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Young Old Man: A Warrior's Prayer

Katharine Hargreaves · Wednesday, October 23rd, 2013

It's hard to find information about *Young Old Man* on the internet. The Los Angeles-based group is a multi-cultural blend of individuals and influences, fronted by the enigmatic Runson Willis. We caught up with them recently to discuss their newest music video, "Warrior's Prayer," and get the lowdown on their eclectic vibe.

Katharine Hargreaves: How would you define your sound?

Runson Willis: First thing, *Young Old Man* is comprised of four members from different cultures and ethnicities: African, Iranian, Indian and Spanish. We try and steer ourselves to our roots. We make music that combines these different backgrounds. It's a high-spirited music, sounds for the soul. We're trying to transcend what people like and make music that looks into them. We're making music that illuminates a deep-seated passion inside ourselves and others. We try and speak truth. Whatever others take from it is not for me to judge.

KH: What acts past and present do you consider to be your biggest influences?

RW: Neema (one of the members) and I had very different experiences growing up. He's Iranian but grew up in a completely black district of D.C. He also has a condition that makes him look different so he had to find a way to fit in. For him, that route was through the culture of black music. But somewhere along the line his mother and father started playing more traditional music of their ancestors. Where this fits into our music is that we would show each other these various sounds and influences. He actually introduced me to a lot of African music – Fela Kuti, Ali Farka Toure, Tinariwin – and as soon as he played them it changed my life. It was a groove that comes from struggle, a groove that's played in pain. We also have a deep love for jazz, Billie Holiday, King Crimson. We found a lot in those artists that stood outside of the box purposefully.

KH: Tell us something about the band that we can't find on Google.

RW: Our drummer (Kiran Gandhi) is a female drummer from India. Also my Bass player, Francisco Morales, and I are in another band called Blac Jesus and the Experimentalists. We're pretty vague about things online – most pictures don't feature all the members and sometimes none of the members. We do it that way because we feel that we're all vessels for the music.

KH: How did you come up with the name Young Old Man, and what meaning does it have?

RW: [Laughs] It has multiple meanings. I've never felt like a young man. I've never acted like one either. Some people have a way of living that is old-fashioned [laughs] – maybe a way of dress, maybe a way of thinking – and all of that would be a part of my personality. So I guess that name

is an extension of our characters, even Kiran. She's very powerful in her spirit and she's actually the one who came up with the name. She would always say to me and Neema, "You're such young old men" and it stuck. We said, "You're right." It's not everyday you see a dude with a pipe and a cardigan. We had other ideas but this one seemed to fit the best. We thought about the past and the present, the old and the young, our ancestry, all embodied in this music. In one way we're keeping it alive, another way situating the music, another way revolutionizing what we've heard. It's not music for the club, it's music for your life.

KH: Other than your own music, what music are you listening to?

RW: Gotta love Thom Yorke. He's amazing, but he's not the only. I'm really into James Brown right now. It has nothing to do with our music but then again maybe it does. He's a big part of the African-American culture and he said it loud: "I'm black and I'm proud." He made me proud to be black.

KH: What's next for *Young Old Man*, and for Runson Willis?

RW: Well, those are two different things. I'm doing some things that are not conducive to the lifestyle of a "rock and roll" musician. I make music for the people. It's not for me. And it made me realize that it never has been. We all use music to embody something greater than ourselves. With Runson Willis, I'm a servant of God so my music is about blessing people's lives. There's many things to come: we just released a music video a month ago and it's doing well so far. I'm working on my solo stuff and recorded another music video a few days ago. I look back and most of this music has emerged from struggle. With *Young Old Man*, we're going to continue recording tracks and we're about to do a full-length album. We'll see what happens with that. We'll keep it classy, keep it about the people, don't make it about ourselves. People get too caught up in that. They keep saying "I want to make it." I say "Make what? Make Art? So make art. Don't let what people call art make you."

Watch the newest music video, "Warrior's Prayer," from *Young Old Man*:

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