

Backstage with... Hypnotic Brass Ensemble



You've toured in Europe with Mos Def, and recorded with Erykah Badu and Damon Albarn. Your records can fetch \$100 on eBay, and you've turned down major-label offers. How come you're still performing in the street?

Amal Baji Hubert, cornetist:

Music is not only for the crowd who has money to pay to go to a venue. Maybe there's a young child not old enough to get in, or an older person who doesn't want to go to a spot with young people. We want the real, true people going through their everyday struggles to be able to hear this music.

Gabriel Hubert, trumpeter:

We never wanted to be a club band. Mainly 'cause they couldn't pay what we felt we're worth. We've got nine pieces. We make more on the street than a club offers, so why not do that every day? We target shopping areas, and in big cities, that's where international people are. That's why we moved to New York from Chicago—you can talk to the globe in Manhattan.

So why pay to see you at Joe's Pub when I can catch you in Times Square or Union Square for free?

Saiph Graves, trombonist:

Outside we're giving you the basic Hypnotic philosophy and trying to grab your collar. We don't necessarily play full tunes, because people are only gonna hear you for a minute, or less. Inside we already have your attention, so we stretch out. We've been experimenting with

covers, giving them a Hypnotic twist. Mos gave us the idea to do BBD's "Poison."

Gabriel Hubert: The reason to see us in a club is because that's where you're gonna start seeing us more. It's irritating when a person wants to buy your CD but they tell you, "I'll see you tomorrow." Or you do a seven-country tour in Europe and come back and get disrespected on the street because America hasn't gotten the Hypnotic buzz yet. So we're gonna give New York City streets what we gave to Chicago. We're gonna let you miss us.

Except for your drummer, 360, who's not related, you all grew up in the same house with your father, Phil Cohran of Sun Ra Arkestra and Artistic Heritage Ensemble. Do you still live together?

Gabriel Hubert: We live in Briarcliff Manor, upstate. A house fell in our lap. The guy that owns the mansion from *American Gangster* owns our house. We did a bar mitzvah in that mansion, which is around the corner, and he liked the music, the movement. And he had a four-acre, \$1.9-million home sitting empty.

Now that's a score. If you don't mind me asking, how much does that run you?

Gabriel Hubert: \$3,000 a month, with most utilities included.

—*Jesse Serwer*

Hypnotic Brass Ensemble plays Joe's Pub Sat 3.