

**Blackalicious**  
8 pm Wed., April 26  
McDonald Theatre,  
\$20 adv./\$22 dos.



## Crafting Fresh Rhymes with Soul Power

Blackalicious throws down some of the funkier rap around.

I think the first song that showed me why underground hip hop kicks the mainstream's ass all over the music spectrum was **Blackalicious'** "Alphabet Aerobics." I was blown away as lyricist Gift of Gab laid down verse after verse of alphabet alliterations, speeding up into a frenzy that had me scrambling for a dictionary.

Now, more than six years later, Gab and DJ/Producer Chief X-Cel have turned Blackalicious into a phenomenon of "thinking man" rap. 2002's *Blazing Arrow* was a critically-acclaimed experiment into a world of science (observe "Chemical Calisthenics," my favorite song by the group), relaxation ("Make You Feel That Way") and other journeys of the mind.

2005 saw the release of *The Craft*, arguably the most unique release by the group to date. Featuring guest performances from rap stars such as Pigeon John and funk legend George Clinton, the album blasts out soul power and R&B while Gab continues his slick, speedy delivery on the mic.

"We're always growing and taking things in new directions, doing things we haven't done and going places we haven't gone," says Gab. "We'll never do the same record twice."

Songs like "Automatique," featuring a hook sung by R&B star Marsha Ambrosius

of Floetry, and "The Fall and Rise of Elliot Brown" showcase the band's soul-influenced direction prominently while Gab raps to a tempo from X-Cel that never seems to remain static. "'Automatique' is a song that came together organically, and the concept of the song is just about letting music flow and being consumed by the creative energies," says Gab. "'Elliot Brown' is part fiction, part reality, about a young man trying to find a better way to live. I wanted to focus more on storytelling with this record, with that song and 'Black Diamonds and Pearls'... even 'Supreme People' to an extent."

In 2004, while X-Cel went off to pursue other producing projects, Gab went solo and dropped *4th Dimensional Rocketships Going Up*, an ethereal record that still had Gab speaking at his blistering pace, but which differed greatly sound-wise from Blackalicious.

"What *4th Dimension* did was allow us to get out and get our hands into some other chemistry," says Gab, "and as a result, both X and I came back to Blackalicious even stronger." Blackalicious is a musical project that grabs you by the shoulders and makes you think while putting your fist in the air and nodding your head. It may sound complex at first, but believe me, it becomes relaxing faster than you think. **EW**

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