



EGO DEATH

Believe in the hip hop of the Flatbush Zombies

Something interesting happens at the end of Flatbush Zombies' latest release, *3001: A Laced Odyssey*. Halfway through the album's closing track "Your Favorite Rap Song," the music drifts away and in comes an extended series of voicemail-like recordings. Most are stoned treatises to the greatness of the Brooklyn hip-hop trio. "If this is the Flatbush Zombies, I just wanna say ya'll fucking rock," one voice says, holding in a bong rip.

Self-adulation has long (and often boringly) been hip hop's lingua franca. A music scene about telling instead of showing greatness attracts showers instead of growers, so the genre goes flaccid. Then a voice in the sequence says, "How you gonna tell me an hour of my life is worth \$11 an hour?" And, for me, everything I'd just heard changed. I reversed through the album on Spotify, listening for different meanings. In our Bernie-moment of the one percent and income inequality, that line had currency.

Formed in 2010, Flatbush Zombies is comprised of Meechy Darko, Zombie Juice and Erick "The Architect" Elliott. Rising up out of the mix-tape scene, Flatbush Zombies are associated with a hip-hop sound known as Beast Coast. The trio's debut full-length is funny (listen to "R.I.P.C.D." or "New Phone, Who Dis?").

There's also the comic-book style of Wu Tang, the intense, self-contained universe of Gorillaz and the psychedelic drug-fueled pathology of classic horrorcore acts like Gravediggaz.

Members of Flatbush Zombies (named after the Brooklyn neighborhood the trio grew up in) bonded as teens over Japanese anime and LSD. "Influenced by Stanley Kubrick," the Zombies rap on album-opener "The Odyssey." Elsewhere, the jazz-saxophone nuance from the track "A Spike Lee Joint" recalls Kendrick Lamar.

Listening back through the album a second time, I searched for why the Zombies are blowing up right now (the Eugene show is sold out). I pause at the relatively subdued, spaced-out track "Ascension." In it, a refrain is repeated over a hoarse whisper: "I have ascended, I'm trying to be better than God/ What the fuck am I saying? I ain't even entered my prime."

And I find myself again thinking about movements coalescing around Black Lives Matter and other issues of social justice. I think of the nihilism spawned when innocent people are gunned down and our climate is turning against us.

"I'm out here trying to get by, doing what I gotta do," the recorded voice from the sequence continues. "Shit, an hour of my life ain't worth anything." And that is why Flatbush is what it is. 'Cause they do what the fuck they want ... making music, following their dreams. This searching, yearning and humbleness resonates at a time when arguably our most unifying presidential candidate speaks of individual sacrifice for the common good while also preaching an independent path to success but, most of all, hope.

The same could be said about Flatbush Zombies. ■

Flatbush Zombies perform with Remy Banks 9 pm Friday, April 22, at WOW Hall; SOLD OUT.

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