


# THE AMBASSADOR

BY BRENTEN GILBERT



HIP-HOP IS ALL GROWN UP – BULKED UP IN A SENSE, FILLING OUT ITS ONCE-BAGGY OUTFITS. WHAT WAS ONCE SIMPLY A VOICE FOR THE MARGINALIZED CITIZENS OF NEW YORK CITY HAS GROWN INTO A MEGAPHONE THAT DICTATES THE ACTIONS OF AN ENTIRE GENERATION.

THE AMBASSADOR, CO-FOUNDER OF RAP OUTFIT THE CROSS MOVEMENT, HAS WORKED WITHIN THE HIP-HOP CULTURE FOR OVER FOURTEEN YEARS, OPENLY SHARING HIS FAITH AND HOPE. HIS VISION? A GENERATION OF HIP-HOPPERS “WHO ARE REDEEMED AND WHO LIVE LIKE IT.”

One of the stumbling blocks in the way of realizing this goal, however, is the predominant notion that hip-hop is beyond help. “People think that every sinful thing that’s done or is pervasive within the hip-hop community is hip-hop,” says The Ambassador. “We have to distinguish between the sin that’s within the culture and the culture itself.”

So what exactly is the hip-hop culture? “What you’re looking at is a social phenomenon or movement that developed surrounding four original, fundamental modes of expression,” Ambassador explains, “turntablism (doing tricks with the turntables), emceeing (rapping), break dancing, and graffiti.” Those four elements combine to form hip-hop art, which initially was the essence of the culture. “People who enjoyed, rallied around, or were involved in this art formed the hip-hop culture, which now more expansively includes the lifestyle, activities, innovations and language that existed within that community.”

As this culture began to thrive, religious

themes naturally found their way into the various arts. Seizing the opportunity, the Nation of Islam quickly reached out to the community, validating their self-expression and influencing their beliefs. In the track “Thesis Pieces” from his recent solo album, *The Thesis*, The Ambassador offers the NOI as an example of effectively engaging the streets and promoting a better culture. However, Christians have a more extensive and difficult message to deliver. “Nobody has a problem with a humanitarian, so if that’s all Christians are supposed to be is humanitarians, we’d never be persecuted,” notes The Ambassador. “It’s when it’s time to really represent the interests of Jesus Christ that all of a sudden our album doesn’t sell as well and people don’t like us as much.” But a down cycle in popularity doesn’t mean that it’s time to tone down the message, as many within the industry choose to do in order to thrive in the mainstream. “I think it’s very strategic when a person stays on top in the mainstream and they’re a Christian,” The Ambassador con-

tinues. “I think what they do is: they cease to give people the hard sayings. That’s why they stay on top.”

“The mainstream,” The Ambassador states, “will always be primarily hostile to God.” Despite this hostility, The Ambassador believes that Christian music does have its seasons in the limelight. “Every now and then,” he notices, “you’ll have someone (like a Joseph or a Moses) who gets embraced because God, in His wisdom, allows someone to blow up in the world’s scheme of things while staying faithful.” Seeking this success, however, is how many get sidetracked.

The key to truly succeeding as a Christian artist lies in perspective. It starts with realizing that God doesn’t measure success by the standards of the world. “Right now,” explains the Ambassador, “the Christian industry is more into who’s selling and who people like than who’s actually being faithful to what God is after in a servant.” This attitude and focus affects what music gets marketed well and played on



## BEATS

[hip-hop news by Sphere of Hip Hop dot com]

July 19th marked the drop date of DJ Maj's 4th Gotee release titled *BoogiRoot* – the newest member of the ingredient family. Maj recently stated, "People will truly get to know Maj on this album and I believe it follows the natural progression for a DJ/Producer to step into rhyming (DJ Quick, Jay-Z, Tony Touch, J-Live, etc..), and that's why this record is so timely. It's my heart best album to date. Plus it marks the start of a new season for Maj & Maj fans."

Participating in *BoogiRoot* are the voices of legendary Brooklyn MC – Special ED, Michael Tait, manChild (Mars ILL), Toby Mac, KJ52, Shonlock, MOC, new Gotee recording artist Liquid Beats, new Gotee recording artist Ayiesha Woods, Gabe Real (Diverse City), LA Symphony and Verbs.

News shorts... Mars ILL recently released their second Gotee release, and third overall after the classic *Raw Material* debut, *Pro Pain* on July 19th. (marsill.com)

Tru-Life from the Cross Movement crew released his solo project in June, following up earlier solo releases from the CM camp by Phanatik and The Ambassador. (crossmovement.com)

2005 looks to be a busy year for members of the Deepspace 5 crew. Listener, Mars ILL, Sivion, Illtripp and Sev Statik all have brand new records out now. Playdough has a solo on deck for release as well. Look for new music from Sintax-the-terrific as well as Beat Rabbi later this year, both releasing on Illect Recordings. (illect.com)

LA Symphony has a new album packed full of those ever-so-fresh LAS beats + rhymes set to release in October on Gotee Records. Look for guest appearances and production from Posdnus (De La Soul), Madlib and Evidence (Dilated Peoples). An EP of new music plus a 12" vinyl single will lead off prior to the record's October release. (lasymphony.com)

Gotta check these releases out... Manafest *Epiphany*, Othello *Elevator Music*, Mr Del *The Future*, Ohmega Watts *The Find*, Sivion *Mood Enhancement*, Change *Tuesday Mournings*, Locke and the Chris Wilson Five *Loose Ties*, Rob Hodge *Born King*, The Procussions *Up All Night* and Cookbook & Uno Mas *While They Slept*.

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the radio, since program directors are hesitant to change their format and incorporate more hip-hop music. "Well I think that's a shame," he continues. "If you can find enough hip-hop that is honoring God – and that's necessary to counter what's going on in mainstream hip-hop – you should play more of it, even if that's not helping your ratings."

A truly redeemed culture places more importance in remaining faithful to Christ's teaching and becoming more like Him, regardless of the earthly costs. Much like a redeemed person, the culture "progressively relies upon faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit of God." The Ambassador remarks, "It's still those same basic elements, [but] yielded to the requirements and the requests of God."

Unlike "the Kanye's and the Common's [who] set the scene and set people's sight on more than just the typical," the Ambassador's message speaks of the Holy Spirit Who changes your lifestyle. "Ambassador is presenting a Jesus Who's not walking with you but inviting

you to walk with Him. He's got an agenda and He's got a mission and He's doing something and He says 'drop your nets,' as it were, and 'follow me.'" This is not to say that redeemed hip-hop is reduced to explicitly religious themes. The Ambassador envisions discussing everyday life and emotions in a way that displays humanity "surrendered to God's rules for humanity"

The other side of the equation needed for redeeming this culture includes creating a church that supports hip-hop. "Embrace this seeming paradox [of redeemed hip-hop culture]," The Ambassador urges. "Teach them how to make sure that their culture never competes with their Christ. Then, send them into this world that's hip hop oriented as indigenous missionaries sponsored by the church." Then, finally, hip-hop "will begin to see the church of Jesus Christ as providing hope and direction in this decaying world." The Ambassador concludes, "this is a hip-hop with whom [God] will be well pleased." ✕