

Shock-G's Values

Written by Robert ID673
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Shock-G

Shock-G the man credited with discovering late rap icon Tupac Shakur recently released an album that explores the complicated nature of race in America.

After 15 years of doing "The Humpty Dance," Digital Underground frontman Shock-G's solo debut reveals an artist who has maintained a sense of humor despite growing disillusioned with hip-hop's faux thuggism, and society's insistence on squeezing individuals into preconceived notions of race and ethnicity.

"A lot of the statements on the album are things I've been wanting to say since I was a teenager but couldn't get out through Digital Underground," the rapper, born Gregory Jacobs, said last week from his home in Los Angeles. He appears Saturday at Cervantes' Masterpiece Ballroom.

But after learning shortly after Christmas that two Sri Lankan friends lost their entire extended families in the Indian Ocean tsunami, music seemed trite to Shock-G. So instead of using the solace of home to work on new material or prepare for tour dates, the rapper powwowed with former manager Nzazi Malonga about how to get food and water to loved ones on the other side of the globe.

"This tsunami bleeds into our lives," said Shock-G, who added that personal politics caused his circle of friends to mistrust the ability of governments and nonprofit organizations to successfully distribute relief materials.

"We can always point fingers, but the fact is that people are calling us now and saying we don't have any water and we're thirsty," said Malonga, a tai chi instructor and spiritual leader who helped organize Digital Underground's first album release party for the title that put Shock-G on

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the map, "Sex Packets."

Malonga recalled becoming friends with the rapper after Shock-G stepped up during a tour to help another person in need.

"Shock in his seemingly befuddled state came to me with a blank check and said, "All I need is rent money,"" Malonga said. "That's who he is. Beyond the music and the dancing, that's really who he is. He would have been much more famous had he not carried so many other people."

And there it is. Tupac Shakur's Goliath impact on the music world will forever follow Shock-G.

"Tupac was Greg's roadie. He carried Greg's bags," Malonga said of the relationship between the two entertainers. "Greg financed (Tupac), helped him get a driver's license, fed him, housed him ... then he stood back and watched him flourish."

Shock-G broaches that relationship on his album, "Fear of a Mixed Planet," which also features his own kooky, sci-fi cover illustrations. This project was personal in every way: Shock-G raps about corrupt morality in the music business, his own womanizing, lost friendships and ethnic misunderstandings. The lyricist packages those thoughts in a lo-fi, funky sound reminiscent of Digital Underground's George Clinton-inspired psychedelia.

"I come from a hodgepodge," Shock-G said. "When you have a white trash auntie and a thugged-out criminal uncle and a very educated intellectual African-American mason grandfather and lawyers in the families and junkies in the family and Pakistanis and Jewish people, and they come over on Thanksgiving?"

"It's hard to listen to people say white people do this or black people do that," he said.

Five days after this interview, Shock-G put Malonga on a plane for Colombo, Sri Lanka, for a humanitarian trip the rapper wanted to go on himself. But duty means something different for

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"We'll be there (in Denver) on the 8th to take our minds off of this (tsunami) for an hour or two," the rapper said. "But if I don't make it, you'll know why."

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