

No Rap Artist On the West Coast Like Kam

Written by NiKKi ID1585

Friday, 24 June 2005 12:00 -

Ben Quinones of the LA Weekly has a very interesting article about Kam in his column this week. Kam is not your ordinary hip-hop rap artist and this article brings his mission into focus. A unique standout in the west coast music scene, this is a very good article and it shows that Kam is more than a rap artist; he is a man who deserves our respect. Enjoy...

L.A. rapper Kam and the politics of love by BEN QUIÑONES

From our table outside Magic Johnson's T.G.I. Friday's — in "the black Beverly Hills," Ladera Heights — rap artist Kam sits and watches scantily dressed women parading for the gaze of men in golf gear puffing on cigars. The game is on, and Kam — whose name in ancient Aramaic means "land of the blacks" — wants no part of it. His attention is focused instead on discussing the new "Gangbusters" bill that will incarcerate more of his black and brown brothers.

You probably wouldn't recognize Kam if you saw him, and his music isn't usually in heavy rotation, but his latest cut, "I Don't Think So," off the new Back 2 Basics compilation, has been getting lots of airplay. As part of a Cali-heavy collection representing contemporary rappers with fundamental flow, it's blatantly political. And though the song probably won't hit the Billboard Top 10, that's okay with Kam; "I don't give a f**k about going platinum, or being on the radio," he says. "I'm trying to affect that one person."

Kam comes from a long line of resistant rappers such as Chuck D., KRS-One, Paris and even N.W.A. "N.W.A started out political," says Kam. "They were saying f**k the police, they weren't saying f**k this nigga. That's who I pattern myself after." Some would call Kam a conscious rapper, except that he's never carried a backpack, and his political consciousness is born of real street life.

Craig A. Miller was born in Boyle Heights and raised in the Willowbrook area of South L.A., which lies between Watts and Compton. Some of Kam's family rolled with B-Dawgs (Bloods) and Rips (Crips), but he also hung out with Mexicans. After getting kicked out of Locke High

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School and then graduating from Centennial High in Compton, Kam was out on the street “doing bad.” Meanwhile, his older brother Ruben was at USC, where black Muslims sold bean pies and pushed tapes of Louis Farrakhan. “You need to listen to this,” Ruben told Kam — but Kam wasn’t having it, replying, “Nigga, how do a bean and a pie go together?”

All that changed the day Kam wound up in the hospital fighting for his life. (Kam declines to reveal the details of his hospitalization, but whatever happened, it was serious.) “If your Allah get me out of this one, I’ll be with it,” he told his brother. He survived, and while recovering attended mosque; in 1991 he became a member of the Nation of Islam. “The Nation was speaking to what I was feeling everyday,” he says.

Music was always around Kam: “I couldn’t sing, but rap — all you had to do was talk to a beat. So I started reciting Run-D.M.C. lyrics. Then I heard Mixmaster Spade and Toddy Tee — first ones doing gangsta rap,” he recalls. In 1988, Kam entered a St. Ides (yes, as in 40-ounce St. Ides) rap contest that DJ Pooh and King T were behind. Kam won first prize.

Through Pooh, Kam met Ice Cube — who had only recently left N.W.A. While the riots were raging in 1992, the two were busy recording Kam’s debut, *Neva Again*, with Cube as executive producer. The album dropped in 1993, and included the hit “Peace Treaty.”

Unfortunately, their relationship deteriorated soon after, as Kam felt *Neva Again* wasn’t being properly promoted. The rivalry — which included the release of dis records on both sides — is history now, says Kam. “Everything was squashed. Cube is cool with me. I love dude.”

Sway and King Tech, who host the long-running, hugely popular *Wake Up Show* (heard locally on Power 106), bring together some of the illest MCs from New York to California on *Back 2 Basics* — including Common, West Coast rappers Crooked I, Sly Boogy and, of course, Kam. But Kam stands out here, not only for his skills but for his uniquely L.A.-based take on radical politics. He’s especially outspoken on race relations among youth: “The United States government is known for causing dissension to keep us divided,” he says. “Black and brown always [rode] together — there was some tension here and there, but they’re fueling the flames on both sides. The Latino people are my people. We family. They don’t want us to know that we came from the same blood. We are all the same blood.”

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After hearing Jadakiss' hit "Why?" ("Why did Bush knock down the towers?") and watching Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11, Kam was inspired to ask some hard questions of his own with "I Don't Think So": "Money and fame, is that all I'm in the game for?" "Is conscious rap played out?" "Is the black and the brown the ones that's thugs?" "Did the gangbangers bring in the guns and drugs?" "Do Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice really represent us?" "Is members of government gonna send their children to war?"

Kam is working on his next album, Self, and preparing for the 10th anniversary of the Million Man March on October 16 in Washington, D.C. "The goal is positive — atonement, to reform ourselves. Brotherhood," he says. "Only way we can win is by finding some common truth together. I don't know anybody else on the West Coast that got the mission that I got. I'm in it for keeps.

"I'm trying to wake my people up," he says. "I'm past the point of no return. Let's do it, let's go."