



"PEOPLE MOVED ON. IF I WERE  
TO SIT HERE HOLDING ON TO  
THIS DIRTY GANGSTA RAP  
FLAG, THEN I'M AN IDIOT."

# RETURN

DJ Quik was down, but never out. His new album finds Compton's finest shining brighter than ever.

By JESSE SERWER • Photography by WILLIAMS + HIRAKAWB

## OF THE FONKY ONE

Not long ago, unknowing new-schoolers tried to write off Compton's DJ Quik as a washed-up relic of the gangsta glory days. Around the dawn of the Millennium, Quik busted from the G-funk mold with a pair of inventive albums, 2000's *Balance and Options* and 2002's *Under Tha Influence*, while carrying his new groove into a series of far-reaching freelance productions for the likes of Eightball and MJG, Truth Hurts, Talib Kweli and Jay-Z. While mainstream success and commercial recognition eluded him, bad luck, legal trouble and tragedy didn't. Newly focused for his seventh album, the Fonky one has created his best work yet in *Trauma* (self-released through his new Mad Science imprint). The album brings his patented conversational lyrical style and the good time Cali vibe, while breaking things down with serious talk and slinky club-ready beats laced by the likes of TI, the Game and even early '90s R&B sensations Jodeci (who reunited on *Trauma* for the first time in a decade.) *URB* caught up with the man born David Blake as he got down to business in his Woodland Hills, CA office.

**As someone so closely identified with California and the sound, why did you come to New York to make this album?**

I did half of it there. When I started, I was still working as a VP of A&R with Warner Brothers. I felt if I was going to make a real big impression music wise, I had to do some pivotal things. One was getting that New York energy. New York is a super-smart city — it just doesn't stop. It's hot with culture. Being a Compton boy, I was a little country. Now that I'm grown, I'm right on time with it. I mixed a little of that in this record, and got what I consider to be a masterpiece.

There's something real special and unique about recording in NY in the winter that you don't get anywhere else, even in LA, and I love LA. I don't know what it is. I know a little about the blueprint of New York, with Thomas Edison bringing electricity out there when he was the wizard of Menlo Park. I'm geeky about technical shit.

**Why did you call it *Trauma*?**

I was going to call it *Works Well With Others*, because I wanted to show I could work with anybody as a producer. When you got a progress report from a teacher in grade school, they'd put comments like that. But when I said it to people, they didn't get it.

The trauma? I've been trying to break away from

a generation of curses on me, and ties to people who didn't have my best interest at heart. There's a culture here in California where if you try to move on, certain people take real offense to that and they attack your credibility and assassinate your character. People impeded me and I had to talk about it on my record. I'll probably never do another record like *Trauma*, but I think it set the record straight. It clarifies my head state, but it's also talking about what's going on in the city, in the streets of California, right now.

**It sounds like you went through some really dark days...**

I can't say all my times at Death Row were peachy keen, but my problems started with the contract I signed with Profile around '95. It really capped me for growth — they always kept me in suspension. After I made headway with that, I bought this beautiful house in Woodland Hills, put a studio in it and thought it would be cool to start recording there. Then I had a super tragedy. My best friend got killed in my house by my nephew. I lost two people at once. As a human being, how do you deal with that? I tried to stay working, because I'm a professional workaholic. That was my way of not dealing with reality, but I was doing records I wasn't happy with.

Ultimately, it caught up to me. I couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, couldn't focus — I was worth nothing to nobody. At the same time, I got people around me taking it harder to me, always in my pockets, always needing things and never giving anything back. It all just came to a head. I spent most of that time drinking and trying to find love in the hood or a shoulder to cry on, and that makes you a burden. Then I lost a few more people who were very close to me around 2001. You wonder, "Where is this coming from?" I started cutting the dead weight — all the people that hung on and clung on because we had a heyday. People started lashing out at me real bad, but as soon as I cut the bullshit, I had total peace of mind and a lot of focus. I've had the necessary help to deal with my grief. I can't get back the time I lost, but I'd like to pick up and move on. That's what I did and now we have success. It's perfect.

**The album opens with an ode to Roger Troutman. His music was a big influence on California hip-hop. How well did you know him?**

It didn't take long to know the man, because he was an eccentric and brilliant dude. The little time we

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shared in the studio was enough to let me know that he was the most brilliant musician I've ever met. He appreciated what I did with his music, which felt good. It was like "Wow, you really care?" He loved what I did with the talk box, because I didn't bite him — I went somewhere else with it. It was unfortunate that he had some dysfunctional things going on family-wise that ended up reaching a boiling point. I get a little emotional about [his murder by his brother] because it sucks. It fucked me up terribly. What happened to him seemingly could have happened to me — family members can get jealous. When I made this record, I was on trial for alleged assault and battery, kidnapping and burglary against my sister, but it was bullshit. Nobody got hurt. It was a family feud that outside people got involved in and blew up for their own gain. So I was getting up at six in the morning, putting on a suit and praying this judge don't throw me in jail.

**How would you describe the vibe in LA right now?**

It's percolating. LA is on the cusp of some big breakthrough, but nobody knows what it is yet. I'm doing my thing, Game's doing his thing, Snoop's doing his thing and we're all working. There's a quiet, internal "making amends" kind of feeling out here more than any big presence — people are working together more as opposed to being so spread out and fighting.

**Do you hear a sound emerging? Are you trying to be an architect of a new sound?**

I'm trying to bring the party records back. I'm keeping the subject matter really light on some records, and then it's a purging on others. I talk about adult things, but not to the point where I'd feel embarrassed if a five-year-old was listening.

There was a time when I wasn't that popular, where people kind of stared like "Who's this old rapper on the stage?" It's not like that anymore, because I'm making music that makes sense to people. I didn't realize I had such a big platform, and I wasted my time keeping it regional. I'm happy to have seen the things I've seen, but you can't sell records saying "fuck fuck, shoot the bitch up" anymore. A lot of people out here are mad they can't still sell gangsta rap from '94. People moved on. If I were to sit here holding on to this dirty gangsta rap flag, then I'm an idiot. Unfortunately, the gangbanging politics around here suck. I'm glad they're not killing each other as bad as they were a few months ago. It's quiet here now.

**What's inspired the new directions you've gone in musically over the last few years?**

I'm a fan of film score guys. I dig music that goes along with visuals, and I try to make that kind of music. I had a chance to score Chris Rock's *Head of State* and I've been different ever since. People I met inspired me to go bigger. I had been trying so hard to get digital to be just like analog and it wasn't working because you could never get that feel without the tape. My thing now is to reach back

to that sound, but forward to clarity. I've come up with a hybrid — the best that analog can offer and the best that digital can offer, without the limitations of either.

This record is not being accepted because I'm an old artist who made a good album finally, but because it's so current and different at the same time. We played around with the arrangements — 20 or 24 bars instead of 16- and 8-bar hooks, and the tracks are very elliptical, like the push and pull of a turntable. It shuffles and it's in the main tempo of West Coast records, but it's open and organic, not stuck to a grid. It swings. I was like a short order beat cook — these tracks came into fruition right there that day with the artist in the studio. All my other albums took a lot longer, because I was always feuding with somebody at the label or these motherfuckers across town are at the studio I need to use trying to stick me up or extort me because the dope game has dried up. We glorified gangsta rap so much that it opened some weird trapdoor and real gangsters came in and made it not fun. Life started to imitate art, and it became wack.

**You appeared as yourself on the HBO series *Entourage* recently as the DJ at Ari's daughter's bat mitzvah. Have you ever really done that?**

Penny Marshall and her brother [actor Garry Marshall] hired me to do his son's bar mitzvah. Call me crazy, but I am DJ Quik. My first gigs were weddings. ←



## QUIK TRICKS

DJ Quik breaks down some of the beats that re-established him in the upper echelon of hip-hop producers:

### "BUCK BOUNCE"

EIGHTBALL AND MJG (2001)

Eightball and MJG were the dopest in the South at that point. That was before crunk and the big South explosion. I was listening to "Big Pimpin'" and I wanted to make a crazy Timbaland-type record. It was a bounce record, but it had some different guitar things going on. When I listen back to that

record, though, I think it could have been a lot doper. I was grieving from a few tragedies and I could have put more into those records.

### "ADDICTIVE"

TRUTH HURTS FEAT. RAKIM (2002)

Some Indian people are still mad at me for that song, because they thought that it bastardized their culture. I've had Pakistani people interview me who are so standoffish it's almost disrespectful. They are authentically pissed off about that record. I was watching this Bollywood channel that popped up on our cable service called Zee TV and I saw some dope shit going on. I recorded it onto my VCR, dubbed it down to a mini disc, put it into a drum machine and (BT Express's) "Do It 'Til You're Satisfied" just went right through it — they both had that Panjabi rhythm. I put it on tape and gave the track to Dre. He thought it was some innovative shit and had Truth do her vocals and mixed it. So who was the real producer? I wasn't even in the studio when Dre

produced the song. He didn't have to throw me a bone and give me full production credit, but he did. It started a little trend. I heard Tim doing it, Erick Sermon. Even the people that sued us had to admit the shit was hot.

### "JUSTIFY MY THUG"

JAY-Z (2003)

I wanted to give him some Scarface-type theme music, like what Girogio Moroder would have done — that '80s Miami music. Jay jumped on that bitch and killed it. I thank him because he helped break me out of that mold of the West, not getting past the Mississippi. That was the first time I had spent that amount of time in a recording studio in New York. People in the West didn't really like that record — they didn't like the shuffle. I could have given him some West Coast shit like what Rick Rock gave him on "Change the Game," but I thought if I am going to be with Jay, I want to do something totally different that moves him.