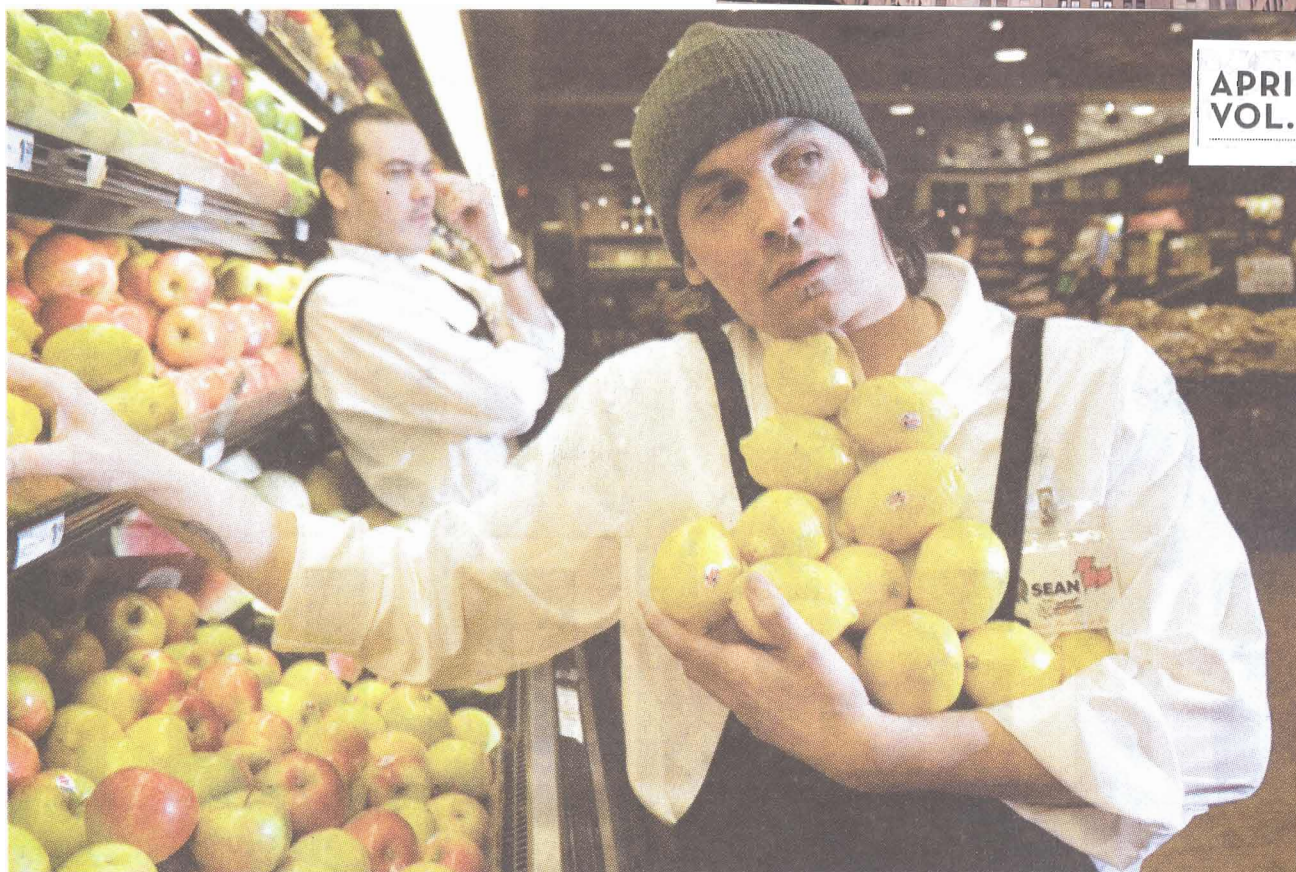


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GROWING PAINS

ATMOSPHERE'S MC SLUG DISPLAYS NEW-FOUND MATURITY ON THE DUO'S LATEST EFFORT

Sean Daley, now 35, has rapped for more than a decade as Slug of the leading backpack hip-hop duo Atmosphere.

He epitomizes the paradox of a culture that celebrates its defeats. He's paraded his own through autobiographical lyrics that detail an upbringing, love life and career replete with less-than-boast-worthy highlights, including a labored relationship with an alcoholic father and promiscuous sex with fans.

Seven's Travels, released in 2003, detailed the rigors of touring 200 days a year. But listen closely, and you'll hear the sound of a man hitting what recovering addicts call "rock bottom." Daley was struggling with bad boozing and romantic relationship habits ("I was fighting to fuck and fucking to fight," he says), but copping out on his dysfunction by surrounding himself with Atmosphere devotees to inflate his ego.

"I still hear that record as the happiest music we ever made, so for that to be what came out of me when I was in such a dark space—I don't understand that part," says Daley. "There were some really good beats, but all the stories were incomplete, and there was so much contradiction going on. It just was really unfocused."

While working on the follow up, *You Can't Imagine How Much Fun*

We're Having, Daley acquired the rare medical condition alopecia, which causes temporary hair loss. Simultaneously, he quit drinking for six months. The crises of body and mind prompted him and production partner Anthony "Ant" Davis to begin a new creative process. They collaborated daily on beats and rhymes (in the past they'd worked in isolation), drafted recording sessions exhaustively and incorporated live instrumentation in addition to samples. It's a matured work ethic they carried into their latest, *When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That Shit Gold*, due April 22. Daley, additionally, veers away from cannibalizing his life for narrative fodder, though he still devotes himself to telling the stories of unlikely heroes and paints women with a particularly romantic stroke (an underpaid diner waitress or a mom scraping to pay her medical bills).

"In the past, I didn't give a fuck about who was gonna listen and what they were gonna take from it," says Daley. "But seeing my fan base continue to stay young while I get old, there is some thought put into not wanting to be part of the problem—not wanting to fill some kid's head up with false shit." —STACEY DUGAN

Atmosphere play Metro (3730 N. Clark, 773-549-0203) April 22 and 23