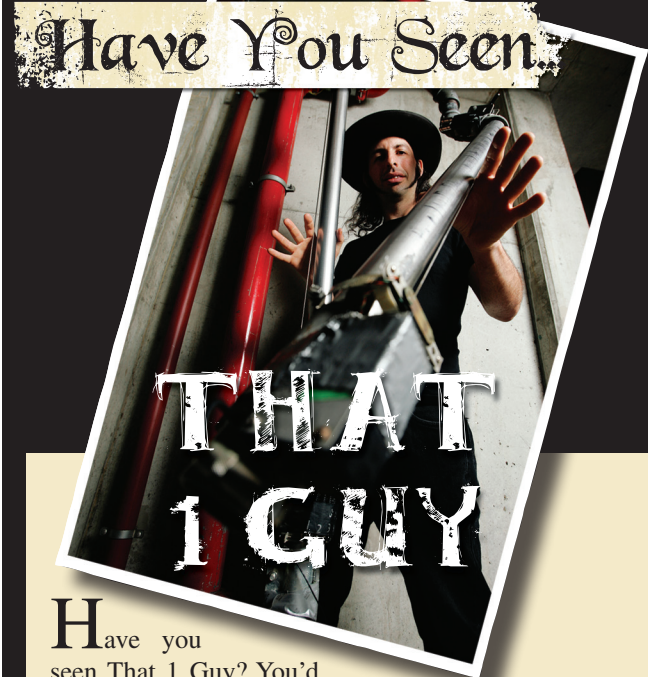
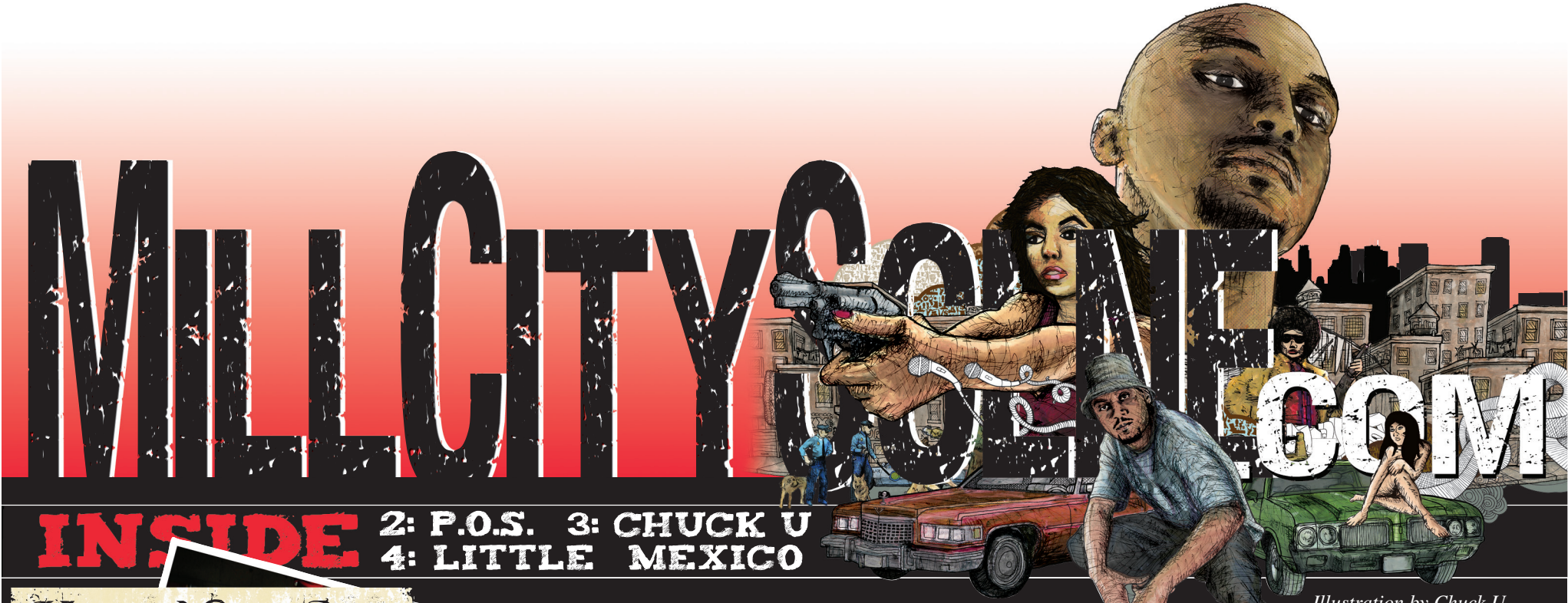




Have you seen That 1 Guy? You'd definitely know him if you saw him – there's no mistaking his trademark Quaker-Oats-guy hat, jutting blades of sideburns, and that crazy pipe-harp looking thing he's always pounding on. Well for the record, that crazy instrument is the Magic Pipe, and the magic man himself is Mike Silverman, better known by his alter-ego, That 1 Guy. He has re-navigated the boundaries between percussive, string and electronic instruments through his use of several custom-made musical monstrosities, including the Magic Pipe, the Magic Boot and the Magic Saw. His style is hip-hop and psychedelic, it's techno and it's rock, it's folk and it's beat poetry over superbly coordinated noise, and it's quite possibly the most intriguing specimen in the history of musical evolution.

We got a few minutes to talk to him by phone while on the road for his current tour, which brings him back to Minnesota for a return to the Bella Madre Music Festival at Harmony Park on Memorial Day Weekend.

Q) You were at Bella Madre Music Festival last year, jamming with Buckethead.

A) Yeah, we were doing a little tour together, about a two-week tour. He did his set, I did my set, and we played a little together at the festival.

Q) How did you guys start jamming?

A) I opened up for him a few years ago on a tour and we just sort of hit it off. He asked me to come sit in with them and it just kind of clicked... We're sort of doing our own thing this year. I'm not sure what he's doing, he kind of keeps to himself. We'll probably do some more stuff down the road at some point.

Q) Originally you wanted your album, *The Moon is Disgusting*, to be the soundtrack to an animated film.

A) Yeah, I had this whole little story I was working on for a few years that I'm still putting together. I don't know a whole lot about the film industry, so it's a move behind on those ideas, but I figured I'd put the album out because I'm first and foremost a musician ... [The story] is pretty much finished, and I need to just sort of storyboard it out. I think that's the thing that's next, is really deciding on the medium of it all. If it's going to be fully animated, and how much of it I'm going to do myself versus farm out. I want to keep the idea real pure, but like I was saying I'm not super familiar with animation. I've done some animation with some people in the past for some music videos, but I'm still learning about it as I go so I feel like I'm kind of delving into uncharted territory, which is okay. I don't mind. It's kind of fun that way.

Q) Will it be more of a children's movie, or will it be all-ages?

A) It's sort of like my music, it's sort of for everybody. I think kids are gonna like it a lot. My stuff in general has a lot of sensibilities for kids. Not that I do that on purpose, but I notice lately they've been really gravitating towards it. I think it's gonna be just a visual extension of my music, really.

Q) It sounds like Australia really likes your whole style, maybe because of similarities to some of the aboriginal music, or...

A) Yeah, there is a bit of that in there. There's a real rhythmic sensibility to that, the aboriginal culture, the way the didge sounds, lots of low frequencies and things, and I think there's a lot of overlap with mine even though technically it's a completely different approach. Mine's a string and percussion instrument and the didge is very much just a wind instrument. But when you listen sonically to what's happening there's very similar sensibilities happening. So it's pretty neat that way. That could be part of the overlap.

Q) How does an Australian or a European crowd differ from an American one?

A) You know, Europe is a different audience too. Europe, in the same way Australia is, isn't as hung up on titles and genres and scenes. There's definitely aspects of Europe culture that are. In the U.K., they're very scene-oriented. But... I played this festival in Holland a few years ago, and if you looked at the lineup it was like Korn, and Marilyn Manson, and Apocalyptica, and then folk music, and hip-hop... just everything. And everyone seems to just want it and check it all out ... It's not so genre-based. I think the audience is just way more open-minded over there to just everything, and I like that a lot better. I know as a fan of music, if I go to a festival I don't wanna hear just one kind of music all night. I don't wanna hear just jam bands or just metal, I want to hear everything. My iPod's got every kind of music in it, and that's what I want to see, you know?

Q) Who would you like to collaborate with that you haven't yet?

A) I like playing with drummers a lot, and percussionists from around the world. There's this incredible percussionist, Zakir Hussain, from the Bay Area, who's just the best tabla player I've ever seen in my life. I always wanted to do something with him. I've never gotten to meet him, but that'd be a fun one. Who else... if Rush let me be in their band for a week, I'd do that cuz I'm a big fan, but I don't know if I'd fit in well.

Q) Have you met them?

A) No, I haven't met them. They're just my favorite band ever. I think if I met them I'd probably just freak out, wouldn't even be able to talk to 'em.

Q) What's the most fun or unique collaboration you've been part of?

A) The Buckethead thing is really magical. We made some really neat music together and had a real neat musical connection, I thought, and that's probably my favorite. There's been some one-off things that happen at festivals that are really fun. I played up at the Winnipeg Folk Festival and did this workshop with this bluegrass band. There were actually two bluegrass bands and me, and we all played at the same time together. When I played "Weasel Pot Pie," they all jumped in with me, and it was so neat, just had such a neat vibe. It was something that I couldn't have planned, and if you would've told me we were going to do try to do it, I would have thought it was a bad idea until we actually did it.

Q) Your style is sort of a convergence of different styles and genres. You also seem to be a fan of vivid, imagery-laden words and phrases. Do you have a phrase to describe your style?

A) Yeah. It's really vague because I want it to encompass everything, but I call it rhythm and sound. It's my genre. It's sort of a weird take on rhythm and blues, but when I describe the fundamentals of what I do, especially to someone who's never seen me before, it's very rhythmic and it's very sonically dense. It's the two big elements to what I'm doing. It's super vague, just the same as "That 1 Guy" as a really vague title doesn't really mean much. But it sort of says it all at the same time.

Q) It sounds like the running joke is that you went to Home Depot to get materials to piece together and make your instrument, the Magic Pipe. How many different stores did you actually have to go to?

A) Home Depot was the main one, mainly because it's such a big place and I could walk up and down the aisles and find stuff, just pull stuff off the shelves and design it as I build it, really. But since then, I've rebuilt the thing out of custom machine pieces that are all made specifically for the instrument, so it's its own design now, it's fully fabricated ... I had one main prototype that I rebuilt about three times in terms of fine-tuning it and redoing sections of it. But a lot of the components were the original components I had made in 1998, so it's come together really slowly.

Q) Is it an ever-evolving machine, or is it pretty much where it's at now?

Featured Artist

Many band-oriented live rap acts make outrageous claims to be a blend of various styles, whether it's funk or jazz or metal, but often it seems they just barely touch those genres sonically, and in the end they are ultimately still hip-hop. The reasons for their deceptive practices are not always clear. Maybe they're trying to artificially broaden their appeal and sound more eclectic. Who knows. But this definitely can not be said for Junkyard Empire; their sound draws equally from hip-hop and its cultural great-grandfather, jazz, while doing a disservice to neither and honoring both. Take away the vocals, it's jazz; take away the instruments, it's rap. Put them together and it's a genuine hybrid of the two, a sort of compressed timeline which traces the roots of black music in America from its origins to its most recent culminations.



Junkyard Empire crafts a truly original flow and energy, mixing socially and politically energized lyrics with an intelligent musical backdrop. The result is a product both classic and nouveau, both familiar and avant-garde. Perhaps if Marty McFly had been an MC instead of a guitar player, went back to 1945 instead of 1955 and spat Public Enemy lyrics over Coltrane, it might be comparable to this.

As a testament to their greatness, the ensemble has now secured a weekly gig at the Black Dog Cafe in Lowertown, St. Paul. It's free with a suggested donation at the door, and they always bring surprise guest artists, such as Toki Wright and El Guante. Definitely make it a point to get out and see them, and keep an eye out for them on the lineup at future MillCityScene.com events.



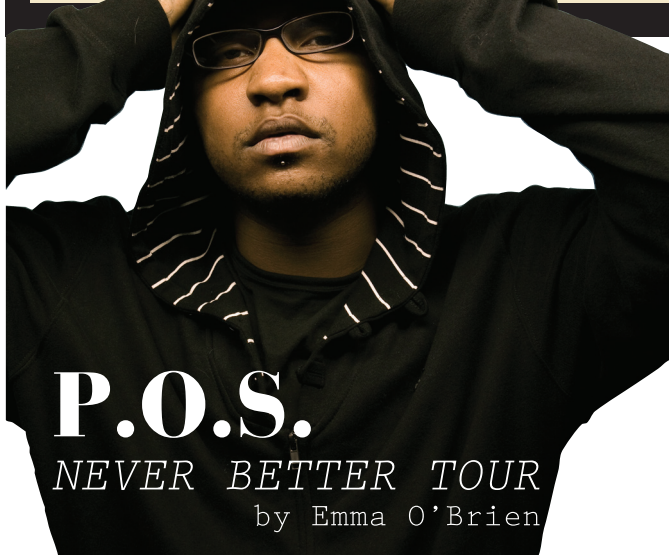
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That 1 Guy...continued

A) It's ever-evolving. I'm pretty content with the design and the feel and the shape and the concept of it. That's not gonna change and it hasn't changed. But the details and the fine-tuning of it is where things have evolved a lot and will always continue to evolve. Like the electronics, and the sampling mechanism, and the audio-switching system ...That all kind of comes together piece by piece. I sort of let that evolve very organically, and that will always continue to evolve.

Q) Did you have to learn a lot about electronics to build it or did you already know that stuff?

A) I didn't know anything about electronics. I knew a little bit, I had taken electronics in high school and I could solder and stuff, but I really didn't know anything about components. All that stuff I learned trial-and-error by just doing it. It was actually pretty simple. Mostly it's just the sensors all over the instrument and the wiring, and I did all that myself.



A concert is never better than its audience. By these standards, the second-to-last night of P.O.S.'s *Never Better Tour*, a stop at the Stones Throw in Eau Claire, Wisc., could have more aptly been named "Never Worse." Don't get me wrong, I'm not hating on Eau Claire. I was born and raised there before escaping to South Minneapolis and falling in love with rap music. Though I've never quite shed my Wisconsin roots, when it comes to P.O.S. and Doomtree I have always counted myself among the dedicated few.

That dedicated few has been growing steadily over the years, and with the *Never Better Tour*, a three-week, cross-country whirlwind bringing P.O.S., Sims, Mike Mictlan, Lazerbeak, and DJ Plain Ole Bill from coast to coast and home again, the ranks have swollen well into the dedicated thousands. A week after P.O.S.'s third album was released by Rhymesayers Entertainment, *Never Better* was in the Top 30 of hip-hop downloads on iTunes, among artists like Jay-Z and Flo Rida. The tour has attracted crowds of 300-500 in most cities, and according to Doomtree crewmembers Mike Mictlan and Sims, the audience has been of Minneapolis caliber at nearly every venue. But something is definitely off in Eau Claire. To quote Mike Mictlan's "Fire on the Watermark," "home never looked so bad."

I arrive down at the Stones Throw on Friday, Feb. 27, halfway through Sims's set, in time to hear him scold the inactive audience for taking too many Jell-O shots and being bitches. He continues on with "Like You Mean It," from his new False Hopes XIV, rapping, "This is my dedication to dedication/I dedicate this to you," but to this particular audience, he can't make it sound sincere. "I've never been mad at a show," Sims insists when I catch up with him later. But tonight's crowd, which included an inebriated girl in the front row repeatedly screaming "SHOW ME YOUR COCK!", set him over the edge. His complex lyrics about the economy and politics couldn't penetrate the alcohol-saturated Eau Claire audience, and they responded with disrespect and disinterest.

"It's not the college crowd," he insists, explaining that the previous night's stint in Urbana, Ill., went fine. "And it's not Eau Claire or the Stone's Throw;" he adds, noting that members of Doomtree have performed here in the past to better audiences. As we talk, a scantily-clad barista with a tray of Jell-O shots walks by and Sims shakes his head.

Between sets Plain Ole Bill is working his magic on the turntables. He sports a "Get Cryphy" shirt, promoting the monthly dance night he and DJ Jimmy2Times spin for at First Avenue's VIP room. This crowd isn't dancing, though some of the dudes in the room look like they were hoping a Friday night rap show might give them the opportunity to grind on some drunk girl. Wrong type of rap, my friends. Plain Ole Bill's role in the *Never Better Tour* came almost by accident. P.O.S.'s usual DJ Turbonemesis was unable to join this tour, and Doomtree's other major DJ, Paper Tiger, has a "job ass job" that he couldn't be absent from. Plain Ole Bill stepped up to table, as it were, adding a bit of funk to the vibe. Bill also works the merch table, a fitting role considering he works at Fifth Element in Minneapolis, the official record store of Rhymesayers Entertainment.

Hand Over Fist takes the stage next, with Lazerbeak on the drum machine and Mictlan on the mic. They begin with their signature song, "Hand Over Fist," and as Mictlan yells "Throw it up!", a few kids in the front row make the Lazerbeak symbol with their hands, a bird head with a pecking beak. Mike Mictlan comes hard, and in the spaces between the stanzas of his raps, you can hear his lungs rattle as he draws in another forceful breath and spits it out in a series of cleverly strung-together phrases. Light gleams off the brass knuckles on his right hand, and his flat-brimmed custom Doomtree hat reminiscent of LA hip-hop, circa N.W.A. Mictlan has an overwhelming stage presence, and I have never seen him not totally own a crowd. But as I watch from the balcony of the Stone's Throw, a very clear division appears in the mezzanine below. The front third of the audience is glued to the stage, mesmerized. The rest of the crowd has their backs to the stage and their noses in their

And by kind of piecing together all the sampling and all that stuff and signal routing and signal processing, that's all just been trial and error through experimentation.

Q) Do people ever approach you wanting to know how to build their own, or wanting to buy the design and market it to the masses?

A) Yeah, I get a lot of people wanting me to build them. Not too many, but a few, and I just always say it's such a custom instrument for what I'm doing, I just don't think it would make sense ... I was talking to a kid the other night at one of my shows who was asking about building an instrument, and I said, "Start with what you have, and try to think about what you wish it could do that it can't do and make it do that, cuz that's what I did. And that way when you build your own instrument, you'll be playing your own strings and it will make sense for you. Because what I'm doing is very unique and it really makes sense for me. I don't think it would make sense for a whole lot of other people, because it's much based on this really weird style of bass-playing that I had developed that was already pretty out of the box.

beers.

"I could tell there was a big empty space behind them," Mike tells me after his set, "and behind them people just weren't into it." He admits he didn't let it bother him, preferring to simply be himself, knowing, in the words of P.O.S., "If they don't feel it/Then we are not for them (and that's cool)."

When P.O.S. appears on stage and straps on his guitar, the audience takes no notice. Perhaps they assume it's a roadie, or maybe they just weren't expecting a rapper to rock out. As the lights come up, P.O.S. launches into "The Brave and the Snake" with full force. Heads turn, and some edge closer to the stage.

"Some girl just made me feel really weird," P.O.S. says after the song, always one to acknowledge awkwardness where it arises. "I forget how Eau Claire is. It's good to be here." P.O.S. brings a youthful energy to his stage performance as easily as if he were still a high school punk dabbling in rap. Though some have speculated that P.O.S. might be jumping on the rap-rock bandwagon with the likes of Lil Wayne, he has actually been disregarding society's pre-fab categories since he first set his heart on music. Furthermore, lines like, "They make it rain (rain?)/Rain go away," put an even greater distance between P.O.S. and the Lil Waynes of the rap world.

"No matter the coast, we all toast the same PBR," P.O.S. raps in his characteristically hoarse voice, a line which might have gotten cheers at a Minneapolis venue. I look around me at my fellow concert attendees. No one here is drinking PBR. Pabst Blue Ribbon, the cheap beer with an acceptable taste, has gained universal appreciation among hipsters in all corners of the country. But there are few hipsters in the audience tonight, save for two lone young men in identical skinny black jeans and keffiyehs tied around their necks. The majority of tonight's clientele are what a friend of mine would term "a bunch of bros." My theory is proven when P.O.S. brings Sims and Mictlan on stage for some joint numbers and says, "Can we just like pound a beer? This is Doomtree drinking on stage. It doesn't happen much." The crowd responds with more excitement than I thought them capable of. In this venue, Doomtree gains more attention when they resort to raising a bottle than when they command the mic. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

The Eau Claire show does have its enthusiasts though, those pressing close to the stage or leaning over the balcony crossing their hands and hooking their thumbs to make the Doomtree wings sign. These 50 or 60 people sing along on the chorus of the new "Drumroll (We're All Thirsty)" and know every word to "Half-Cocked Concepts," beyond the obvious, "First of all, fuck Bush..." "You guys are fucking with it!" P.O.S. laughs. He completes a fairly short set, no encore, and people filter out of the bar.

"We all skipped songs tonight," Mictlan tells me, acknowledging he

Q) Are there any others out there floating around?

A) The original Magic Pipe is floating around. The original prototype is somewhere, I don't know where, because my van was stolen a while ago with it in it. It's s bummer. It's somewhere, though. Somewhere.

Q) Probably on the Rainbow Circuit somewhere.

A) Yeah, somewhere in Quebec because I was in Montreal when my van was taken.

Q) What was the biggest, or best, show you've played?

A) I can answer both with one answer. I played at Woodford Folk Festival this year. It was my fourth year playing there and I got my own headlining set on the ampitheater stage. Everyone came to see my set, it was 15,000 people and the whole place was going crazy. It was the best energy audience I ever played for, and probably the best sound I've ever had. It was just such a magical experience. I'll never forget that one for sure.

doesn't think the collective attention span of the audience, which he estimates at 300 people, would have lasted much longer. On their way out, some fans ask P.O.S. to autograph their arms, which strikes me as a rather impermanent thing to have signed, but then it sinks in: you can't autograph an mp3. Mictlan says he's happy so many kids on the tour know his songs from *Hand Over Fist*, but he knows they haven't been buying it and can only assume they're downloading it instead. It's that cautious balance between doing the music for the love of it versus doing it for a living that P.O.S. acknowledged earlier when he told the audience that, though his music videos appear on MTV, his rent is still always late.

As I talk to Mictlan, a tipsy kid stumbles up and points, "Hey man, you're in Big Quarters!" Mictlan raises his eyebrows. "This fucking kid has been trying to convince me I'm in Big Quarters all night."

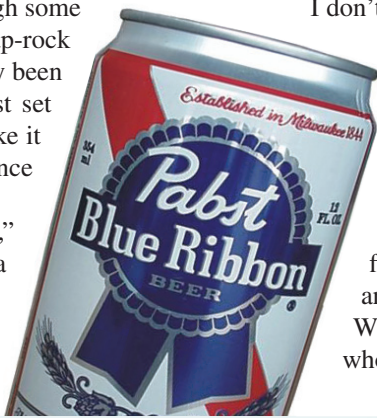
I don't want to act all "urbaner-than-thou," but Eau Claire just does not put on like the Twin Cities. While Minneapolis has been on the map for quality underground hip-hop since the birth of Rhymesayers Entertainment in the late 90s, Eau Claire is better known for its flannel-wearing indie folk rockers and its basement hardcore scene. While rap groups like Frozen Tundra, who opened tonight's show (but whom I unfortunately missed), and labels like Effit Records have been earning Eau Claire some hip-hop credibility, this city of 65,000 can't compete with the metropolis one state over. Tonight, it seems, was just another Friday night in a college town. The bros came to their usual bar, forking over the cover charge but not digesting the music.

Fast forward to the next evening, 80 miles west: the Saturday night homecoming concert before a sold-out, all-ages mass of Doomtree loyalists in Minneapolis's First Avenue. Mike Mictlan greets the crowd with a massive smile.

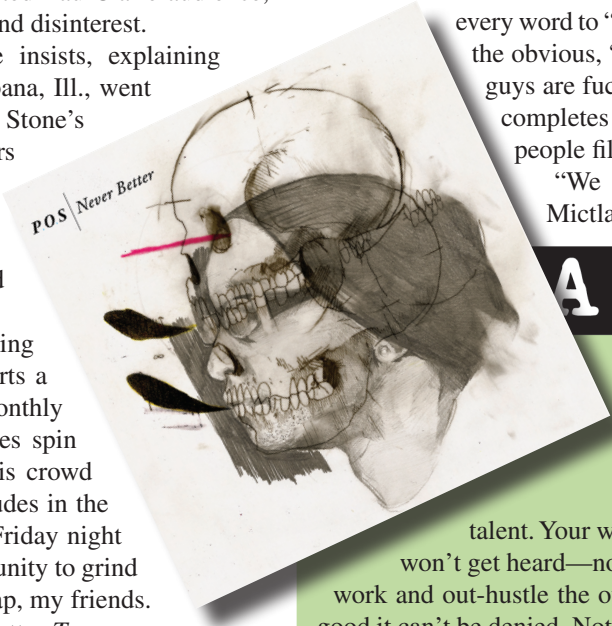
"It feels good to be home where they know good rap music," he shouts, and I sense that he's making a direct reference to the Eau Claire show the previous night. Mictlan looks a far cry from a thug tonight, dressed to the nines in a blue button-up dress shirt and telling the audience about cuddling with his 5-month old daughter and his love for seafood. But by the time he's halfway through his set, the dress shirt has been cast aside, revealing a South Minneapolis T-shirt, and he's reminding the crowd, "I was always a spic, wiping my face clean from spit/ Smile when I'm pissed, then cleaning the blood off my fist."

Sims takes the stage in fine form, clearly recovered from the mediocre gig in Eau Claire. When he shouts to the crowd...

For the entire article, log on to <http://www.millcityscene.com>



"No matter the coast, we all toast the same PBR,"



P.O.S. - *Never Better*

By Dane Johnson

Being from the Midwest, it's not enough to have talent. Your work won't get seen, your work won't get heard—not unless you're willing to out-work and out-hustle the others, and just make music so good it can't be denied. Not to say that everything coming out of the Heartland is A+, but once it makes it past the cornfields, chances are you're not going to be hearing any Tony Yayos or third-rate cousins and weed carriers of better MCs. *Never Better* is P.O.S.'s third album. He was firmly entrenched as a quality MC with quality production skills by the time *Audition* came out in 2006. He's had three years to work on a follow up to his sophomore solo release, and he's kept the quality consistent while simultaneously working on collaborative projects with the Doomtree crew.

The first thing you'll notice if you're new to P.O.S. is the lack of Premier-copping, DJ Toomp-stealing beats. P.O.S. grew up with punk and hip-hop and infuses his beats with hard hitting drums, live band recordings and fuzzed out riffs. What's great about this all is that he manages to do it while avoiding comparisons to anything resembling the rap-rock mess that arrived in the late '90s. The first two tracks, "Let it Rattle" and "Drum Roll," are appropriately titled and start the album hurtling into live, rapid motion.

While the album has its louder tendencies, it can hit on the soft spot as well. "Purexed," "Optimist (We Are

ALBUM REVIEW :

Not for Them)" and "Never Better" allow P.O.S.'s voice to shine over what are almost surprisingly melodic beats. This makes for a good change of pace from the hardened fury of both his rhymes and the production on some of the rest of the album.

"Purexed" is one of the album's standouts, along with "Goodbye." Both songs are assertions of individuality and ideals; as P.O.S. says on "Purexed," "Yeah, we do our own damn thing / We don't blink at what tomorrow might bring." "Goodbye" has P.O.S. expressing his many frustrations wanting to live life one way, but fighting the limitations as he lays down, "So many lives in so many lines waitin' / There's only so much time, so many die patient."

"Been Afraid" is a solid track that conjures up a fog-soaked dock at midnight. It's dark production for a dark story of domestic abuse. He's also got tracks like "Low Light Low Life," a solid piece of boom bap that would be home to any MC and is almost begging for a NYC team-up. He showcases his rhymes on "Get Smokes" with a beat that is almost absent, yet not necessary.

Yet again, a Minnesota MC shows he's capable of rhyming on the same stage with anyone from NYC, Atlanta or LA. P.O.S. has shown three years is too long of an absence for someone of his talents. It will be interesting to see, after taking a more rock-oriented approach on this album (even more so than his last album), how he follows up *Never Better*, and if he can top it.



Twin Cities college students can go to William Mitchell and study law, they can go to the U of M and study veterinary medicine, they can go to McNally Smith College of Music and study hip-hop. Wait. What?

St. Paul’s very own McNally Smith is proud to announce the first accredited diploma program devoted to, you heard me right, hip-hop studies. Headed by Toki Wright, the newest addition to local hip-hop powerhouse record label Rhymesayers Entertainment, the program kicks off this August. Music theory, language of rap and spoken word, business, and recording technology courses build up this program’s three semester span, which can be completed within twelve months. Students can expect to build writing skills, recording and production knowledge and experience, as well as hands-on DJ work on the tables. Understanding hip-hop’s role and influence in past, present, and future culture will be a key focus of the program. Students can expect to learn from Minneapolis’s best, with local musicians and producers making up this faculty roster: Toki Wright, the Doomtree crew’s very own Dessa, Heiruspecs’ Sean McPherson, and engineer/producer, Joe Mabbott (Atmosphere.)

AB: McNally Smith is the first to offer a Hip-Hop Studies Diploma in the entire country. Do you feel that has something to do with the experience and background of the faculty or Minneapolis’s growing Hip-hop roster?

TW: The more prevalent factor is McNally Smith’s openness to offer the diploma. There are hip-hop scholars across the

world. This is the first time that you have upper level academia fully accepting the need to embrace hip-hop culture as a valued culture. It’s one thing to allow a class, or a section of a class, but to attempt to study the culture from this many angles is ambitious.

Minneapolis’s growing hip-hop roster helps, but our history will never be as deep as New York City or Los Angeles. We are an extension of a growing and expanding community.

AB: Do you see this being a course of study that catches on in other musically driven colleges and schools?

TW: At some point I believe most upper level academia will catch on. You can’t ignore hip-hop’s global impact on society, culture, economics, and politics. It would be like ignoring the Internet because you don’t understand its validity. It doesn’t matter whether you understand it or not. If you want to be in sync with how young people communicate you have to learn to understand.

AB: The courses sound amazing and diverse, but what does one do after graduation with a diploma in this field?

TW: People have to be clear that the hip-hop diploma is not an end all be all. It is a marker for success that supplements other areas of your education. Credits from the diploma apply to other degrees accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. The difference is that you are able to get a well rounded introduction to college from a perspective that makes sense to those appreciative of hip-hop, and it is a marker for success. Diploma recipients will be able to apply their skills in other areas with a better understanding of contemporary culture.

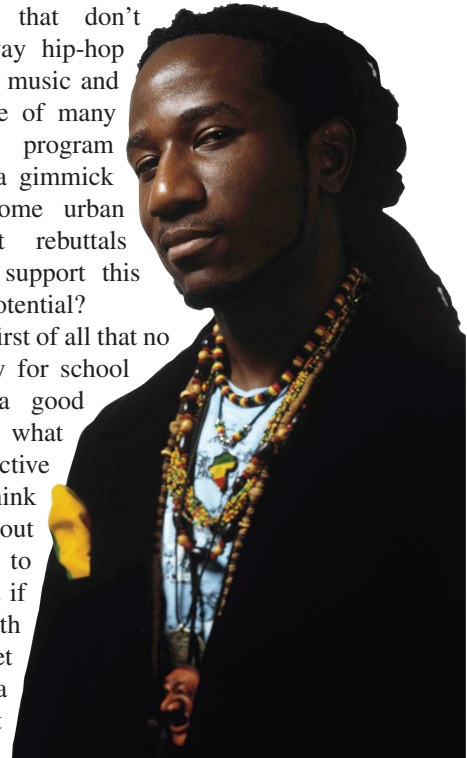
AB: What do you and the other faculty members behind the course have to say to those that aren’t exactly in support of a degree this unheard of?

TW: To speak only for myself I would say that I was once told that a healthy amount of skepticism is good for you. You should always question ideas whether they are new or widely

accepted. In the same token I would say that just because you disagree with the idea of a diploma program doesn’t mean that it isn’t valid. At some point in history philosophy, civil law, architecture, theology, etc., had to go through the same process of having their validity questioned. Eventually they were accepted into the canon of upper-level education.

AB: For those that don’t understand the way hip-hop culture has driven music and the overall culture of many generations, this program might seem like a gimmick targeting low-income urban minorities. What rebuttals do you have to support this diploma and it’s potential?

TW: I would say first of all that no person should pay for school without having a good understanding of what it will cost. Prospective students should think very carefully about what they want to get out of life and if choosing this path will help them get there. The diploma program is not for everybody. Coming from...



TOKI WRIGHT
Photo Courtesy of Rhymesayers Entertainment

...Continued On Page 4

Hey Man...
CHUCK U!
by Crystal Erickson

If you know anything about the local music scene, you’ve seen a concert poster, album or magazine cover by Chuck U. His style is easily recognizable and distinct with its bright covers and intricate detail. He describes his drawings as doodles, but that is a bit too modest. Chuck U creates tiny worlds in his work, composite of many various drawings that come together cohesively in one piece. Common motifs include bubble fonts, bright colors, paisley prints, tubular figures, city skylines, curlicues and coils. The artist has created works for Vita. MN, Star Tribune, and Utne Reader, and was recently featured in the February issue of Juxtapoz, featuring one of his latest commissions, the cover of Dance Band’s *Geekadelic*. Other recent projects include the album art for Muja Messiah’s *Thee Adventures of a B-Boy D-Boy*. He also designed the Bella Sol ’08 logo, and painted it on their promotional truck. His aesthetic may have started in hip-hop, but has evolved into a class of its own. Chuck U began his freelance career in design making posters for the Hook Up, a popular hip-hop night at the Dinkytowner. His career took off as a result of his hip-hop roots, and now includes selling original prints.

CE: When did you get into hip-hop?

CU: Ever since I was a little kid, I was into hip-hop. I was at a garage sale and some girl recommended I buy these Phat Boys and Rakim tapes, so I did. My parents took them away, so I from then on I had to listen to hip-hop in secret

CE: What would you describe your style, and what inspired it?

CU: Hand-drawn pen and ink, influenced both by old-school, Will Bradley-type graphics and new-school graphics. I started [graffiti] writing in high school, and it evolved from there.

CE: What is the typical creative process like for a project? Do you still actively seek out work, or are they coming to you now?

CU: I just start it. Sometimes the client will be very specific with what they want. Other times they’ll be like “just listen to our album

and do what you feel.” I Kind of doodle in my sketchbook, draw random stuff, then make a collage to make a full piece. Now days, people come to me for the most part. When I was first starting out though, I was a whore, I went to every show, with a mini portfolio, and a stack of business cards. But the last two or three years people have been mostly contacting me, which is cool. It took years and years to make any money at this. I still don’t make lots. I used to trade stuff. I’d trade for beats and studio time, or drink tickets and guest list spots.

CE: What do you think is unique about the Minneapolis hip-hop scene? Everyone always says Minneapolis is so big on hip-hop, but so are other cities. Obviously, there is something special going on here. What is that to you?

CU: I haven’t been to many cities, but in Minneapolis, you jump off a building and chances are, you’ll land on a rapper. For such a small scene, that’s a lot of people making music. Having Rhymesayers be from here inspired a lot of kids, having that in your background. They think, “If they can do it, I can do it too”.

CE: Your style is so obviously hip-hop, but yet translates well to other genres. Why is that?

CU: I never focused on trying to make my stuff look like hip-hop. It just ended up there. Those were the shows I went to. I consciously tried to stay away from the whole “hip-hop” aesthetic. I try to change a little [of my aesthetics] to make it fit the music. I usually listen to the album before I start the art.

CE: Bella Sol van. When did you do that?

CU: That was last year’s Bella Sol, a big hippie festival in Harmony Park. They drive around in the truck to help promote the festival.

CE: The Hook Up is a pretty important hip-hop night. How’d you get into doing their fliers?

CU: Unicus was the promoter, I had done flyers and stuff for him before he started the hook up. So he had me do the flier every month. He would let me be pretty creative, with my weird drawings and stuff, let me make everything bigger. Usually the bands are bigger and the art smaller. Unicus was pretty cool about letting me try new stuff. They still throw it, every Saturday.

CE: How about the Foundation posters?

CU: Madlib and Questlove, it was the promoters that hired me, not Foundation. But Mixmaster Mike was for Foundation. Sometimes it’s the promoter, the venue or the band itself that hire me to do a poster.

CE: And the Muja cover?

CU: With the Muja cover, I wanted it to be political and gangster at the same time. I was trying to figure out a solution, because he’s socially conscious and gangster. Blaxploitation films were like that, a Dolemite-type movie poster. I want to avoid using any hip-hop clichés, staples. Breakdancers, turntables—you can only use so much before it becomes too played out. Boomboxes—

CE: That makes me think of the idea of how you want to make sure in hip-hop, your work adds to it, or else it’s sort of viewed irrelevant. What do you think you’re adding to hip-hop?

CU: I don’t think I’m adding much to it. If anything hip-hop adds to me. Unknown Prophets, Unicus, Kanser, etc. I owe a lot to the scene for giving me my early work.

CE: I think there’s a level of authenticity in your work, and a lot of the work going on in the local hip-hop scene. A lot of people, though, heavily rely on what happened in the past in producing their work. It just looks sort of fake, kind of like going to Dre Day. We’re romanticizing this golden era of hip-hop or gangsta rap, without celebrating what’s going on now. There’s so much room to grow, evolve, expand on what was started, instead of merely re-hashing what was done. What do you think about this?

CU: That’s one of the things I love about hip-hop, that there’s a bunch of subgenres. Like locally there’s Unknown Prophets and Kanser, Brother Ali who kind of make “classic sounding” rap, , then there’s people like P.O.S., Fill In the Breaks, and Kristoff Krane who don’t really fit into any genre, who are moving the genre forward. Then there’s the more street cats like Muja, Slim, and Trama, that are a bit more hardcore. I love that there’s not really a “Minneapolis sound,” although most of the rest of the country think it’s emo rap. Hopefully Muja will blow up and change that.

CE: Another characteristic of hip-hop, as a lived culture, you had to be there, see it. You obviously have this going in your work, you are part of the culture here. Any thoughts?

CU: Hip-hop is better participating in the crowd. But you can do it yourself too. You can live on a farm in the middle of no where and still be down. There is deeper meaning if you’re there seeing it first hand.

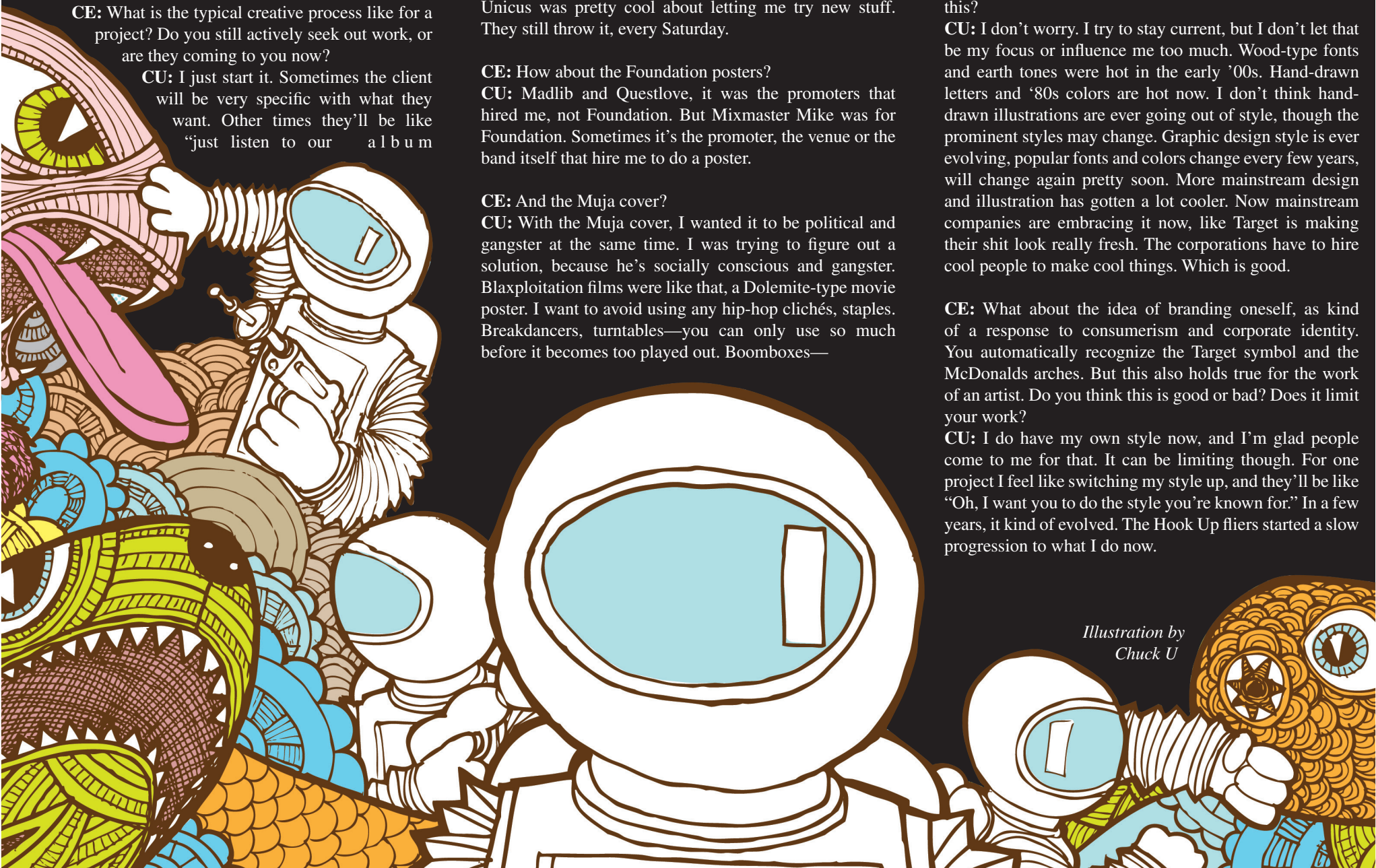
CE: Your work coincides with a lot of trends, with the arts and crafts movement, DIY ethics, things that are popular in other genres now. These movements have suddenly become fashionable, but have always had a presence in hip-hop. Does that make it simply a trend, causing it to lose power? Do you worry about this? How do you avoid this?

CU: I don’t worry. I try to stay current, but I don’t let that be my focus or influence me too much. Wood-type fonts and earth tones were hot in the early ’00s. Hand-drawn letters and ’80s colors are hot now. I don’t think hand-drawn illustrations are ever going out of style, though the prominent styles may change. Graphic design style is ever evolving, popular fonts and colors change every few years, will change again pretty soon. More mainstream design and illustration has gotten a lot cooler. Now mainstream companies are embracing it now, like Target is making their shit look really fresh. The corporations have to hire cool people to make cool things. Which is good.

CE: What about the idea of branding oneself, as kind of a response to consumerism and corporate identity. You automatically recognize the Target symbol and the McDonalds arches. But this also holds true for the work of an artist. Do you think this is good or bad? Does it limit your work?

CU: I do have my own style now, and I’m glad people come to me for that. It can be limiting though. For one project I feel like switching my style up, and they’ll be like “Oh, I want you to do the style you’re known for.” In a few years, it kind of evolved. The Hook Up fliers started a slow progression to what I do now.

Illustration by
Chuck U



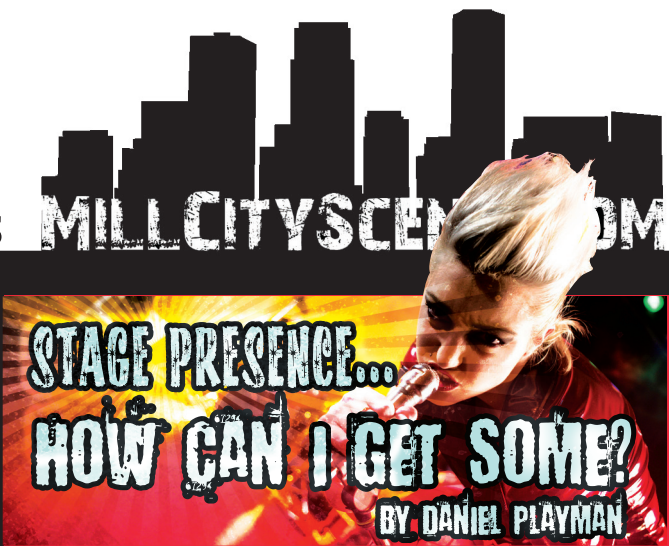
Hip-Hop Diploma...Continued

...someone with a clear understanding of being a “low-income urban minority,” I couldn’t consciously set people up for failure.

Secondly, 75 percent of hip-hop purchases are made by white youth who do not live in the inner city. The interest in hip-hop is global.

Third, hip-hop is a \$12.6 to \$30 billion dollar industry depending on the year. There is plenty of room to create a space for yourself if you are ambitious and a critical thinker. This diploma is not about mass producing rappers and beatmakers. This is about having a clear understanding of music, music business, language, music history, and recording technology.

For the entire article, log on to <http://www.millcityscene.com>



What an odd thing—this ability to captivate. In my journeys as a music head turned musician, I’ve seen many shows in many genres—funk, latin, metal, rock, hip-hop and more—and been impressed over and over by the scintillation that occurs when great performers are onstage. As a bit of a newbie to the stage (my band has been performing for about a year), I feel like Bruce Leroy questing to find “the glow.” Yet like the Tao, it vanishes the second you try to find it. There seems to be something that just emanates from these seasoned performers, while others just don’t have it, though they seem to be doing all the right things.

The first time I ever saw Slug was at Mario Keller’s bar for five bucks on a Wednesday, shortly before the *Lucy Ford* album took off. I knew little of his material at the time, but that night it was just him—no DJ, no hype man, no band—just him, white t-shirt, jeans, and a mic. You know what? He really blew my hair back—captivating as hell. What’s funny is he didn’t really do anything. Nothing like the charismatic emcees that jump all around, passionately bark their vocals, and stage dive. Slug mostly just stood there and rapped, but he made good eye contact, had good body language, and was just flat out confident. I’ve seen him since then, and he is consistently good, but that night was just powerful.

In contrast, I distinctly remember seeing the RZA at the now defunct Quest a few years back performing as Bobby

Digital. He exhibited all the qualities of a great performer: energy, exuberant vocals, and very expressive body language. Unfortunately, it all seemed fraudulent; something just didn’t feel right. Now, I was a died-in-the-wool Wu Tang fan for years, so just seeing the RZA spit on the sidewalk should’ve got me hype. Maybe it was the choice of songs, or maybe a lazy crowd, but I left the Quest a little broken-hearted that night. Did he not care about his performance? What was he doing wrong?

Over years of observations, I can now see that the great performers are the ones that are the most comfortable. Look at Mick Jagger: he may be an old Englishman trying to dance like Tina Turner, but he doesn’t care if it looks a little silly. Stevie Wonder may bat the air with his head, Scott Weiland may don inconceivably tight clothing, Beck may, well, appear to be a bookish white boy doing the splits; yet all is well, fore they are under the spell. Perhaps this is the key to great stage presence, this surrendering to art. The great ones do not strain to control the music, instead they let the music engulf them, freeing their emotions and creating a natural spontaneity that the crowd can sense and feed off.

Whatever it is, I want to bottle it up for myself. Every time I’ve been on stage, I think to myself “don’t force things, just let it happen,” thinking that I have tapped into some timeless, mystical knowledge. Then I get up there, my nerves start fumbling around, and nothing seems natural. I’ve been told my stage presence is good, but they were probably just being nice! So onwards I quest, trying to find “the glow,” through more shows, more terrifying performances, and more quiet observations. Onwards, searching in vain for that which cannot be found, this art of captivation.

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If you were lucky enough to score a ticket to the sold out one-year anniversary of Get Cryphy on February 6, you understand all the hype behind the monthly parties. It’s hard to believe that Plain Ole Bill & Jimmy2Times have been a staple in the downtown party scene for over a year already, but Crypholics are glad to have them. Bill was on tour with P.O.S. at the time of the anniversary show, so I was fortunate enough to get to sit down with Jimmy and ask a few questions about the past, present, and coming year of Minneapolis’ own Get Cryphy.

AB: It’s been a year now. Can you even believe it? Was the past year what you had hoped for? Expected? Never even dreamed of?

J2T: Kind of hard to believe we made it to a year, but after the first couple of parties really popped off I had a feeling we had a good thing going. I can’t lie though; there have been times at Cryphy when I would look up at the crowd in disbelief of how rowdy it actually gets. It’s pretty awesome.

AB: What did you originally expect from Cryphy? What were your original goals and visions for the monthly party?

J2T: I expected Get Cryphy to be a platform for myself, Bill and our friends and associates to have fun and play a bunch of awesome music that you wouldn’t normally get to hear at a

downtown club night. The circle of DJs that Bill and I run in has varied tastes that span multiple genres and are particularly skilled behind the decks and so we wanted to showcase that. The ultimate goal was to create a no frills party where there was no question that you were going to have fun if you came. A lot of Cryphy-goers are average kids who either want to wile out or hear some dope DJ sets or both and that is what we’re trying to provide.

AB: How has Cryphy changed from what you originally had planned? What has been the crowd feedback? Has feedback changed the direction of Cryphy at any time?

J2T: The party itself is rooted in hip-hop and that will never change, but I’m into a whole mess of dance music too cuz it was a big part of my DJing background. So with Get Cryphy, I’ve always tried to run that line between the two, and it has worked out nicely. I feel like there are some groups of kids who want more hip-hop and some who want more dance music, but at the end of the day there is something for everyone and the feedback is always very positive.

AB: What DJs should Crypholics be following? What can be said for the Minneapolis DJ & hip-hop scene?

J2T: The DJ scene in Minneapolis is booming right now. I’ve lived here for six years and while that isn’t very long, I can say that seeing DJ-based events that pop off (that aren’t raves or techno-based events) is a new thing for me to see. It’s created a newish DJ scene here, where there are elements from both the hip-hop and rave scenes respectively, but the scene itself is DJ based.

As far as DJs that I stay up on, locally I’m always checking for my dudes Mike the 2600 King and Bitch Ass Darius aka the Wizard of Gaz. Minneapolis does not know how lucky they are to have these dudes in our city. DJ Fundo is my dude who consistently keeps it rockin’, and my guy So Gold is coming

with some fresh production. Last Word is MIA but he knows the deal too, and my dude Winship is on the come up, as is Petey Wheatstraw.

On a national level, I stay checkin’ for Dave Nada, The Rub DJs, Bird Peterson, Diplo, Blaqstarr, the Unruly Records crew and Emynd & Bo Bliz (whose productions always get a lot of love at Get Cryphy).

AB: Do you think this would have been as big of a success in any other city or at any other venue?

J2T: That’s hard to say. I feel like a lot of the draw of the event is the quality of DJing you are going to get, so I would say yes but who knows. The VIP room has definitely reached the “alterna-club” status but it was not there yet when we started the party last year, so I’d reiterate: yes.

AB: Besides Get Cryphy, what other opportunities have you guys had as DJs/musicians?

J2T: Well, before Cryphy was ever started, We were both travelling DJs with various TC rappers and that was fun, but for me it had its time. Between that and Cryphy, we have both worked as club DJs but by the same token have gotten to open for and even share stages with some of our DJ idols, such as DJ Qbert who we got to have a live scratch session with a few times while Foundation was still open.

AB: Going into the next year of Get Cryphy, what direction would you guys like to see the party taking? Can we expect anything new?

J2T: You’ll just have to wait and see. From a personal standpoint expect a lot more tracks and remixes from me, which you will of course be hearing at GET CRYPHY! And I just wanna say thanks to everyone who has come to GET CRYPHY over the past year! Its been amazing and I couldn’t be happier about the last year of Cryphy getting.

LITTLE MEXICO BY KYLE KELLER

After worming through an absurd gauntlet of automobiles and traffic lights, I found myself gliding into a small Latino village.

Hunkered beneath limestone bluffs, just south of downtown St Paul, and West of the Mississippi’s abrupt serpentine curve, churns a gentle and quaint Latino community. The West Side flats have traditionally been homesteaded by a vast amalgam of immigrants, but after the “first” World War, the area became a true scene for the Hispanic cultura.

A thin, arching footbridge with bright-pink façade welcomes unbeknownst visitors with cultural savor as they tumble along old Robert Trail. Cesar Chavez Street, named for the cherished Mexican labor activist, acts as Main Street for Latino commerce and entertainment.

Although the strip is short, covering no more than a square mile or so, it’s quite vibrant and just plain pleasing to the eyes. The warming color schemes and festively handcrafted signs give Chavez Street a real zest and genuine Hispanic aura.

In a land feared and respected for its cruelly bitter cold, a taste from the South truly lightens the spirit. I caught myself replaying personal adventures in Mexico as I carelessly rolled the strip, gobbling up the visuals.

A pasteleria offering cakes for an upcoming quinceanera celebration; a clinica to good health, nurturing planet earth’s children in native tongues; Mercado, stenciled black amenity labels, kids’ toys, spicy candy, authentic gaucho belts.

A strange sort of low-hanging brightness glazed over the miniscule atmosphere of Chavez Street, both nostalgic as well as innocently aesthetic. The barren sidewalks, however, revealed the real truth of an ugly

winter:

No crazy hats bopping around. No wild string quartets roaming pothole-filled streets, all the while crying harmoniously of lost lovers and kingship. No concrete-treading toy vendors smiling ear to ear, wielding spin drums and blue paper whistles. No charms to be claimed. Everyone was feeling this come down, I remember thinking.

After taking in more gloom than I could stand, I decided to exit the heated car and make my way at least a block by foot. I parked next to a rainbowishly decorated mural, respectfully priding some great historical figures that I’d never taken enough time to have “heard of.”

After passing some head-hang-low-type street people, I made my way into the resident liquor store, which overtly offered deals on tasty Mexican beer. I snatched a sixer of Tecate, a fifth of hornito tequila, and approached the register. Caucasian female swiping plastic Visa; MasterCard’s accepted. Meager white-bearded man perched behind white cashier woman, deciphering one top-ten-Americana song on flashy Macintosh mobile. My God, I thought. We’ve done it again. First Burger King. Then, ugghhh.

Accelerating pace. I jumped a new threshold: “Now Entering El Mercado Burrito,” the sign read warmly. Pessimistically assuming to find Old Dutch “tortillas” and microwaveable Taco Bell entrees, followed by the guiltily white echo of “What have we done now,” I squirmed into the many-time brick renovated establishment. Wrong again.

The Authenticity: bump-bump-bump-bump—the thumping bass hit of Mariachi beat and the heavenly baritone voice of a Mexican suave. My squinting eyes morphed into borderline dilated pupils. Nearly all five senses pleasantly zapped by throbbing culture. Odorously poignant chiles and tortas lining display cases, what true “earth tone” color coordination looked like. All foods from

God’s ground, harmoniously attractive, minus the red #6 and MSG. Awful... (In a good sense of the word “awe”).

Attractive handbags, finger-molded potteries and dinner plates covered in sun scenes and Mayan calendars, clay-kitten trinkets and keyed playable flutes. It was all there, like in my Mexican dream travels. Scoring points for real mood elevation.

Aisles constructed like typical grocery store, yet decorated for yearlong occasion. Piñatas dangled invitingly above each row, column and end-cap. Every wall entrenched in flamboyant colors, the colors that all of us refuse to admit we’re in love with. We’ve encrusted ourselves with such a bohemian sense of art that we’ve willfully steered away from the best color arrangements of all: the fun ones. In parts of Mexico, they have entire cities bathed in these illuminatingly wonderful tones. They make us happy, why not use them, exploit them even?

I giddily romped through rows and rows of goodies. Stone ground flower “tortilla chips,” check. One pint of jalapeno-laden salsa, check. One thirst-quenching mango cocktail, check. Meandering bee line to money machine.

Making my way to the register, I sighed, calmed, relieved. Contentment. I’d got my cookies for the day.

The great American equalizer has thus far left Chavez Street unscathed, I reckoned. And soon enough, God, it can’t come soon enough, the stunted stretch of Chavez Street will fill again with its delightful cacophony of brilliance, vitality and soul. Come, summer months. Please Sun come back! Tip your 23.4 degrees once again! Waxing this round...

When Old Man Winter’s wrath begins to wane, and the enduring members of our populous emerge once again from their crooked homes, the whole place will be a scene to fancy. And I too, will be dancing; flailing a jeering skeleton puppet made of paper Mache.