

Hip Hop Davey D Interviews Phife Dawg of Tribe Called Quest

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Monday, 25 September 2006 02:44 -

The Return of Tribe Called Quest by Davey D

When many of us think of the group Tribe Called Quest, we revert back to what many consider a 'Golden Era' in Hip Hop. It was a time of innocence in the sense that many acts seemed to be creating music on their own terms without the interference of unknowing A&Rs who's jobs depended upon unrealistic record sales or the formulaic dictates of popular radio and TV outlets.

It was time when acts strived to be groundbreaking in both their music selection and rhyme styles. For example, many people forget that Tribe Called Quest was part of a super rap collective called The Native Tongues which included De La Soul, Black Sheep, Queen Latifah, The Jungle Brothers and Chi Ali. Say what you will, but you can't get much more diverse or high powered than that.

Tribe Called Quest was arguably the best of the bunch especially when the discussion centers around the Top Ten Hip Hop albums of all times. Most people have either 'Midnight Mauraders' or 'Low End Theory' somewhere on that list. It's a testament to the staying power and brilliance of a group that seriously made their mark without a whole lot of gimmicks, fanfare and controversy.

When the group broke up in the late 90s, it was sad day for many within Hip Hop. I recall just how much things had changed when Rollingstone or Spin Magazine opted to put an emerging Eminem on their cover and not Tribe who was leaving the game at the time. In other words we didn't get a big send off for them. They just disappeared. In many respects the jiggy style Hip Hop audience at that time had little appreciation for what ATCQ had accomplished.

We recently sat down and spoke with Phife Dawg who now lives in the Bay Area about the factors that lead to the group's break up and now return after a 6-7 year hiatus. We talked about the various solo projects the members have embraced, including Phife's critically acclaimed Ventilation LP. We went into depth about the pros and cons of being solo.

We also spoke indepth about Phife burgeoning second career as a sports analyst and

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announcer. For those who don't know, Phife actually works for Major League Baseball as a bona fide sports reporter.

We talked to Phife about the current state of Hip Hop and where he feels things are going and whether or not this New York based group gets the respect and appreciation from their hometown fans with their return. We asked Phife if cats have been getting at them, as New York struggles to regain the spotlight that once shone on them brightly during Tribe's hey day.

What's interesting to note is that ATCQ actually broke and sold considerably more records in the Bay and LA than back home in the Apple. There's always been a strong love affair in more ways than one with Tribe and tCali. For example, one of Q-Tip's closest cousins hails from the notorious 69 Ville in East Oakland which gave birth to legendary kingpins like Felix Mitchel. Tip's cousin is a well known factor in 'The Town'.

Both Phife and Ali found their current and in Ali's case, his first wife in the Bay. Of course we can't overlook the projects the group has done with former Tony Toni Tone lead singer Rafeal Saadiq. Q Tip knocked off a couple of songs with Saadiq while Ali hooked up with him and formed the now defunct Lucy Pearl.

We spoke in depth about Phife's love of sports and how ironically it was the current marketing campaign to push the upcoming 2K7 basketball game that helped facilitate the group getting back together. They are currently on tour.

Lastly we spoke to Phife about the group's elusive 4th member Jarobi and why he initially parted ways with the group just as they were releasing their first LP. Jarobi has been on some of the tour dates with the group.