



REMIX

CHAMPION MC: BROTHER ALI

If it weren't for Brother Ali's relentless touring schedule, heads may have started to seriously wonder what happened to one of the Midwest's most commanding voices in hip-hop. No doubt Ali's electrifying stage show is a sight to behold, but when it comes down to it, the masses have been waiting for another album from the self-dubbed "champion." It's been a few years since Ali and his producer Ant (of Atmosphere) dropped the breakout 2003 LP *Shadows on the Sun* (Rhymesayers). But just this past August, a glimmer of light became visible when Ali leaked an online exclusive with the fiery banger, "Original King." Soon after, the arrival of his new album, *The Undisputed Truth*, was announced for a late-February 2007 release.

So what prolonged the completion of what Ali calls his "most focused" piece of work ever? As Ali can attest to, life happened. "I got divorced, got custody of my son, was homeless, moved around a little bit, went on tour a lot, got into another relationship and just grew up in a lot of ways," Ali says. "And so I wanted to make an album that reflected all of that."

As a good friend, Ant remained patient while Ali tried to figure out how he was going to articulate via hip-hop the drastic transitions he faced. When the time was right, Ali started recording tracks in Ant's basement studio, in which all of the preproduction was created with only a vintage Ensoniq ASR-10 and a Tascam four-track recorder. Admittedly, Ant is a sonic perfectionist. So when Ali brought such heavy subject matter to the table, Ant had no problem taking his time crafting music for *The Undisputed Truth*. "For me, [the recording process] is strictly making sure that the songs are completely his truth," Ant explains.

Ali, who makes beats himself (try to find his out-of-print, self-produced 2000 cassette from Rhymesayers, *Rites of Passage*), especially appreciates the extra effort. "[Ant] pushes me to bring my realest, rawest, most honest self to my music," he says. And this stringency explains why tracks like "Walking Away," which is about his divorce, took so long to get right. Instead of taking a predictable downtrodden approach, Ali flipped the script and hired psychedelic/funk guitarist Jef Lee Johnson to help create an atypical mood.

While there will also be a number of battle-oriented, braggadocios tracks, Ant, for one, is most proud of the last third of the album, which includes the political-minded forthcoming single, "Uncle Sam Goddamn." "The last five songs are about who we are as friends and how we see music and how honest and gifted [Ali] is at saying exactly how he feels," Ant says. "I think the music I did for those [songs] accompany that well, and I honestly am proud of that."—Max Herman