

Polyrhythm Addicts Say Hip Hop's in an Emergency

Written by Robert ID3517

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The need to "save" hip hop has been talked about so much, it's practically a cliché. Every day, it seems another new hip hop emcee comes out and proclaims themselves the Patron Saint of rap, enlightening the masses with "the real hip hop."

The irony is that such posturing achieves a level of false grandeur, similar in kind to the bling-and-murder rap it professes to mock. But what happens when you bring together four cats with decades of experience combined in the game? In 1999, just as hip-hop was turning the corner into an era defined more by liars & loot than lyrics & truth, a hip hop super group dropped a bomb on the industry. Actually, maybe supernova's a better word, as the 10 tracks quickly burned an indelible image into the consciousness of its listeners before becoming a victim, like so many others, of the business side of the game.

Now, the Polyrhythm Addicts (DJ Spinna, Shabaam Sahdeeq, Mr. Complex and scorching new member Tiye Phoenix) return with the May 2007 release of Break Glass... at a time when honest hip hop groups are so desperately needed. "Right now, hip-hop's in an emergency," says Sahdeeq. "Nas said, 'Hip-hop is dead.'" We think it can still be saved. You can see it. All you gotta do is just break the emergency glass and it's right there.

Break Glass... guarantees a return to the time when flow and beats actually mattered, yet sees the group maturing both artistically and emotionally from their debut. The beats are rawer, with less keyboard overdubs and more of a focus on the classic boom-bap style. In addition, the album employs a mix of beats and live musicians to beef up the sound. "Whatever's hot now, the audience gets brainwashed into thinking that's what's real and there's no balance," says Spinna. "It's gotten boring and I think there's an audience that's neglected. They want to hear something with more depth."

Enter the Polyrhythm Addicts. Recorded entirely at Spinna's studio, the Thingamajig Lab in Brooklyn, Break Glass... is hardly lacking in depth. Sahdeeq, recently released from prison, draws from learned experiences to bolster his already-established intelligent thug style. Mr. Complex has the natural gift of a veteran storyteller, weaving an unpredictable, hysterical string of metaphors and punchlines together. DJ Spinna, one of the most acclaimed and prolific producers in music, is legendary for his quality control and ability to drop hotness in numerous genres. And lest we think it's only about the fellas, Tiye Phoenix joins the group for that soulful, yet sexy, tip.

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The name may not ring a bell, but chances are, you've heard something the D.C. native has done. Tiye Phoenix is that rare quadruple threat in hip-hop. As a producer, she beat out eight DJs to take the top prize at the 2006 Meet the Producers Beat Battle Invitational. As a singer, her smooth voice can be heard on a number of hip-hop albums, including Reflection Eternal's critically-acclaimed debut. As a keyboardist, (she's been playing since she was seven) her group Soulful Symphony has rocked crowds with Nas and Black Moon, as well as Mr. Complex's own band. But most importantly, as an emcee in the tradition of Lauryn Hill and Jean Grae, she brings that rare combination of lyrical prowess, dexterity and sick flow to add to the group's already-powerful emcee lineup.

The former Rawkus and Universal artist recalls her initial meeting with Spinna: "The very first session we had, Spinna said to me, 'This is a project sent to you by the heavens. It's an opportunity for you to be as lyrical as you wanna be and just be yourself.'" For Phoenix, that means bringing a sexy attitude without the trashiness of some of her female peers.

Having been in the game for over a decade, Phoenix has seen first-hand the shift in rap's consciousness. "There are a good number of hip-hop supporters who feel like right now, hip-hop's a vast wasteland," she says. "They know they're being short-changed and not getting the best art when they listen to the radio. We kept those people in mind because we are those people." "I knew she was nice on the mic," says Spinna of Phoenix. "But once we started this record and seeing how skilled she was, I knew the album was gonna be taken to another level." While Break Glass... is the first album the foursome recorded together, the group all have connections dating back to the mid-90s. Spinna had been producing Mr. Complex's stuff for a minute, as well as providing the beat for Sahdeeq's underground classic "5 Star Generals" (with a then-unknown hip hop MC Eminem). When Complex brought the group together in 1999, he had only intended to drop one track for a Japanese compilation. That single, "Not Your Ordinary," was so popular, it spurred the hip-hop supergroup into recording their debut album Rhyme Related.

Fast forward to summer 2006 and, after label changes, personnel shifts, hardships and growth, Complex connected with Spinna to discuss reforming the group. "Over the past years, I get asked all the time, 'W'sup with Poly? W'sup with Poly?'" Complex admits. "It's like people never forgot and have been waiting years for the second album."

After reconnecting with Sahdeeq and bringing in Phoenix, the group decamped to Spinna's lab to begin work on Break Glass..., which boasts contributions from Pharoahe Monch, Planet Asia, Phonte from Little Brother and many more.

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“There still is a receptivity amongst the people for hip-hop to veer off in a new direction,” says Phoenix. “I think it’s what everybody is feeling like they are missing from hip-hop. Honest rhymes. Honest beats. And that pure love for the art form.”

The hammer’s already in your hand. All you gotta do is “break glass.”

Break Glass... will be released in May 2007

For more information contact

www.myspace.com/backspinpromo

<http://www.crackspace.com/polyrhythmaddicts>

<http://www.babygrande.com>