

Digging the Roots

WHEN ?UESTLOVE arrives late for this interview, breathing hard with pick in Afro and headphones buzzing, he has an interesting excuse.



Roots rock.

"I got pulled over on the way," says the drummer formerly known as Ahmir. "I didn't know it was still illegal to jaywalk in Hollywood. As if they don't have something more important to do."

With that said, ?uestlove grabs the recorder and is ready to talk about the latest successes of Philadelphia rap outfit the Roots — an organic hip hop LP (their third with another in progress) called *Illadelph Halflife*, an oft-requested video poking fun at the cliché rap lifestyle and a chance to be on Jenny McCarthy TV.

"I'm not gonna act nonchalant. We're excited people are listening. I like Jenny McCarthy. Every time *Singled Out* is on, we play like we're the contestants," he says. "It all started to pay off when MTV finally accepted the video."

* MTV wasn't the only wall ?uestlove and the boys (lead lyricist Black Thought, rapper Malik B, bassist Hub, keyboardist Kamal and human percussionist Rahzel the Godfather of Noyze) hit before taking their street show to "cha-ching city." The first was cultivating fans for their nostalgic rhymes à la 1987.

"We're emulating the brand of hip hop we grew up on" ?uestlove says. "The Roots are about what we wanted to be at 12 or 13. We're not some gun-brandishing, misogynistic band. You should be responsible for how you deliver your message. But remember Dante's *Inferno* and the 12 circles of hell? We're only in the circle below gangsta rap, so I can't brag that much."

The second was the uphill battle of signing with Geffen Records, a company best known for its contributions to the alternative world (Nirvana, Sonic Youth, Beck).

"We chose Geffen because we had ideas traditional rap groups didn't. We figured Geffen would have more patience with us. But where do we fit in?" ?uestlove asks, motioning to the posters of grunge's glamour girls and boys. "We were guinea pigs, and sometimes we regretted it."

But ?uestlove knows it's just one of the many things you learn after being enticed into the business by the promise of a playa's life of cars, girls and mansions.

"You find out the *Yo! MTV Raps* brothas

were foolin' ya. Half my troubles began the day I signed on the dotted line. You think you'll be paid and it'll be cool. But shit ain't like that. Unless you're doing some mindless R&B or whatever the flavor of the second is, you're not gonna get the sales or the fantasy. Hey, didn't someone just do a video on that?"

By Carrie Bell, Assistant Editor / Photo courtesy of DGC Records

Like Father, Like Son

JAKOB DYLAN SOUNDS homesick when he hears it's been another breezy, sun-filled afternoon in his home base of Los Angeles.



6th Avenue heartthrobs.

"It's been cold on my side of the world. But I'll be back soon enough," says the 27-year-old vocalist/guitarist of The Wallflowers (which includes Michael Ward, Mario Calire, Greg Richling and Rami Jaffee).

His "side of the world" refers to Pennsylvania, where the band is finishing a tour with Sheryl Crow. But with months of headlining gigs to follow, "soon" isn't soon enough.

"Every day we see the same five faces on the bus," he says. "We'd like to move on ... But as long as people are still buying this album, we have to keep working it."

And it seems fans and critics alike can't get enough of the quintet's sophomore effort *Bringing Down the Horse*, which spawned the hit "6th Avenue Heartache." The band's appeal could be due to the laundry list of talent like Adam Duritz, Michael Penn, Sam Phillips and producer T-Bone Burnett enlisted for the recording. Or maybe it's Dylan's stunning good looks and famous genealogy (Bob Dylan is his dad). Dylan thinks it has more to do with the timelessness of their sound.

"There's a better climate for a group like ours right now. The group is better. We have a company that's working harder for us. I also learned a few lessons about making records since the first one [1992's *The Wallflowers*]. It all comes down to experience."

The experience is all his own, but one can't help noticing the similarities between him and his legend-of-folk-rock father — the poetic, colloquial lyrics, the classic sound, the artsy shy-guy image. Whether the constant comparisons get to him or not, Dylan won't say.

"I don't think who my dad is should concern people. If I write a bad song, I'm the only one responsible. If I write a good song, that's great and I deserve the pat on the back," he says. "The band has to stand on its own two feet."

By Carrie Bell, Assistant Editor / Photo courtesy of Interscope Records

Dance Hall Crashers

WHILE GOLDFINGER were watching James Bond flicks and Gwen Stefani was standing in line for teacups at the Tragic Kingdom, Dicky Barrett and seven friends were starting a band inspired by the *überreggae* movement known as ska.



Boston-baked Bosstones

"When we were younger, we were always trying to sneak into clubs to see visiting bands. We thought if we started our own band, we'd get into places for free," vocalist Barrett says. "In the course of time, we actually got pretty good at the music part."

Of course, "pretty good" is an understatement when charting the career of the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, who have five CDs, three EPs, 11 years of touring, an appearance in *Clueless* and a Converse commercial under their belts. Amidst all the commotion, the Bosstones focused on creating horn-filled, two-tone ska — even before the cool kids invaded their plaid, plaid world.

"The current musical climate doesn't annoy me, abuse me or affect me," Barrett says. "We drew from the bands we loved, like Madness, in hopes of creating something original. Trends come and go. We stay the Bosstones."

Although the Bosstones are known for bombastic party anthems like "Someday I Suppose," they don't mind using music as a soapbox. The serious side was most recently seen with their involvement in *Safe and Sound*, a CD produced in response to the Brookline clinic murders.

"I'm not a brilliant man, but I know this isn't a perfect planet. Where's the harm in writing something that will make people think and question?"

With more drinking songs and some introspective pieces on their new album, *Let's Face It*, the guys aren't the least bit worried about how it will fare in the skank-friendly world.

"I think the record will do fine, although I can't complain if it doesn't. I never imagined this: recording, 300 shows a year, fans. I spend my days living in a dream."

By Carrie Bell, Assistant Editor / Photo courtesy of Mercury

An Apple A Day

FIONA APPLE KNOWS WHY the caged bird sings. "By putting the suffering in my life into songs, I've been able to understand myself," she says from an Indiana U. tour stop.



She's no Granny Smith

Reading poetry by Maya Angelou inspired Apple's introspection. "I came across her poetry when I felt like everyone hated me. She wrote about her vulnerability when she felt humiliated and ashamed."

So why is the waif-ish 19-year-old so pained?

Those who hear smoky radio hits like "Shadowboxer" and "Sleep to Dream" would say whatever her pain is, it's made her wise beyond her years. According to the songwriter/singer/pianist, she was somewhat of a loner as a kid, but she's not ailing now. "I've lived a lot in my little life, but I'm not saying I know something about relationships or life. I just say what I feel and what I know."

Apple's not concerned with being the "next big thing," either. "I don't care if what I'm doing is hip or cool. I don't want to spend the rest of my life trying to figure that out."

Compared to Apple's attention-thirsty peers, her attitude is a little unconventional. She was signed by the first record exec who heard her demo, pays little attention to SoundScan results and never attended concerts before her own. "I still don't know what I'm doing on stage."

Modest as she remains about her rise in the biz, the native New Yorker looks out for herself by letting both experience and inexperience be her guide.

By Melissa Grego, Assistant Editor / Photo courtesy of WORK/Clean Slate