

Meet Oakland emcee Casual's newest alter-ego: The name is Rockwell. Smash Rockwell.

The man who made a name for himself as a grimy battle rapper now sits proudly behind a desk in the building he co-owns with his fellow Hieroglyphics brethren. But don't think the trappings of success have quelled the fire in his belly; Casual Presents: Smash Rockwell is the most focused and well-rounded project he has released yet.

September 6th is the day when Casual's distinctive deep voice, signature pitch-altering style, and menacingly cocky Oakland accent will satisfy old fans and win over a new generation of hip-hop heads.

Musically, Casual Presents Smash Rockwell is more of a worldly affair than Casual's previous Oakland-centric endeavors, though that classic Oakland sound is represented here by production from both Casual and A-Plus (Souls Of Mischief). Dan the Automator, Jake One, and Domino bring the West Coast influence. J-Zone and Young Zee supply the East Coast vibe, Artistry from London brings a European touch, and the legendary Dante Ross rounds out the lineup. Casual, who has spent over 10 years playing the rap game, picked the best parts from his different experiences and brought them all together in this one album. "Smash Rockwell is me at my finest," explains Cas. "And the term 'smash' in Oakland means to get aggressive and take control, which is what I've done with my life, my business, and this album."

The lead single, "Say That Then" challenges the materialistic nature of the current state of hip-hop. Casual reminds folks that it's not about what you look like but what you spit. On "Styles" Casuals displays his skills with wordplay, free association, and syllabic versatility: "You've never been hot/name a city your group rocks/you ain't been large since the video jukebox/ I keep it moving like Soul2Soul/ old school like pole to pole/ but keep improving, right?"

Perhaps the song that best embodies Casual's position in hip-hop is the braggadocios ode "Wakemup": "Rap ciphers, I break 'em up/ classics, I make 'em up/ sleep(ing) dudes, I wake 'em up." Equipped with expert production, varying lyrical styles, and the classic Hiero aesthetic, this album is Mr. Rockwell's most sonically accessible album to date.

Casual first made his mark at the 1992 Gavin Convention when he, Souls of Mischief, Pharoahe Monche, and Kurious broke into a spontaneous cipher that left heads speechless. By the time Cas returned home, his answering machine was maxed-out with message from different A&R's.

He ultimately signed to Jive Records in 1994 and released his critically acclaimed debut LP *Fear Itself*. Despite being under-promoted, the album sold well and was awarded a rare 4 mics score from *The Source Magazine*. However, Casual's frustration at the lack of creative control and under-promotion led him to leave the label. Together, with Souls of Mischief, Pep Love, and Domino, Casual established one of the first and most successful indie hip-hop companies of all time, Hieroglyphics Imperium in 1997.

Hieroglyphics released their first album, *Third Eye Vision* in 1998 as a collective unit and followed it up with releases by each of the individual artists. Next, Casual self-released the limited edition cassette-only recording entitled *Meanwhile* which sold over 5,000 units and is now a collector's item. The following single "VIP" further cemented Casual's reputation as a gifted lyricist.

Casual's second official Hiero-backed release was 2001's *He Think He Raw*. Although the album showcased Casual's signature style, his antagonistic tone belied the dark state of mind he was in at the time. "In looking back, I now realize how angry I was with my position in hip-hop. I was rapping about all the negative stuff which turned a lot of people off." Despite Casual's reservations, the album sold a respectable number of units.

To tide fans over for the next full length album, Casual put out *Truck Driver*, a compilation of unreleased and vinyl-only tracks in 2003. In keeping with the tradition of releasing small runs of hard-to-obtain records, the album was sold exclusively at shows and on the Hieroglyphics website.

Armed with an undeniably fresh single and month-long national tour, Casual's fourth solo album, *Smash Rockwell* is set to put Casual back on the map as a hip-hop force to be reckoned with. Mr. Smash Rockwell is the embodiment of the new Casual; wise businessman and pragmatic artist. "I can't expect everyone to know who I am, kids who are in high school were only 5 years old when my first album came out." Now, if cats claim themselves to be true hip-hop fans then they should know about me, but I ain't mad if they don't. Now they will." Remember the name. Rockwell. Smash Rockwell.

Oakland Rap MC Casual Smash Rockwell

Written by Robert ID1770

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Casual Presents Smash Rockwell 9/06/05; if ya don't get this one – your sleeping.

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