

Legendary Rap Duo Blood of Abraham's Eyedollartree

Written by Robert ID1632

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Few contemporary hip-hop acts can say they performed alongside rap icons Eazy E, Public Enemy, and the Black Eyed Peas, in addition to working on videos for Nas, Gangstarr, T.I. and other platinum selling rap artists, all in the span of a single career. Enter Blood of Abraham, the Los Angeles-based duo of Benyad and Mazik. Once signed to Ruthless Records, these talented MCs have drawn from their troubled lives and creative muses, to conjure up hip-hop music which speaks to everyone from the stern hip hop head to the avant-garde musical elitist.

With their upcoming release Eyedollartree, these longtime stalwarts on the Los Angeles subterranean circuit, bring together a uniquely artistic amalgamation of politically charged tracks which recount our country's current woes as well as delve into the group's own history. Combining such melodic and lushly layered songs with straight-up Los Angeles hip-hop and eclectic samples, the album features guest appearances from will.i.am (Black Eyed Peas), Divine Styler and Kool Keith.

More than anything, though, Blood of Abraham's music is founded on their unique history. As childhood friends at Los Angeles's Birmingham High School, Benyad and Mazik found a common heritage in that they were both Jewish (Benyad was actually born in Israel and raised in Nigeria.) and shared a love for both conscious and gangsta' hip-hop such as Native Tongues, KRS-One, Gangstarr, and N.W.A.

This dynamic duo is also bound by their interest in film, history, epistemology and philosophy—Stanley Kubrick, Egyptology and the storied psychiatrist, Jung to name a few influences. After joining together professionally in the early nineties, the two fledgling MCs began calling themselves Blood of Abraham, in reference to the common lineage of all people.

"At first we were balls out militant about our heritage, but then we realized that even though all these organized religions had separated, they all recognized Abraham as a prophet," notes Benyad. "So, in a sense we're all from the Blood of Abraham."

The duo, along with fellow chum Will.I.Am, began battling local rappers at various Los Angeles hip-hop ciphers and quickly established themselves as one of the more creative tandems on the southern Cali underground circuit. After a chance meeting with Eazy E at an open mic session, he had them perform at a now legendary gang truce event he was hosting at Gazarri's on Sunset (now the Key Club), following a performance by long time stalwarts Above The Law.

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Soon thereafter, Blood of Abraham signed with Ruthless, a surprising decision for Eazy given his gangsta' sensibility. Nonetheless, the group and Eazy forged a friendship and Mazik even began living at one of Eazy's mansions.

The deal brought forth a debut album, the innovative, *Future Profits*, but with Eazy's death, Blood of Abraham faded back into anonymity and album surfaced only for a brief minute. Benyad and Mazik then followed other creative intuitions – scoring for commercials, producing, and directing music videos – Benyad went on to direct videos such as Nas's "Thief's Theme," John Legend's "Use to Love You" and T.I.'s "U Don't Know Me."

Still, despite the astonishing success Blood of Abraham was experiencing as directors and creative minds, the group knew there was more music in them they needed to record. Now, with *Eyedollartree*, a play on the word idolatry, which critiques our culture's idolizing the dollar, Blood of Abraham has its chance to voice their anger at the shallowness of our 'cash is king' society.

"Obviously, with the first album, we were a lot younger and basically I don't really think we had a sound yet," says Mazik. "We were playing with samples and producing and it was good for the time being, but this album has a more complete sound as far as our own sensibilities go."

"Everything seems a lot more melodic," says Benyad. "Every song has its own, unique bass line and drums. There's a lot of detail, of texturing on every track. So the album, while it's easy to digest the first time, gets better with age."

Indeed, a large part of the reasoning and reckoning behind *Eyedollartree* involves the group's own relationship with the world and the current events which have captured America's hearts and minds over the past few years. Songs like "Omegaton," backed by a haunting space era piano loop, which features the legendary Kool Keith and underground legend Divine Styler, exemplifies Blood of Abraham's take on the world.

"We ran into Kool Keith at Tower Records on Sunset and we knew Divine Styler...these were two people whose music we highly respected so we thought of an ill concept for the song which would work for all of us," says Benyad. That concept ended up being the sonic and lyrical creation of a future post-apocalyptic world where water is worth more than gold—"where Star Wars meets Mad Max," chuckles Benyad.

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"Tion" is a powerful track which gives listeners a glimpse into the group's own story and relationship with the godfather of gangsta' rap. "I think with the lyrical content, we definitely put a lot out there in terms of our relationship with Eazy," says Mazik. "Every time I listen to that song, it grows."

"Hurricane" is a take on the legendary children's book Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. "We switched some lyrics around, put a crazy ass beat behind it and there's singing on it as well which adds to the fact that it's so different," Benyad says.

The tuneful "Calling All Citizens," hones in on America's materialistic obsession, self-loathing and our misguided yearning to believe everything thrown at us either by politicians or pop culture.

Says Mazik: "This album is a chapter we wanted to get out for a while. Clearly, we know we're not a popular act but through our production and lyrical content we just wanted to make a record that stands the test of time." Mission accomplished.

Eyedollartree drops September 6th on Basement Records / mastergrip. The album will include a bonus DVD, which contains two videos and a short film.