



BASS & TREEBIE

ATMOSPHERE

Hip Hop's Hypochondriacs Set Out To Make Sex Music For The Single Mom

words by: Donald C. Stefanovich photos by: Chad Buchanan

N On a (relatively) quiet Los Angeles street, somewhere in the west end of Hollywood, sits a rather unassuming hotel. Its cracking, yellow walls and dusty, weathered exterior hint at an ideal setting for some of the best of the Sunset Strip's worst one night stands. It also wasn't difficult to imagine that if the walls could talk, they might tell tales of the Los Angeles County Coroner in some of his finest hours. The funny thing was that upon entering the lobby, after one glance around the ultra-modern interior with wood accents, spotless floors and furniture I'd be afraid to sit on, I found myself glancing down in quick assessment of my attire. It felt out of place - never mind the fact that I was about to attend a listening party for the new album by one of the most arguably notorious duos in hip hop. Fortunately, it was back outside on the gum speckled sidewalk that I met Slug and Ant. In a way I didn't entirely yet understand, something about them seemed to reflect the misleading appearance of the hotel. We proceeded to pile into a white minivan, the sort a soccer mom might drive. As I would soon discover, this may not have been coincidence. It was here that we had our party.

"It's like everywhere else that's not New York or L.A. We grabbed on to it just as hard as anybody," says Atmosphere lyricist, Slug, of their hometown, Minneapolis. "I've learned that people who ain't from New York or L.A. have a tendency to take hip hop a lot more personal because of how they use it to reinforce their identity. It's like, there's a certain type of entitlement that comes with being from the Bronx that in a way, it could almost be taken for

granted that you're surrounded by hip hop all the time. Whereas, in the Midwest, they're probably still so insecure about their role in hip hop that they take all of it so personal. I grew up like that. I was one of those kids that loved this shit so much that I would get beat up over it." It's been 11 years since Atmosphere put the Midwest on the hip hop map with *Overcast*, their first full length; a feat not to be taken lightly, especially at the hands of Slug, real name

Sean Daley and Ant, real name Anthony Davis. Hip hop archetypes they weren't and a hip hop mecca, Minnesota wasn't. "We were never even given the option of playing the demo game. It was all about doin' it for yourself. DIY in my city is a big deal," Slug says. "Minneapolis has always had a sound. I guess if I had to categorize that sound, it's the sound of people who don't quite know how to do it, but they're doing their best because music's what they love." On

their fifth full-length (they have countless EPs, compilations, instrumental albums, dub series, cassettes, bootlegs and singles). *When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That Shit Gold*, it's a sound they attempt to embody – with a bit of a twist, of course.

"We were actually looking for what Minneapolis sounded like in like the '80s. The earlier Prince stuff, even The Replacements – some of the more country, rock, *No Depression* type shit. I think we allowed the sound to dictate where the writing went and then it would be piped out and kind of keep the writing focused," says Slug, attempting to describe the origins of the record. "We spent so much time on it," says Ant, producer and the more reserved half of Atmosphere. "We had some musicians involved so, very tedious. It's tough. A lot of the keyboard sounds we have on there, it was a bitch to recapture a lot of those '80s sounds that we used."

Known for his conscious and brutally honest lyrics, Slug claims never to lie in his raps, only to tell stories. More than one acquaintance has been less than pleased at finding themselves in his flows. It's a problem he says that won't be one this time around. "This record is 95% fiction, but I still believe that there's no lies in fiction. The lie is trying to pull a story on you that doesn't have a means to the end. The point is to get to the moral of the story, not necessarily the literal telling of the story, but the final point of the story. I feel like in a lot of rap, it's constant story telling... but it's like they tell the story and it's like a fantasy and there's no means to the end. And that's something that I can imagine I would ever do. I'm not trying to dis contemporary hip hop, it's just a phase it's in right now, but bottom line is people aren't talking about the consequences."

The first track laid down for the album, "In Her Music Box" chronicles a young girl in the back seat of her father's car, absorbing the explicit rap beating through his stereo as she is dragged along – seemingly more of an accessory than a daughter.

Throughout the album, Slug spins yarns about the everyman's struggle; from addiction to parenthood, drawing more parallels to modern folk than contemporary hip hop. Although he claims his words as fiction, they're certainly not entirely alien territory either. "I'm trying to figure out why a whole bunch of 19-year olds can relate to what I'm doing, you know?" Slug puzzles. "I'm 35 and I got a kid that's closer to 19 than I am. What am I saying or doing that these kids can relate? I know if I sit down one on one with them, the kind of relating I'm going to have is, 'I've been there, done that. Brush your fuckin' teeth and eat your breakfast.' If I were to try and reinforce anything it would be the reinforcement that I am kinda trying to grow up inside of what I'm doing. I don't really have to put on no front, no airs about it. In the music, in person, on stage, just in general, I feel kind of fortunate that I can treat my dogs like how I would even if I was a fuckin' delivery guy. I've grown up and learned a lot from a lot of my own personal decision making over the last few years. And I think – I hope, I hope – that that's all reflected in the music. I've been trying to get that soccer-mom demographic."

The rapper seems to grapple with having reached a pinnacle. While most would consider Atmosphere nothing less than on the upswing, Slug seems disoriented when looking down from atop his current achievements. "I think the actual striving to this point has always been the actual focus of what we do. So now that we're kind of reaching this point, I don't know if we really know how to deal with it." While optimistic in spite of what one might infer from most of his lyrics, Slug remains acutely aware. "Everybody has their ups and downs and me personally, I'd rather crash the plate myself than allow people to crash it for me. I would much rather take the whole fuckin' thing and steer it into a tree and call it a done day and get out and walk away than run out of gas. I like water. I'm a water guy. I never swam in a tree, but fuck it." And as for Ant? "I'll probably go down too. I've followed this long."

AT A GLANCE...

+ NURSERY RHYMES

"There's a special pressing of the album that's coming out with – I mean it's called a children's book, but really I wouldn't read it to the kids. It's designed like a children's book with watercolors, colored pencil illustrations and this story I wrote about this boy who's shrinking and his princess who can't see." - Slug

+ PLAN B

"Fat Mike got me into parking lots. Between NOFX and Fat Wreck Chords he's still building his little parking lot empire. He makes a killing off that. It didn't really

get to know that dude too good, but when he was around me I would listen when he talked." - Slug

+ PACKRAT

"[I collect] Pieces of camouflage cloth that represent pretty much every major army in the world. I've got a small piece of camouflage from whatever their actual uniform is and they're all oragami'd into peace doves actually. Really a weird thing but it was something that was started up. I believe it was Shingo that gave them to me a while ago actually, but I keep them out. They're pretty fresh." - Slug

+ SWITCH HITTER

"I jerk off with my left hand!" - Slug

FOR THE RECORD

words by: BROOK

Hip Shoes Make Hop To Music

NIKE commissioned their own hip hop track, "Better Than I've Ever Been," a shrewd marketing scheme so popular it even earned a Grammy nomination for "Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group." Featuring all-stars Kanye West, Nas, KRS-One and produced by Rick Rubin, the song celebrates the 25th year anniversary of the popular Air Force 1 shoe and is Nike's first soulless product.

Beefcake Pantyhose

The first pressing of Beck's *Odelay* deluxe reissue shipped with unproofed lyrics. Apparently, they were copied from a fan website for temporary layout purposes. Beck apologized and has made the right lyrics available at Beck.com while subsequent pressings of the CD will have the corrected lyrics as well. Fans complain that they still don't make any sense.



Fo' Shizzle

Snoop Dogg was ticketed after NYPD officers caught the rapper smoking marijuana outside a New York nightclub. He explained that he wouldn't gizzle over the hizzle and avoided arrest. Meanwhile pop singer Aaron Carter WAS arrested for marijuana possession after he was pulled over for speeding. He tried to wizzle his way out of it, but it's just annoying coming from white boys, y'know?



Goo Goo G'looli!

In 1969 14 year-old Beatles fan Jerry Levitan had a lucky encounter with a surprisingly accommodating John Lennon resulting in the recording of a 40 minute interview, inspiring "I Met the Walrus," a five-minute animated short. For 36 years Levitan sat on the audiotape, until he met Toronto-based animator Josh Raskin. The resulting collaboration has earned acclaim and awards. My short film, based on meeting Clay Aiken, is called "I Met the Jackass."

Courtney's Deathbed Confession?

This month in '94 the body of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain was found, victim of apparent suicide. As years pass and thoroughly detailed alternative theories regarding his death emerge, it's become a valid matter of debate. Unfortunately, conspiracy theorists can exploit Kurt as much as the industry he left behind. Even so, check

