

LIQUID SOUND OF THE LYRICIST LOUNGE

WRITTEN BY ROOSEVELT FRANKLIN (KING OF THE SEVEN SEAS)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEN HECK

It has to go like this, with a twist to get respect from lyricists who expect trix from this kid sometimes referred to as a journalist. Not me; blessings of the Lord be upon thee. I'm just a pen in the hands of the Most High. It started out on the Lower East Side in a loft, nuff respect.

Kids came down to mic test, ghetto bops from Bush Babees to Mop Tops and Educated Rapper/JTFO. Too much racket, founders Anthony Marshall and Danny Castro had to make the function convertible. Kraftmatic, they hit the concrete with street team finesse, searching for a place to call home. Roaming the urban prairie they made connects and collected demo tapes as S.A.T. for admission to the stage of whatever night club they could infiltrate: Muse, Village Gate, Supper Club, Tramps (shorty ain't even old enough to drink!). Some spots ain't want 'em but they kept pumpin' and got a reputation among the ghetto, think tank.

Shows were emceed by legendary MC's: Doug E. Fresh to Kool Keith, Guru and KRS-1, Q-tip, De La, Jeru, whatever. Up and coming killahs performed alongside veteran mic wreckers; Kweli and Last Emperor with Lord Finesse and Cocoa Bros., like that. And you already heard the story about how Rah Digga rocked the crowd 7 months pregnant and got her record deal. For real, Lyricist Lounge—the place where stars are born.

Speaking truth to power, mad kids got activated by the word. The Bird verbally, complex metaphors and phrasing, it had to be put on an album, *Volume 1*. '98 set it straight with raw kuts as the soundtrack to a movement and to prove it, they started their own label, Open Mic, charting with the Mos Def debut *"Universal Magnetic"*. Who knew, but it blew, so they came through with the whole crew! On their Lyricist Lounge LP, existence of the underground's best was no longer a secret, peep it on tour coast to coast. Unknown lights shining like Black Star were orbiting with hosts Slick Rick, Common, Xzibit, a lyrical circus soon to be taken to Europe and beyond.

Along came MTV, now everybody know like they glow and blow atomic. Ground breaking boombastic sketch comedy like a rocket to the moon, it

took this rap shit to a new plateau. You know crazy biters soon to follow like Figaro Figaro. Give it up got to, though, for their rebirth of the cool, the strange yin/yang combination of Words and Master Foul. His reincarnation of Flavor Flav got down with "behavior by Babee Power, Thirstin Howl, Invincible, A.L., and Goodfella Mike G. Even Def Jef got fresh from the old school west coast. Hip-Hop history like the Hall of Fame, Lyricist Lounge got that name to toast and boast. Don't worry 'bout them lame self-deprecating white kids with the goofy acting, that's part of the game. A shame MTV forced them on the show to appeal to Ohio or Iowa, but you know how that go, the show must go on, just not on MTV no mo', sho'nuff.

Moving on, it's 2001 and the Lounge's 10th anniversary. The 2nd album's been released and sold golden, but kids bitch that ain't no underground voices representative. Understand, it's about lyrics and tight MCs as well as broadening the audience. That's the plan and why there's established artists this time around. For the gritty Frank Nitti', they got the *Underground Airplay*, a series of mixtape/CD's with singles by Phil the Agony, Zion I, Maspyke, Self Scientific, etc.. That's the first project from their parent corporate, M.I.C. Media where they make videotapes like "The Best of" from the TV show and rock their indie music label which will put out the mix tapes quarterly. The children's division will make hip-hop music for little shortsies twelve and younger under the name MeWe Entertainment. Check for special appearances on Sesame Street. See lyricistlounge.com for more information and catch the sensation. Roosevelt Franklin, representing for the nation. Space Ghost.

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