

DECEMBER 19, 2014

BINGE! Wu-Tang Clan

ROLL DEEP WITH THE MARTIAL-ARTS-LOVING, SLANG-OBSSESSED MYTHMAKERS WHO CREATED THE DOPEST HIP-HOP COLLECTIVE IN HISTORY—AND BECAME POP CULTURE ICONS. **By Kyle Anderson**

♥ THE PRIDE OF STATEN ISLAND



THEY SPRANG FROM SOME OF New York City's toughest neighborhoods fully formed, with their own mythology—it involved a lot of kung fu and arcane drug slang—and self-styled X-Men monikers: RZA, GZA, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Method Man, Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, Raekwon, U-God, Masta Killa. Their sound was a brazen combination of vintage soul samples and claustrophobic boom-bap, and the early songs ("C.R.E.A.M.," "Protect Ya Neck," "Triumph") became instant classics among mixtape traders and radio listeners alike. But the collective soon graduated beyond their humble beginnings, spreading tentacles deep into the outer reaches of pop culture. Their logo, a stylized W, became as iconic in some circles as the Bat signal or McDonald's arches. They birthed books, films, videogames, TV shows, and even a clothing line. Most vitally, they kicked in the door for a parade of game-changing Gotham MCs, from Biggie to Jay Z. While they're still making headlines and albums (including their just-released sixth studio effort, *A Better Tomorrow*), the Wu of the 21st century have certainly evolved—but they'll always bring the ruckus.

OL' DIRTY BASTARD (1968-2004)

A true Joker in a deck full of wild cards, ODB (born Russell Tyrone Jones) quickly became one of the Clan's breakout stars, but trouble followed him. Jones was nearly as famous for his struggles with the law and substance abuse as he was for his signature raspy flow, and by age 35 he was gone, felled by an overdose.

♥ THE STUDIO ALBUMS



Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers) (1993)
As intense and vivid as a superhero origin story, and track for track one of rap's most hallowed albums.



Wu-Tang Forever (1997)
If *36 Chambers* is *Pulp Fiction*, the double-disc follow-up is *Django Unchained*: a blockbuster version of the Wu worldview.



The W (2000)
A more reflective Clan brood over some of RZA's most dynamic production, from the dance-ready "Gravel Pit" to the Isaac Hayes-sampling "I Can't Go to Sleep."



Iron Flag (2001)
The urgency of their first three albums falls off some, and the absence of ODB is felt. Still, *Flag* gives Ghostface a chance to shine on tracks like "Uzi (Pinky Ring)."



8 Diagrams (2007)
The Clan discover psychedelia and live instruments. *Diagrams* doesn't always deliver, but don't miss the ballsy, Beatles-sampling "The Heart Gently Weeps."



A Better Tomorrow (2014)
A hard-charging Method Man reclaims center stage on this long-awaited return—an intriguing if uneven reflection on the house that Wu built.

♥ TANG-Y MOMENTS

WU-WEAR

Clothing Rules Everything Around Me: one of the first rap-affiliated streetwear lines, and still going strong.



WU SLANG

Ex.: Brolic [braaaaw-lick] *adj.*, to be way too muscular



THE WU-TANG NAME GENERATOR

An online algorithm that allows ordinary citizens to enter their full names and be granted their own Wu-appropriate alter egos (e.g., Brad Pitt becomes "Vulgar Prophet"). Former *Community* actor Donald Glover got his official nom de rap, Childish Gambino, from it.

SHAOLIN STYLE VIDEOGAME

A Wu-themed four-player 3-D game popular since its release in 1999.



THE TAO OF WU

Spirituality and the "seven pillars" as seen through the eyes of RZA.



"Time is rough and tough like leather/ Figured out I went the wrong route/So I got with a sick-ass clique and went all out"

Method Man
"Triumph"

"As the world turns, I spread like germs/Bless the globe with the pestilence/The hardheaded never learn"

Raekwon
"CREAM"



Smarting from a loss to Puff Daddy for Best Rap Album in 1998, Ol' Dirty Bastard famously bum-rushed the stage when Shawn Colvin's "Sunny Came Home" won Song of the Year—shouting the immortal line "Wu-Tang is for the children!"

ULTIMATE WU SOLO MIXTAPE

- ▶ "Bring the Pain" METHOD MAN
- ▶ "Shadowboxin'" GZA FEAT. METHOD MAN
- ▶ "Incarcerated Scarfaces" RAEKWON
- ▶ "Got Your Money" OL' DIRTY BASTARD FEAT. KELIS
- ▶ "The Champ" GHOSTFACE KILLAH
- ▶ "I Can See" TEKITHA FEAT. CAPPADONNA
- ▶ "Mi Casa" METHOD MAN & REDMAN
- ▶ "Fantasy (Remix)" MARIAH CAREY FEAT. OL' DIRTY BASTARD
- ▶ "Apollo Kids" GHOSTFACE KILLAH FEAT. RAEKWON
- ▶ "All That I Got Is You" GHOSTFACE KILLAH FEAT. MARY J. BLIGE
- ▶ "Brooklyn Zoo" OL' DIRTY BASTARD
- ▶ "The Heist" BUSTA RHYMES FEAT. GHOSTFACE KILLAH, RAEKWON & ROC MARCIANO
- ▶ "B.O.B.B.Y." RZA
- ▶ "Friction" INSPECTAH DECK FEAT. MASTA KILLA
- ▶ "Kiss the Ring" RAEKWON FEAT. MASTA KILLA & INSPECTAH DECK
- ▶ "Ghetto Superstar (This Is What You Are)" PRAS FEAT. MYA & OL' DIRTY BASTARD
- ▶ "Graveyard Chamber" GRAVEDIGGAAZ FEAT. KILLAH PRIEST & SHABAZZ THE DISCIPLE

WU ON SCREEN: THE HIGHLIGHTS



THE MAN WITH THE IRON FISTS

Writer-director RZA sends Russell Crowe, Lucy Liu, and Dave Bautista in hot pursuit of ancient Chinese gold (and many sword fights). Surreal and sublime.



COFFEE AND CIGARETTES

Jim Jarmusch's 2004 anthology pairs RZA and GZA with Bill Murray in a delightful scene in which the duo drink tea and call their costar by his full name repeatedly.



THE WIRE

Method Man's finest dramatic turn came as drug capo Calvin "Cheese" Wagstaff, right-hand man to Prop Joe and the final character killed on the HBO series.



30 ROCK

Ghostface Killah (playing himself) shills for Donaghy Estates, a sparkling wine made by Alec Baldwin's Jack Donaghy that tastes like "the urine of Satan."



HOW HIGH

Method Man and Redman headline the 2001 hydroponic buddy comedy as goofball stoners who accidentally smoke their way into the Ivy League.

THE WU-NIVERSE A WHO'S WHO OF CLAN ASSOCIATES



Quentin Tarantino

RZA provided the *Kill Bill* score over which Uma Thurman sliced and diced.



Denzel Washington

In *American Gangster*, RZA chases Washington's drug lord Frank Lucas.



Zach Braff

Method Man plays a bellhop with a side game in peep shows in Braff's *Garden State*.



Notorious B.I.G.

The only other rapper on Biggie's perfect debut, *Ready to Die*? Method Man.



Kanye West

Long a self-professed fan of the group, he later rapped with Raekwon and RZA.



Mariah Carey

ODB delivered one of his wildest verses on the remix of Carey's No. 1 hit "Fantasy."



MASTA KILLA



RZA



METHOD MAN



GHOSTFACE KILLAH



RAEKWON



U-GOD



INSPECTAH DECK



OL' DIRTY BASTARD



CAPPADONNA



GZA



Jim Jarmusch

RZA scored *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, and worked with him again with GZA.



Leonardo DiCaprio

RZA, who wrote a song for *Django Unchained*, was surprised the star "knew all my s---."



Mary J. Blige

Both Method Man and Ghostface teamed with the R&B queen on crossover singles.



The Black Keys

Raekwon, RZA, and a posthumous ODB guested on their *Blakroc* project.



The Kennedys

RZA's mom so admired the political family that she named her son Robert Fitzgerald.



Dave Chappelle

A much-loved Chappelle's Show skit touted the services of Wu-Tang Financial.

OL' DIRTY: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AP/GETTY IMAGES; THE MAN WITH THE IRON FISTS: CHARLAM CHASEN; COFFEE AND CIGARETTES: THE WIRE: BRAFF: EVERETT COLLECTION; U-GOD: HOW HIGH: SAM GRADAM; TARANTINO: JARMUSCH: TODD BRITTON; MASTA KILLA: MASTA KILLA; RZA: AMANDA DREHM/WIREIMAGE.COM; METHOD MAN: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES; GHOSTFACE KILLAH: STEVEN S. HEINZ/REXUS; RAEKWON: PAUL MONTAGNA/GETTY IMAGES; U-GOD: JON SATO/WIREIMAGE.COM; INSPECTAH DECK: JIM SPELLMAN/WIREIMAGE.COM; OL' DIRTY BASTARD: BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES; CAPPADONNA: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES; GZA: ARAYA DIAZ/WIREIMAGE.COM; GILBERT: NIVELLES/706; BLIGE: MICHAEL DESSAU/GETTY IMAGES; THE BLACK KEYS: JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN F. KENNEDY: NANA WALKER/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT F. KENNEDY: SUPPLICA/GETTY IMAGES; CHAPPELLE: DANIEL BOZAR/GETTY IMAGES.