

The Mix Tape Volume II: 60 Minutes of Funk
 FunkMaster Flex
 Loud Records/RCA

Even though I think we are in no position to judge if a person is, "keepin' it real," I just want to say that we should all think back to when hip hop was the greatest show on Earth. When there were no gold chains, no cellular phones,

and no MTV. When MCs on both coasts were armed with routines, not Ruegers. When a block party was not a Glock party. When they battled over crackling sun-dried records inside dimly lit gymnasiums just for respect and care fare. When all it cost to see a ghetto superstar was eight quarters.

FunkMaster Flex's first release, *The Mix Tape Volume I: 60 Minutes of Funk*, took us back to that era. Opening with the sassy Yvette Michelle, the album featured crazy tracks (e.g. Sadat X's "Loud Hangover"), fresh freestyles from artists such as Redman and MethodMan, and priceless old school jams from pioneers such as Run DMC and LL Cool J.

While Flex's sophomore album gets a thumbs up, it didn't live up to my expectations.

Something was wrong. Maybe it was the lack of energy that filled Flex's voice; throughout the album, he talks like he'd rather be somewhere else. Maybe it is because there are too many short jams, as opposed to longer affairs. Maybe it's the not-too-impressive selection of artists (Keni Burke, Dav, The Gap Band as opposed to *Volume I's* Sadat X, Tribe, Fugees, and KRS One). Maybe it is the ho-hum beats and repetition he uses as opposed to the originality he dropped on the first one (e.g. "Get up").

The album does have a few strong moments, including the DJ Kool jams and the Soul II Soul vibe. There is a slew of big names (Kim, Foxy, Biggie, Puff, Redman, Lost Boyz, Nas, Jay-Z), which makes you wonder why the album wasn't all that.

In short, I'd say the album is alternately likable, perplexing, and ferociously bland. Flex didn't tap his full potential. He displays only flashes of brilliance that we already know can burn so brightly.

MOHANAD MORAH

Gridlock'd
 Various Artists
 Death Row/Interscope

Snoop Doggy Dogg and 2pac are actually quite gifted. This is analogous to saying Ted Bundy is actually quite intelligent. Had their respective talents been put to use in better pursuit, the world might have been better for it. Instead, we are left with the foul-tasting fruits of their misguided labour.

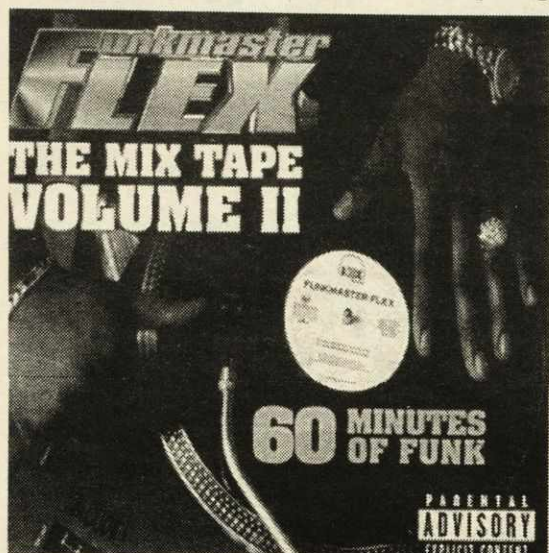
All biases against inferior hip hop aside, the soundtrack to *Gridlock'd* (the movie starring the enigmatic 2pac Shakur and the talented Tim Roth) is the latest in a tradition of g-funk, rap/gangsta, r&b compilations from Death Row records. This being the first without the supervision and services of hitmaker Dr. Dre, it lacks the sure-fire hits and catchiness of *Above the Rim* and *Murder was the Case*. Most of the songs will be right at home on American radio between Toni Braxton and Blackstreet, but they probably won't experience simi-

lar success in Canada — not even to the extent of previous Death Row releases.

As is the case with just about anything, *Gridlock'd* has its moments, be them few and far between. "Life is a Traffic Jam" stands out as easily the album's best song (even after 2pac cuts off the spoken words of Medusa). The vocal progression on "Why" by Nate Dogg is relatively catchy, as is the bassline on "Don't Try Ty Play Me Homey" by Daz. And even while 2pac seems to be perpetually dissing Bad Boy records, Rage poignantly manages to stick up her middle finger to both coasts at once, while proudly decreeing, "It ain't where you're from, it's where your gat's at."

Snoop's collaboration with 70s soul/funk star Charlie Wilson on "Off The Hook" is the song that best symbolizes the album: an end product that falls far short of realizing its potential.

SOHRAB FARID



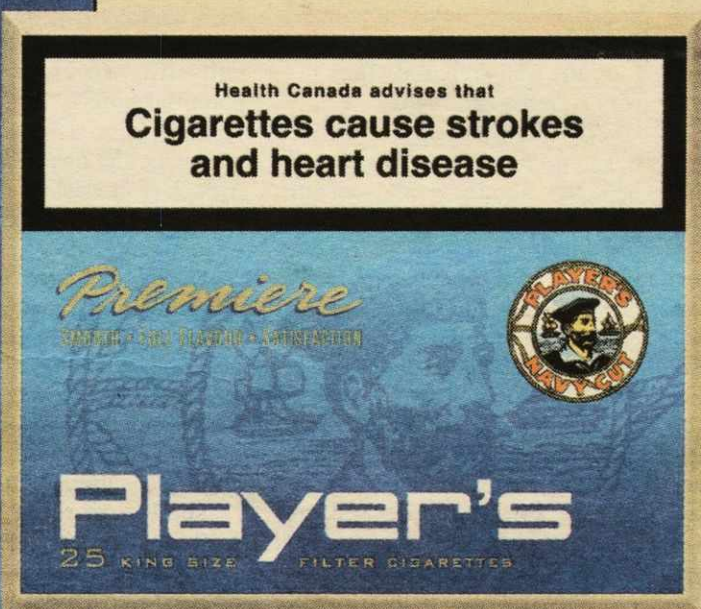
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