Cultural Daily

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Phife Dawg: Rest in Peace

Lucas Elzey · Wednesday, November 16th, 2016

Reposting in celebration of Phife Dawg, who passed away a year ago.

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The man, the myth, the legend, rapper Phife Dawg from the classic hip hop group A Tribe Called Quest, now rests in hip hop heaven.

> *Microphone check 1 2, what is this?*
> *It's the 5 foot assassin with the ruffneck business.*

This is the rhyme that Phife came out with in the song "Buggin Out" that caught my attention. Out of Tribe members Q-Tip, close friend to the group Consequence, and other close friend to the group Busta Rhymes, I think Phife Dawg was the best lyrically. I always loved when his verse came on, and I would recite all the lyrics word for word.

> *I love you, you love me,*
> *the shorty Phife Dawg is your favorite MC.*

Born Malik Izaak Taylor in Queens, New York, Phife grew up with his grandmother, who had a strong Trinidad background and was also a devout Catholic. Every Sunday you could find the guy at church, maybe even Sunday school. He later attended Garvey High with friends and soon to be groupmates Ali Muhammad, Jarobi White and Jonathan Davis aka Q-tip. As he rhymes:

> *1988 Senior Year, Garvey High*
> *where all the guys were corny but the girls were mad fly,*
> *Lounging with the Tipster, cooling with Sha,*
> *scooping out the honeys, they know who they are.*

By the time the first Tribe album dropped, *People's Instinctive Travels and Paths of Rhythm*, almost everybody was present…except for Phife. Phife, Phife Dawg, the other man on the mic, was more focused on having fun in the streets. He would rarely come into the studio and record with the group, which made Tip very frustrated. Which is also why such a small portion of the many songs on the album even have Phife in them. Q-Tip and Mr. Muhammad took over and made the album on their own, with Tip just spitting positive vibes and lessons to be learned. Personally, my favorite song from this great album is "Youthful Expression":

Phife, Jarobi, Ali told me,
get the force, like Wan Kenobi.

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Phife Dawg finally cleaned up his act and wanted to contribute more to the Tribe, so that's exactly what he did. So next up on this groovy soul train of hits, comes the album *The Low End Theory*. Phife makes his name known even more on it with his lyrics. Like I said earlier, he really caught my ear with his lyrics on the song "Buggin Out," but my favorite track is on this album and it is the legendary track "Scenario." This track is so legendary because of the music video and and all the cameos in it, from a young Redman to Spike Lee. It also pretty much launched the career of Busta Rhymes with his iconic dragon verse. He continues this contributing trend on to the next album *Midnight Marauders*. Phife spits:

But um, no time for jokes, what?
There's bills to be paid. What?
Hoes to be laid, what?
Punks to be slayed, What?
Chumps to attack,
so my man, watch your back
'93 means skills are a must, so never lack, uh.

I personally think that Phife lived an amazing and memorable life. He must have fulfilled most of his dreams. He died in Contra Costa County, California on March 22, 2016, due to complications relating to diabetes, at the age of 45. As he once rhymed: "When's the last time you heard a funky diabetic?" We will always remember Phife Dawg. There's no question the legend influenced artists like Kanye West, Jill Scott, The Roots, and Common.

The Tribe recently dropped a new album, strategically on Veterans Day in early November to send a message, called *We Got It From Here, Thank You For Your Service*. Phife appears on several of the songs, even though he passed earlier this year. The group recently performed on *Saturday Night Live* with Dave Chappelle introducing them before their performance. Q-tip, Ali, and Jarobi were present to musically protest Donald Trump getting into office, and show off their fallen brother once again.

Phife Dawg. Phife, forever.

(Featured image of Phife Dawg by fuseboxradio. Used under CC licensing.)

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