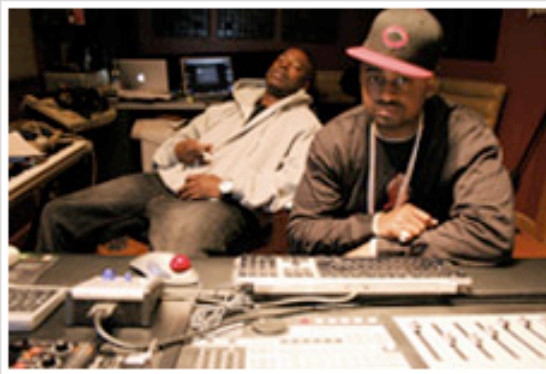


Wednesday, March 21st, 2007

The Heatmakerz *We Takin' Over*

Interview: Brent Woodie



If you were a fan of The Diplomats' sample heavy production during the Roc-A-Fella Records era, chances are The Heatmakerz were behind some of your favorite tracks. The Bronx duo, composed of Rsonist and Thrilla, each shared similar taste in music and decided to blend their production styles to create the Heatmakerz in 1999. (Pop, who was a friend of Rsonist, joined the group

shortly after to handle the business aspect but left the group in 2006 due to money disputes). The Heatmakerz sold their first track to Canibus, producing "The C-Quel" off his album *2000 B.C.* But it wasn't until a chance meeting with Cam'Ron that they got their big break. The duo then went on to produce some of The Diplomats' most successful hits to date such as, "Dipset Anthem" and "I'm Ready." Soon after, established artists such as Lil Flip, Lil Wayne and AZ requested the duo's heavy drums and sped up soul samples.

But after their early success, The Heatmakerz have been relatively quiet. They are looking to change that with the release of their debut album, *The Rush*, dropping March 27 on KOCH Records. While they are known for their work behind the boards, one-half of The Heatmakerz, Rsonist, has decided to start rhyiming. He's featured on 11 of the 15 tracks, starring along side artists such as Jim Jones, Papoose, Peedi Crakk and JR Writer. XXLMag.com sits with The Heatmakerz in

Dojo Studios in Manhattan to discuss their new album, their trademark chipmunk soul and Rsonist's decision to step into the booth.

You made a name for yourself working with The Diplomats. But did people get confused and think you were signed with them?

Rsonist: Always. We missed out on a lot of work because people were scared to approach us. They thought they would have to go through Cam or Jimmy to get work from us. When people started to realize we just produced for Dipset, and we still did outside work, then it started to pick up a little bit.

You guys aren't working with Dipset as much as you did in the past. What's your current relationship with them?

Thrilla: I didn't think anything was wrong with the relationship until I was reading stuff on the Internet that The Heatmakerz and Dipset have beef. We were just trying to do other things and do some outside work. We wanted to prove that anybody could rap over our beats, so we started working with Lil Wayne and Lil Flip. But Dipset is family. I don't bite the hand that feeds me. They can always get a track anytime they want for the cheapest price. They put us on when everybody was turning us down. They kept it real, so I would never turn my back on The Diplomats.

Kanye West and Just Blaze started the sped up sample craze on Jay-Z's *The Blueprint*. Did they influence you?

Rsonist: We were actually doing it before, but we didn't land a spot on *The Blueprint* 'cause niggas wasn't fuckin' with us. To be real with you, we used to bring tracks to Roc-A-Fella and they would be like, "We gonna let Jay hear it." I'm talking about legitimate tracks like "I'm Ready" and all of that. But they were like, "Jay ain't pick nothing." I don't think he even heard anything, because when Dame heard "I'm Ready," he was saying that's the best beat he's ever heard in his life. I'm being real with you, that's what he said. For Dame to tell me that, it means Jay never heard it before. But I kind of figured out what it was. If you read the credits, you'll see who was managing the producers at the time. Those were the same dudes who were taking our stuff [to Roc-A-Fella]. It's common sense they weren't going to let us through the door like that.

After *Diplomatic Immunity*, every producer started to abuse soulful vocal samples. Did that diminish the type of music you were making?

Rsonist: It kind of did because we didn't make it all the way through the door when people started doing it. I mean, sampling is sampling, but people were sampling exactly how we were. They were using the same high hat, so we couldn't even be ourselves. See, Kanye and Just [Blaze], they sampled, but by the time people caught on to what they were doing, they were already through the gate. They were already making their mark. So when we came out right behind them, we brought our style of sampling. But every producer in the world who wanted to [produce for] Dipset felt like they had to sound like us to do it. Sometimes you can't even beat them, because they are charging a third of what you are. It all boils down to money. It's a business. That kind of hurt us, so we had to come back and reinvent ourselves.

Thrilla: Yeah, I think so. But we just do what we feel. I don't listen to what people say. And that chipmunk sound came into play not because I wanted to do it. There was no equipment that could separate the voice from the sample itself. So when I was listening to samples back then, I would listen to the music behind the voice. But I wasn't able to separate the vocals from it, so I said, "Fuck it. Let me just sample everything." That's how that style started.

Why did Pop leave the group?

Rsonist: Man, you know, more money, more problems. That situation dissolved around the top of '06. Pop never made beats.

Thrilla: He was basically handling the business, if you want to call it that... At the time, he wasn't really doing his job. He was just collecting his fees and not wanting to do anything. To be honest, Rsonist was doing everything, as far as running around like the manager. So it didn't make any sense. We were friends at the time, but you can't mix the two. I can't spare someone's feelings because we are friends. It's a business too. That's basically what happened. It wasn't going right, so we cut him out of the business end and eventually he cut himself out of the friendship. We were fair though. He got his money for two or three years, but after that he was kind of mad because he felt he wasn't getting what he deserved.

Why wait until now to come out with your album *The Rush*?

Rsonist: We didn't understand the game [back] then. We didn't know — even though it's common sense — to strike while you're hot. It's one of those things where you get caught up. We just did *Diplomatic Immunity* and we were taking it all in. It's hard to grasp it all. It took us up until now to understand that we have a following and people fuck with us.

Koch Records gets plenty of flak, so why sign with them?

Rsonist: The graveyard, right? [Laughs] For one, this is just a mixtape. There is no better place to put out a mixtape than through an indie. It's common sense. You can do it hand to hand if you really want to be serious about it. You can press up 10,000 on your own and try to get them off, but by the time you do that, you are killing yourself. You might as well get on with a major distributor, let them promote you and put it out right. Even if we sell 20,000 — 'cause I'm not saying we're going platinum or gold — we are good. There are people saying we aren't getting seven dollars [per album]. But we get seven dollars because we didn't take any money from the distributor. Koch didn't give us \$100,000 or \$500,000. We did it ourselves. The only thing they paid for was manufacturing costs, which they get off top. If we sell 20,000 copies, we are getting back \$140,000.

Rsonist, why did you decide to start rapping?

Rsonist: Well, I was in the studio with a friend of mine, Charlemagne [producer], and he was like, "Man, you should start rapping." And I started laughing because I didn't even take it seriously. I never rapped a day in my life. But he was like, "I'm serious, trust me, man. Look at all the other successful producers. All of them had to do something else to break that barrier." So when I actually did my first song, I knew what to do because I've been around rappers for so long. It's just common knowledge.

Thrilla, what did you think?

Thrilla: To be honest, I'm mad at him because he didn't start before. [Laughs] He should have started sooner. One Friday night he called me and was like, "Yo, tomorrow I'm gonna start rapping." So I was like, "Aight, whatever." So I went down to the studio and I heard the first song he did and I looked at him and said, 'I'm actually mad at you.' 'Cause he knew he had it in him. But once people hear him, they are gonna love him. I'm tired of hearing all of this drug dealer shit. Rsonist isn't saying any of that. He's keeping it real. Everything he's saying in his rhymes he can say he really did.