

# The Essential Interview

BY SOHRAB FARID AND MOHANAD MORAH

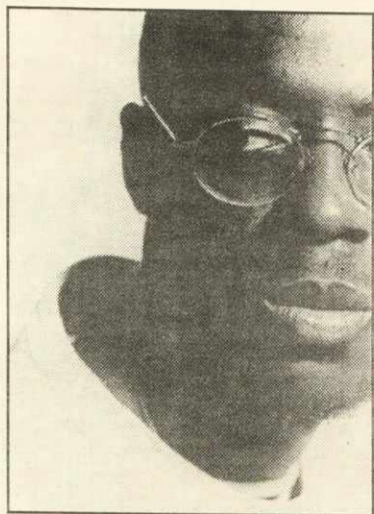
In the arts and beyond, Canadians often find themselves suffering from an unfortunate inferiority complex when compared to their neighbours to the South. The Toronto hip-hop scene is no exception. In an effort to remedy this, the good people of Beat Factory have released *Rap Essentials: Volume 1*, probably the most heavily-promoted and heavily-distributed Canadian hip-hop album by a Canadian label ever. It consists of songs from 15 Toronto hip-hop artists and one from Vancouver's Rascalz (incidentally the albums' best track).

We had a chance to speak with Choclair and Wio-K, two of the artists featured on *Rap Essentials*, about the Toronto hip-hop scene, the trials and tribulations of being an independent artist, sex, and a whole lot of other stuff.

**Gaz:** What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Toronto hip-hop scene?

**Choclair:** The strength is that it has a lot of talent. I think it's weakness is that a lot of people don't support the scene.

**Wio-K:** In the scene here, everyone here knows what's tight. We know what's good and what's proper. The biggest weakness is that everyone thinks that they're better than the next.

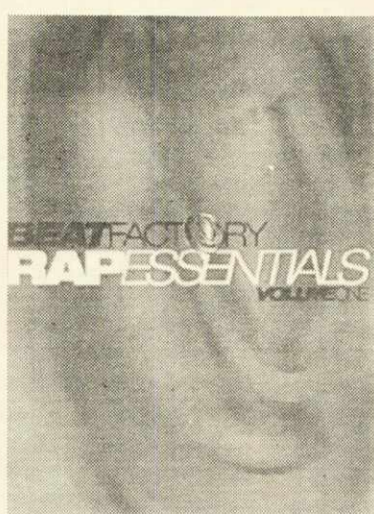


Choclair

**Gaz:** What about as far as originality? I know a lot of groups I've heard from Toronto sound way too much like Mobb Deep, Black Moon...

**Choclair:** I'm all about rappin' on how you rap. There's always gonna be someone who accepts your stuff. But a lot of groups come off like Mobb Deep, Wu-Tang, and they won't take criticism. They think it's bad the way it is. (Writers note: not bad meaning bad, but bad meaning good)

**Gaz:** The trend in hip-hop nowadays is to program beats as opposed to using break beats. Even on the *Rap Essentials* tape, every song has programmed beats. What do you make of all this?



**Choclair:** I think it's a little trend. Everything is full circle. Da Brat sampled a rock sample, and back in the day RUN-DMC cut up a rock record.

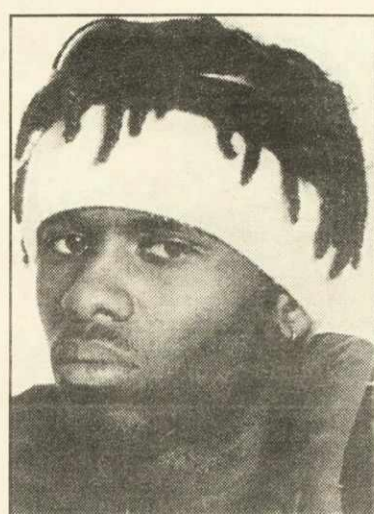
**Wio-K:** I think you can be more original with the programmed beats. I don't think it's a trend. For me, I feel more free with the programmed beats.

**Gaz:** What about the growing absence of DJs, even in the shows?

**Wio-K:** Only a couple crews (in Toronto) bring DJs. I don't have a DJ, but for my crew I'll bring one on the road.

**Gaz:** What are your frustrations as a Canadian hip-hop artist?

**Choclair:** People here maybe haven't heard of you. People think



Wio-k

that when you come out as Canadian artist, you only sell in the city you're from. They don't know you've been selling across the border and overseas. And also living in Canada, the majors don't back it like they should.

**Gaz:** But you know labels...

**Choclair:** Well, it's like Nas bought Lauryn Hill. He's still doing real hip-hop, but he's also doing a career. Just like Biggie Smalls. "Juicy" was his A-side, "Unbelievable" was his B-side. The A-side is for the record company, the B-side is for the underground.

**Gaz:** Where do you see Toronto Hip-hop in 10 years?

**Choclair:** I got the impression that a lot of hip-hop is moving outside of New York. Canada

will be one of the places that gets recognition and the record companies will begin to support it too.

**Gaz:** So when are you guys coming to Halifax?

**Wio-K:** I was hoping you would ask me that, I really want to do a show up there. I really want to come up, trust me.

**Choclair:** I know we're doing an East Coast tour in January. I wanna go because I've been hearing that Halifax is live and that they know hip-hop. When I was in New York, I was talking to a few people, and they were like, "I went to Halifax, and it was bad."

**Gaz:** Have you heard the *Bassments of Bad Men* CD?

**Choclair:** No (writing it down), but I will check it out. I know from what I've heard that Halifax is a real hip-hop place.

**Gaz:** Last question. When the clothes go off, what song goes on?

**Choclair:** (laughing) Oh, with the ladies! I usually rock a Jodeci tune.

**Wio-K:** (also laughing) You know, I don't play songs. I just blaze.

**Gaz:** Not even "Electric Relaxation" by A Tribe Called Quest?

**Wio-K:** No wait, that's true! That song will always bring it out!

**Gaz:** We had to ask you know.

**Choclair:** Yeah I know, but people are going to be like, "Choclair! What a Freak!"

PLACES TO GO - YOUR GUIDE TO LEISURE IN HALIFAX

## The Fog City Diner

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

We're talking about pure ambrosia here people.

Ambrosia (meaning food of the Gods) is the most pretentious word I could think of to describe the most unpretentious eatery in Halifax. The Fog City Diner is located at 1304 Birmingham Street (a couple of blocks behind the Clyde St. Liquor Store).

It's not big. It's not fancy. It's not expensive and there is no specific "type" of person who hangs out at Fog City — it is the very essence of a greasy spoon.

For a small circle of close friends, ritualistic visits to Fog City are always the decadent high point of our weekends, and a surefire cure for the Sunday blahs. This place is not for the faint of heart (seriously, you'll clog an artery) and it's no in and out, grab a bite, kind of place either. This is a MEAL, an experience, a day.

"A day?" you ask naively. "What the hell does he mean by that?"

I mean a day. A whole entire day. That's what it takes if you want to do Fog City in style. I don't mean a flashy kind of style, but rather a kind of excessive, self-denigrating raunchiness that you just have to get down on your hands and knees and roll around

in. That kind of style.

Some people might find it disgusting, but then again vegetarian-lentil-chili has always really pissed me off.

I thought that to give you an idea of what one of these visits is like, I'd outline a typical visit with my most common partners-in-crime: Mikkell, Jen and Pete.

It's early Sunday afternoon and the day is beginning with a hangover. There are a few phone calls, a few mumbled plans, and a few creaky bodies roll out of bed to prepare for a truly epic culinary journey. Our bodies cry for mercy, but our minds and mouths are salivating — eagerly anticipating the MEAL.

The walk down to Fog City is slow but purposeful. Our fragile bodies navigate Halifax's streets with an appearance of shaky uncertainty that belies our experience with the route. As we approach our all-day-breakfast Mecca, our pace quickens, spirits rise and we actually start talking to each other.

Once inside, we pick out the best available booth and slide into the bench seats, slotting our butts into the depressions left by thousands of past customers. We have done it all before, and will do it again, but we savour each part of the ritual as if it were the last

time.

Menus are soon lying in front of us, and we look at them with confusion — there is only one item on the menu. I can't explain it, but for as long as I have been going to Fog City there has only been one thing I could see on the menu. I'm sure there are actually many exciting and different kinds of food, but I've only had eyes for one. It's called...the Sailor's Breakfast.

Oh, I felt a shiver!

This monster comes with two eggs any style, bacon, sausage, ham, home-fries, toast and as much coffee as you can stomach. This is THE MEAL, and it goes for the reasonable price of \$5.25.

THE MEAL slowly makes us a little demented. The grease and the caffeine from the meal mix in our systems with nicotine (Fog City is a full-smoking establishment) and the booze left over from the previous night. It dredges up something scary in each of us.

On this day Pete, in between giggling fits, makes psychotic faces at anyone who will look. I try to stuff increasingly larger pieces of ham into my mouth, while threatening to tie up Jen and cook her for dinner, "with a big apple in her mouth."

Mikkell keeps stealing sausages from other people. Before wrap-

ping her lips around each plump roll of pork, she announces that she was once known as the sausage queen. Jen thinks the food is gross; she is content to ferry pieces of food around her plate, but appears equally satisfied by the experience.

We usually linger for quite a while, concentrating on digestion. When the time for

movement is right, we rise to our feet, stable ourselves, pay the waitress and float home in grease-powered bubbles. We will wake up on Monday and wonder how we wasted an entire day. Not until the following Sunday will we remember that we wasted it in the most pleasant way possible — having a Fog City day.

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