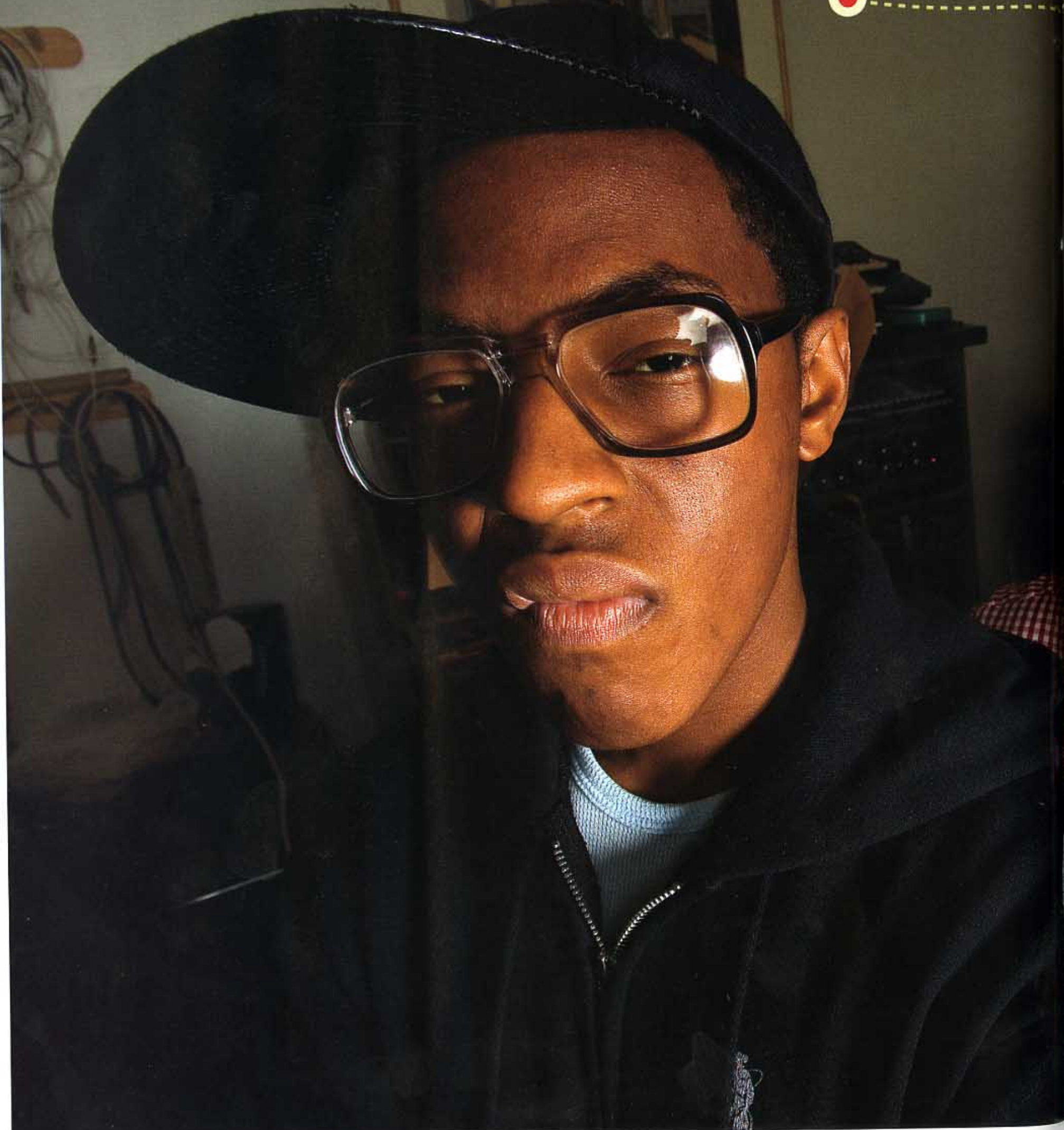
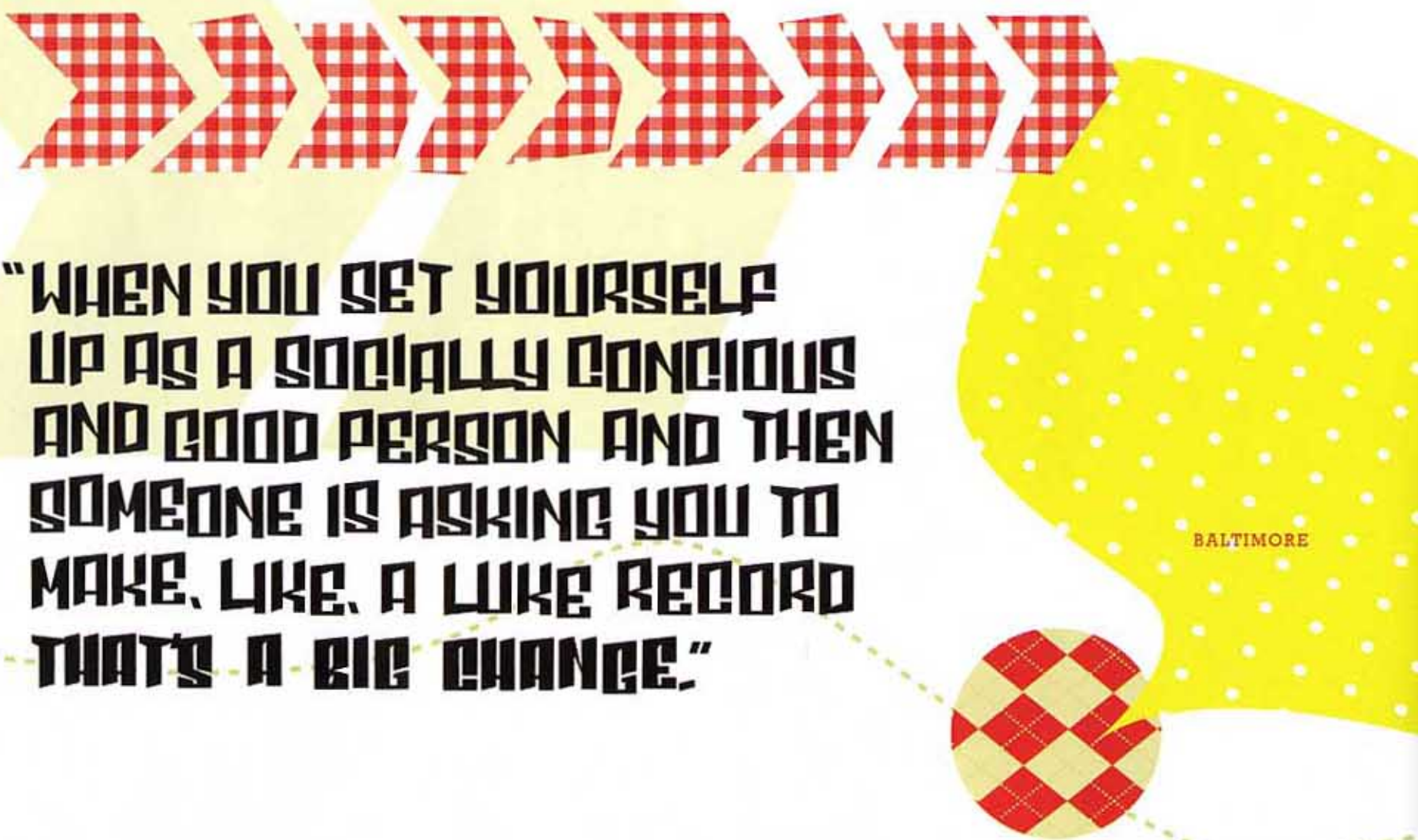


SOMEPLACES



WHAT IT LOOK LIKE

With a dose of B-more club, Philly attitude and Brooklyn beats, Spankrock is the new face of booty bass.
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PHOTOS: DUSTIN ROSS
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"WHEN YOU SET YOURSELF UP AS A SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS AND GOOD PERSON AND THEN SOMEONE IS ASKING YOU TO MAKE, LIKE, A WKE RECORD THAT'S A BIG CHANGE."

BALTIMORE

"This wasn't supposed to happen," laughs Naeem Juwan. "It just wasn't supposed to happen."

Seated inside a Brooklyn falafel joint in the midst of an extended stay in New York City, the Baltimore-bred, Philly-based MC better known as Spankrock is having a good laugh at the strange arc that has led him to be associated with Baltimore club music, the bass music variation suddenly on national blast after more than 15 years as a secret handshake of sorts for Maryland-area black kids.

"I would have never thought that I'd have recorded a song with Scottie B," the soft-spoken 24-year-old says of a recent collabo with the B-more breaks originator. "I would have never ever guessed I'd be interviewed about Baltimore club music."

Like many Charm City youth in the '90s, Juwan spent his nights at high school dances and clubs like The Paradox and Hammerjacks, freaking out to the sounds of Miss Tony and DJ Spen. But as a scrawny prep school kid sheltered from the city's rough streets, he felt a bit out of place as he came to embrace an entirely different avenue of urban culture.

"Baltimore is neat for young kids 'cause you can go to some pretty crazy parties when you're, like, 14," Spank says. "I went to the clubs a lot. But I was really trying to be a conscious rapper like Mos Def. I thought I'd be signed when I was 16 on some backpacker, underground shit. I was coming up to Brooklyn and making demos with (Boot Camp Click/Black Star producer) Sean J Period. I honestly thought I was gonna be a part of Black Star...

I only realized (club music) had an effect on me when I heard Low Budget play Baltimore club records for the first time in Philly. I flipped because I hadn't heard that music in years."

POSSE UP

Wearing glasses and a hooded sweatshirt accented with a pair of punk rock-ish buttons, Naeem Juwan looks like he might be more comfortable carving a bowl on a skateboard than toasting cocky cool-like about wet coochie. But give him some shades, his gold "Spankrock" chain—and beats from production wiz XXXChange (a.k.a. Alex Epton, the other half of Spankrock the group) and DJs Devlin and Darko—and you have the phenomenon that's been rocking parties up and down the East Coast for the past year.

"People get confused 'cause my rap name is Spankrock," Juwan says. "Then XXXChange and I signed the deal together [under the Spankrock as well]. We're kind of a rapper/producer team—like GangStarr, just more



PHILADELPHIA

NUNYA

"WE'RE KIND OF A RAPPER PRODUCER TEAM LIKE GANGSTARR JUST MORE RETARDED"

retarded. But everything I do is very family-oriented."

More than even a family, Spankrock is a movement of sorts. Their live shows often include Amanda Blank, an up-and-coming white femcee from Philly; the Love Peace Project, a family of trained West African drummers and dancers from B-more; and "The Eagle," a Philly chick who Juwan says was "always on the dancefloor dropping down just getting her eagle on anyway."

Spankrock's traveling booty patrol was foreshadowed perfectly by their debut single, "Put That Pussy On Me," which outed on Turntablelab's Money Studies label last summer. With cover art depicting a perfectly round ass with a thong pulled down right below the crack, the "12" is sure to turn heads in the electronica section, where it's probably been inadvertently placed since Ninja Tune subsidiary Big Dada picked it up. But no one's mind is blown more by the Spankrock concept than Mr. Spank himself.

"It's different than anything I would have expected of myself," he says. "It was Alex's idea for me to make poppy, ass-shaking music. When you set yourself up as socially conscious and a good person and then suddenly someone is asking you to make, like, a Luke record, that's a big change. But it was more honest for me than writing about politics 'cause even though I try to stay up on that, I spent a lot of time in parties getting fucked up."

SPANK MODE

There's more than just ass and bass in the Spankrock mix, though. With his nasal voice and relaxed flow, Juwan's take on rhyme evokes Schoolly D, another Philly MC who combined ign'ant lyrics with sonic innovation. One of the first songs Juwan wrote in Spank mode was "Rick Rubin," an ode to the very notion that party music and artistic experimentation are not incompatible.

"Before Alex, I was working with this guy Steve McCready, just trying to push away from underground rap," Spank recalls. "No one really liked what we were doing. (McCready's) beats were

strange, harsh on the ear almost, but I loved 'em—I got excited trying to figure how to rap over them. I kinda figured how to make things exciting again. I stopped going to open mics and trying to battle people at parties and got to thinking, 'How do you have your influences and still create something totally new?' So I used Rick Rubin as an example of someone who really pushed the limits of what rap could be."

That freeform vibe runs throughout *YoYoYoYoYoYo*, the debut LP from Spankrock due this spring. Although earlier Spank releases—like the *Voila* sampler (Money Studies/Big Dada) and the remixes on the "Pussy" 12-inch—cram everything from Can to the Beach Boys into the mix, *YoYoYoYoYoYo* contains very few samples and a whole lot of improvisation, according to XXXChange.

"It is mostly me trying to play instruments badly and then chopping them up," says the Brooklyn-based producer, an old friend of Juwan's from Baltimore who briefly studied jazz drumming at the New England Conservatory and interned at DFA Records. "There's a couple songs where my girlfriend at the time sang because we didn't know any singers."

While a certain Baltimore spirit is apparent in Spank's delivery, B-more breaks don't figure into the mix more than, say, UK grime or even post-punk. But with club music on national blast at the same time Spank is arriving—thanks to Hollertronix, NYC's Aaron LaCrate and an army of internet cheerleaders—the reference is only natural.

"We're both from Baltimore so obviously [B-more club] is an influence, but it's more dance music in general," XXXChange explains. "There's artsy shit on there, but it's hard for us to sit in a room and make serious songs."

SpankRock's *YoYoYoYoYoYo* will be out this spring on Big Dada/Ninja Tune. www.bigdada.com. *Voila* is out now on Money Studies. www.turntablelab.com *Bmore Gutter Music*, a mix CD featuring exclusives from Spankrock and Amanda Blank, is out now on Milkcrate Records.



A Tale of Two Cities

B-more native and Philly representative Spankrock takes us on a tour of the mid-Atlantic's culture capitals.

BALTIMORE IS...

The Paradox

I smoked weed for the first time outside The Paradox, with a half pint of Hennessy, when I was 16. Coming up it was *the* club in Baltimore.

Crab tops

One of the Baltimore Bass Connection's signature moves along with the ACT (air cock thrust). You can find Devlin & Darko, Chipset, Knicky Knuckles, Uncle Eddie and the gang putting it on blast from state to state.

"Bank Roll" by Tim Trees

That's probably my favorite Baltimore hip-hop record and one of my favorite hooks in all of rap. Rod Lee produced the beat. I sometimes perform "What It Look Like" over the instrumental.

PHILLY IS...

Low Budget, Major Taylor and Cosmo Baker

You gotta put all three of those guys together as one Philadelphia all-star DJ team. One night of them all spinning would be crazy.

Upstairs at Abysynnia

It's this Ethiopian restaurant and there's a bar upstairs called Fiumey. They have the cheapest alcohol in West Philly and good young musicians playing jazz just for the fuck of it.

Beanie Sigel

Beanie and Dizzee Rascal are the only rappers that make me want to rap right now.