

daytoday

CHARLOTTEVILLE'S GUIDE TO CULTURE

THE HOOK

38 09.15.05 - 09.21.05

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Blackalicious Practicing the hip-hop *Craft*



NIA, the 2000 full-length album from California hip-hop duo Blackalicious, set the group's course into heady, experimental hip-hop—the title is the Swahili word for “purpose,” if that indicates anything. They first broke with an EP featuring a two-and-a-half minute rap that adeptly alliterates across the alphabet one line at a time. But somehow they're still trying to push the envelope with their latest release, *The Craft*—featuring, among other similarly nutty tracks, a narrative in three distinct and disjoint parts called “The Fall and Rise of Elliott Brown.” They'll drop their unique brand of lyrical literature on the Satellite Ballroom this weekend.

The Hook: Would you say that *The Craft* is more abstract than your older records?

Gift of Gab: This album is more conceptual than the others. There's a lot more storytelling on songs like “Elliott Brown” and “Black Diamonds and Pearls.” There's not really a lot of songs where I'm just busting, just going for it lyrically. I can do that in my sleep.

Chief Xcel: I think it's bigger. Gab is very vivid on this record.

Gift of Gab: With us, every record is about growth, and we definitely tried to stretch each record and go where we hadn't gone before. We'll never make another *NIA*, because we already did that, and we'll never make another *Blazing Arrow*. And now, we'll never make another *Craft*.

The Hook: People say you're on a positive hip-hop kick. What's your reaction to that?

Chief Xcel: We're not on a positive kick. The word “kick” connotes something of a fad. We're just writing music that's true to us.

Gift of Gab: I'm just sharing my experience

as honestly as I can. Music helps me get in touch with my spirit—I feel like I'm channeling something higher. It's kind of a paradox, because if you're not living that all the time, people who meet you might think you're a hypocrite. If you catch me on a bad day, you might think I'm an a***ole. I'd rather be called positive, though.

The Hook: Why is that?

Gift of Gab: Well, I don't want to get into negative versus positive, because it's just art. I think a lot of the best hip-hop in the history of the music was so-called “gangster rap.” Conscious rappers shouldn't be pitched against gangsters. It's all just art. If you're a gangster, you should be the most creative gangster in rap. There are conscious rappers who suck, and then just because they're conscious you're supposed to respect them more? Art doesn't have to be morally right. Art just has to be honest and creative.

The Hook: This will be your first time in Charlottesville.

Gift of Gab: I've never even been in the state before, actually.

The Hook: So this tour is taking you beyond your usual realm?

Chief Xcel: Yeah, we're actually playing a lot of cities for the first time. Right now we're in Boise, Idaho. You never really know what to expect when you go to places that you have never played before, but it was packed last night.

Gift of Gab: Our realm is as far as we can spread it. We're trying to bring our music to as many people as will hear it. ■

If you're one of them, be at the Satellite Ballroom on Saturday, September 16, with \$20 in your pocket.