

BLACKALICIOUS Biography

Cut through the floss and glitz. On the other side of the hype machine are artists that create because they need to, artists that we listen to because they demand our attention.

In a hip-hop career that has stretched past a decade, Blackalicious has earned respect the old-fashioned way--rising through honesty, commitment, and artistry.

Now, with "Blazing Arrow," their fourth album and their major label debut, they have achieved their most fully realized album in a consistently ground-breaking discography.

Ranging from verbal funk-burners and battle-rhyme rippers to expertly crafted future-soul and convention-crushing experimentation, "Blazing Arrow" moves from strength to strength on Chief Xcel's studio wizardry and the Gift of Gab's quicksilver tongue, igniting fires in the soul and body.

The record also features appearances from a star-studded list of friends and admirers, including: Zach De La Rocha (formerly of Rage Against The Machine), Ben Harper, Questlove (The Roots), Chali 2Na and Cut Chemist (Jurassic 5), Rakaa and Babu (Dilated Peoples), Saul Williams, Gil Scott-Heron, Tracey Moore (Jazzyfatnastees), KeKe Wyatt, Jaguar Wright, Money Mark, James Poyser, Paul Humphrey, Sean Lennon, and Miho Hatori (Cibo Matto).

And of course, there are collaborations with Quannum crewmates DJ Shadow, Lyrics Born, Lateef the Truth Speaker, Joyo Velarde, Erinn Anova and the Lifesavas.

Self-described "everyday brothers," the Bay Area native Xavier Mosley (Chief Xcel) met the San Fernando Valley native Tim Parker (Gift of Gab) at John F. Kennedy High School in Sacramento, California in 1987, and immediately struck up a friendship over hip-hop. As Tim (known as Gabby T) and Xavier (then DJ IceSki) began plying their skills in the area, they decided to become a crew. Although they separated after Gab graduated in 1989, they kept in close touch and decided in 1991 to become Blackalicious.

Xcel's friends at the University of California at Davis were forming a crew called SoleSides, including DJ Shadow, Lyrics Born and Lateef The Truth Speaker (known together as Latyrx). In 1992, Gab moved to Davis to reunite with Xcel and found an intense, progressive collective, centered on rowdy KDVS radio shows and all-night livingroom freestyle sessions.

As Xcel prepared their first album, Gab joined DJ Shadow to record "Count and Estimate" as part of Shadow's side of the first SoleSides label 12-inch in late 1992, and released it to underground acclaim.

Blackalicious then recorded "Melodica," released on SoleSides in 1995. The EP's soulful journey-displaying Xcel's lush, layered production and Gab's introspective, whiplash rhymes on classics like "Swan Lake," "40 Oz. For Breakfast" and "Deep In The Jungle," fired the imagination of heads worldwide. By the time they began recording "Nia" in 1996, Billboard magazine was calling the crew the Bay Area's most important new hip-hop group.

But by the end of 1997, Blackalicious and the SoleSides Crew reached a crossroads. SoleSides folded and was reborn as Quannum. In all, "Nia" took three obstacle-filled years to make. Just as Xcel was experiencing profound creative growth, Gab fell into personal turmoil. That tension was reflected in the deeply moving album that resulted.

As Gab says, "We always speak from our hearts about life as we see it, life as we know it, and life as we would like to see it." "Nia," a Swahili word meaning "purpose"-took on a very real meaning.

"Nia" was preceded by 1999's "A2G" EP, which featured "Alphabet Aerobics," a wickedly original collaboration with Jurassic 5's Cut Chemist. The two records proved to be something of a personal and spiritual triumph. "Nia" showed me that the music can move minds," says Xcel. "We were doing a show in Massachusetts and this girl had been waiting outside our bus to see me and Gab all day.

Gab came out and this girl was just shook to meet him. She gave us the most beautiful 5-page letter on how each of the songs had touched her life, and she made us a little music box--it was a Blackalicious box--and that stays up in the studio to this day. I just look at that as a constant reminder of: 'OK, we're doing the right thing.'"

After selling over a hundred thousand copies of "A2G" and "Nia" on their own independent Quannum label, MCA won a bidding war, and Blackalicious signed in late 2000. "Blazing Arrow" marks a continuing progression. "'Nia' was really about purpose and finding the path," says Xcel. "'Blazing Arrow' is about faith, having the strength to endure that path. An arrow in flight."

Gab adds, "'Nia' was forethought and 'Blazing Arrow' is action." The album offers straight-up hip-hop bangers in songs like "Passion" (w/ Rakaa), "4000 Miles" (w/Lateef and Chali 2Na), "Paragraph President" (a nod to early 90s fans); glimmering future-soul in "Nowhere Fast" (w/ ?uestlove and keyboardist James Poyser), "It's Goin' Down" (w/ Hi-Tek and KeKe Wyatt), "Aural Pleasure" (w/ Jaguar Wright) and "First In Flight" (w/ Gil Scott-Heron); and an epic suite that share the vision and ambition of a Marvin Gaye or Pharoah Sanders in the three-part "Release" (w/ Zach De La Rocha and Saul Williams). With Cut Chemist, they even expand on the wig-lifting experimentation of their crowd favorite "Alphabet Aerobics" in "Chemical Calisthenics."

Now in the tenth year of their -career, Blackalicious is just hitting their stride. "When blessings come, sometimes you can celebrate, but most of the time it means that you have to work harder," says Gab. "You may have a vision and you may get close to that vision, but then it broadens. Every time you move forward on it, it always gets bigger."

Xcel says, "It just takes both a faith and a focus--faith that no matter what happens, this is your calling, this is what you are supposed to do and you have to make it happen no matter what obstacles come in your way. The aim has always been to contribute our piece to this movement, to this continuum, because there really is no beginning or end to it."

DISCOGRAPHY

BLACKALICIOUS

- "Lyric Fathom" b/w "Swan Lake" October 1994, SoleSides 002
- Melodica EP Domestic release, August 1995,
- SoleSides 003
- "Touch The Stars" on Connected Compilation, 3-2-1, 1999
- A2G EP, 1999, 3-2-1/Quannum Projects, re-released 2000 Quannum/Sub Verse
- "One of A Kind" and "Jada's Vengeance" on Quannum-Spectrum, 1999, Quannum Projects
- Nia, 2000, Quannum Projects/Sub Verse
- "Deception" b/w Turmoil" and "Redemption", 2000, Quannum Projects
- "Trouble", 2000, Quannum Projects/Mo'Wax
- "If I May" b/w "May I" and "Reanimation", 2000, Quannum Projects/Mo'Wax
- "Calcufta Convention" on Dropen the Bomb Vol.2, 2000, Bomb Records (recorded in 1996)
- "Soul In Flesh" on Unbound Compilation, NGA, 2000
- "Passion" b/w "Paragraph President", 2001, MCA/ Quannum Projects
- Make You Feel That Way", 2002, MCA/Quannum Projects
- Blazing Arrow, 2002, MCA/Quannum Projects

CHIEF XCEL

- "Fully Charged on Planet X", April 1996 SoleSides 005
- "Love Is Touching" remix (for John Tchicai), October 1996, B & W Music
- "Doing Everyday the Hard Way" on The Wafts Prophets-When The 90's Came, January 1997, London Records
- "Bad News" and "Burning Hot in Cali On A Saturday Night", on Latyrx
- The Album, 1997, SoleSides 008 -"Golden Rule"
- The Maroons on Quannum-Spectrum, 1999, Quannum Projects
- "Blue Flames" with Quannum MCs, on SoleSides Greatest Bumps, recorded September 1997, Quannum Projects
- "Headaches Exercise" remix for the Lifesavas, November 2001 Quannum Projects
- "Multitudes" on Constant Elevation, coming out 2002, Astralwerks

GIFT OF GAB

- "Rhyme Like A Nut!", "Count and Estimate" with DJ Shadow, on SoleSides Greatest Bumps, recorded September 1992, Quannum Projects
- "Burning Hot in Cali On A Saturday Night", on Latyrx-The Album, 1997, SoleSides 008
- "Cloud #9" on Latyrx-The Muzapper's Mixes, 1997, SoleSides SS009
- "Blue Flames" with Quannum MCs, on SoleSides Greatest Bumps, recorded September 1997, Quannum Projects

- "Mixed Feelings" (w/ The Angel and Jacky Terrasson on The New Groove, Vol. 1), March 1996 Blue Note Records
- "Concentration", "The Extravaganza" and "Bombonyall" on Quannum-Spectrum, 1999, Quannum Projects
- TK TITLE??? With New Flesh For Old, coming out 2002, Big Dada
- "Kalakuta Show" with Lateef the Truth Speaker, Mixmaster Mike and Mario Caldato, for Red Hot + Riot: A Tribute To Fela Kuti, coming out 2002, MCA