

Wyclef Jean The Hurts in Haiti

Written by Westside ID226

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Rap artist Wyclef Jean left his native Haiti when he was just 9 years old. In the 23 years since, his love and memories haven't faded a bit.

The producer and musician often thinks about how he would feel if he were a child there now, after the island has been relentlessly hit with disasters and turmoil, both natural and man-made.

"When I was coming up I was very poor, but we always had our spirit. That spirit was self-esteem. I feel it's my job to put that self-esteem back in every Haitian kid in Haiti. A sense of self-esteem has been lost," he says from Platinum Sound Studios in New York City.

"How would I feel? I'd feel like the rest of the world has forgotten about me. I think that's how every Haitian kid feels."

Jean shows it by constantly returning to his homeland, to see how he can help. He had visited there just four days before this interview, aiding in flood relief from the recent tropical storms. He can also bring attention to it through his music with his group The Fugees (short for "refugees") and his own solo work, including the new album *Welcome to Haiti Creole 101*, a set of songs infused with Haitian culture.

"I know the rest of the world is saying "Why Haiti? Why should we focus on Haiti? What makes that island in particular so special?"

"It's the only place in the Caribbean that still has a sense of complete culture. It's a very mystical place. That's the only island you can go to and you go "Man, I feel this culture in here 101 percent." "

So it was important for him in the wake of hurricanes and riots in Haiti this year to get the album out. It marks the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence in 1804, plus he wanted to get his political song, *President*, out before the November election in this country.

"Haiti has had a bad year this year. Every two seconds there's some more bad news about Haiti," he says. "It was important to get (the music) out for the Haitian people around the world.

"They have to know that there's a voice that's speaking on behalf of them. They have to join forces and help educate the rest of the world on what Haiti really is as a whole - not just violence in Port-au-Prince."

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He continues: "With everything going on around the world, I felt it was just necessary to just come out - not in a sense of hype, but as an obscure piece of music about the society we live in right now."

It's certainly not downbeat music; the Haitian rhythm infused through the songs range from dance to romance, particularly in the ballad *Douce*.

And *President* addresses the upcoming election, with its controversial chorus: "If I was president, I'd get elected on Friday, assassinated on Saturday, and buried on Sunday."

"This song is not bashing Bush," Jean says. "If you listen to the lyrics and you follow what's going on in the world, before Bush they were still spending billions on war. The state that we're in now, we as people need to check ourselves and make sure we have our rights." (Watch the video for the LP's lead-single "President" - [HERE](#))

But most of the album focuses on Haiti.

"I was trying to help with the flood relief and see exactly in what capacity I can bring things back to Haiti," he says, describing his most recent trip.

"If I'm down there I can tell you what it is they need. Right now they need blankets, they need medicine, they need dry food, they need water. They need solar ovens. Those are the things I've seen with my eyes. If they can get that stuff immediately, it would help the people."

There's some resistance, he says, and he understands it. "People have lost trust in sending money to Haiti because they don't know if it really got there."

And much of the solution must come from the Haitian people themselves. "Right now it just takes people to stop blaming things on the government now. We as civil people should take the initiative. If the garbage is in Port-au-Prince and I can get a garbage crew to come in, we can keep the place clean," he says.

"Every time something goes wrong you don't have to erupt in a rage of violence, you know?"

When he goes back and gets out of violence-torn Port-au-Prince to visit the rest of the country, he finds the land of his youth.

"What fascinated me about Louis Armstrong is he'd travel all over, get different rhythms, and bring them back to jazz," Jean says. "I can always go back to Haiti and close my eyes and listen to the drums and come back with 32 more rhythms."

With much of the album sung in Creole, most people won't know what the songs are about except by the tone.

"Sometimes we don't need to know what the person is saying, if we can *feel* what the person is saying."

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Reunion hopes have not faded

Wyclef Jean fans often ask him if he'll reunite with Lauryn Hill and Pras to make another album as The Fugees, whose album *The Score* redefined hip-hop and helped spread it into the mainstream.

The answer: not anytime soon.

Hill's up-and-down solo career has been her focus, along with her struggles with fame and spirituality. Pras and Jean have been in a war of words in the press of late.

But the group performed together on the *Dave Chapelle Show* not long back, and a reunion is in the works, Jean says.

"I think there's a future there . . . We're finding ourselves, who we are as individuals. In the future there's definitely going to be a Fugees album. Definitely."

[Source](#)