group's early days in South Central Los Angeles at the historic Good Life Café when they were still two separate crews. 2na explained that he along with DJ Cut Chemist and Mark 7even were part of a crew called The Unity Committee. Zaakir, Akil and the late Sean Africa were part of a crew called Rebels of Rhythm.

The crews used to frequent an underground hotspot called the Good Life which 2na described as being the birthplace and refuge for LA's burgeoning underground scene in the early 90s. He talked about how gangsta rap was the rage at that time, but did not by a long shot represent LA's entire Hip Hop scene. Many of the acts that found themselves not falling into the gangsta category came to the Good Life to do showcases and hone their skillz. The top dogs that set the bar and everyone patterned themselves after was a group called Freestyle Fellowship. It was here that a whole freestyle movement was launched that went on to impact the rap game from coast to coast.

2na continued by noting that by the time his crew the Unity Committee started coming to the Good Life it was at the tail end of that era and hence didn't feel a need to try and compete with or emulate Freestyle Fellowship. As a result they developed their own unique style. At the same time Rebels of Rhythm were also coming around and exuded a similar vibe. For a good year the two crews performed at Good Life and built with one another, but never did a song or collaborated. Finally they decided to do a song called 'Unified Rebelution' which combined both their names. The song was released independently after everyone ponied up 400- 500 bucks. It created a huge buzz in LA and led to the guys getting signed by TVT Records.

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Up to that point, many thought the name of their song 'Unified Rebelution' was the name of the group. They came up with the name Jurassic 5 after TVE records pressed the group for a name and Chali 2na's girl at the time and mother to his son joked that the group wish they could sound like the Furious Five. She said 'you guys sound more like the Jurassic 5 meaning they were old. 2na said that joke lead to them actually keeping the name. The rest they say is history.

Chali went on to breakdown the inner workings of the group and the role that each member plays when he comes to the table to record their albums and do shows. He noted that parts are custom made to highlight each person's talents.

He went on to add that as a group they feel a responsibility to do a lot with their music in terms of trying to make difference. He said for him, he has come to appreciate the fact that the opportunity to do what they're doing wasn't always there and it was that sort of collectively understanding especially after 9-11 that inspired the song 'Freedom'.

We also spoke about Chali's need to expand beyond rap. He talked about what lead to him and Cut Chemist hooking up with the group Ozomatli. He also talked about why he also did stuff with Mike Shinoda and Linkin' Park. Chali explained that he's always dabbled in artistic expression. He talked about being a graf writer before he even knew it was connected to Hip Hop.

We wound down our interview by talking about the Cotton Club syndrome. He noted that there has been a power structure both within and outside the industry that seems to work overtime in keeping conscious and revolutionary groups away from the Black masses of the people they ideally need to reach. He noted that it extends beyond Hip Hop as is evidence by the fact that we've never seen people like Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey come together, pool their money and do something big. It may be Fear of a Black Planet.

We concluded our interview by talking about the meaning behind the song 'Remember His Name'. Chali said that it was based upon a true story after Zaakir aka Soup witnessed a death in South Central of someone he knew. The cut speaks for itself as does Chali 2Na's words of wisdom in this interview.

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