



## **Cut Chemist**

*The Audience's Listening*

“They say you get as long as you need to make your first album, but the second one you get a year!” jokes Cut Chemist.

No sweat, folks -- this scientist is ready: The Los Angeles native recorded hundreds of songs before selecting the final 12 for his Warner Bros. Records debut album, *The Audience's Listening*. With that important breakthrough made, this celebrated DJ/producer has now got enough of his own solo material for several more albums, and volumes of inspiration to spare. Just try to stop him now.

Consider this: Cut Chemist's hundreds of songs have been built with the assistance of thousands of rare, crazy, odd, eccentric and quite often unplaceable samples from other records, a truly global library that has been amassed from his extensive travels and dates back to sometime around 1977, when a young, pajama'd Lucas Macfadden was photographed asleep and snuggled up tight to his very own vinyl copy of Disney's *Haunted Mansion*. Dedication from the early days.

Throughout his life, he's honed his skills as a record hunter extraordinaire (though he probably doesn't throw his fresh kill up on the wall like other marksmen). That's a history that has built up into a lot of sheer, sonic power, now unleashed in the form of a varied and uplifting album that even defies his complimentary characterization as someone who is known to play with sound in unexpected ways.

It's true that *The Audience's Listening* was a bit of a long time in the making, but imagine how relatively little time Cut Chemist has had in the laboratory. Mainly, he's toured a lot. He spent 12 years as a DJ and producer for LA hip-hop dynamos Jurassic 5 (which traversed the country and world via packages like Lollapalooza and The Warped Tour), five years playing the turntables as a beautiful instrument

backing up the Grammy-winning Latin alternative band Ozomatli, and several years releasing highly bootlegged mixtapes (such as his *Brain Freeze Original Soundtrack* collaboration with DJ Shadow in 1999, a much sought eBay delight that led to another popular meeting of the two in 2004's *Product Placement* tour and DVD). Throughout it all, he's found the time to helm his own recurring club nights in Los Angeles (these days he can often be found on Saturday nights playing at "Funky Sole" at Hollywood lounge Star Shoes).

As an in-demand DJ that's always tried to further his craft as a producer, too, Cut Chemist has had to juggle a lot more than beats over the years. But, after departing Ozomatli and, more recently, Jurassic 5 in late 2004, his focus is finally squarely on himself.

"That's probably part of why it took me so long," he says of the album. "I had to retrain myself into seeing that I was the only one here. There's really no one else I have to clear things with."

Free and clear from committee vetoes, sure. Free and clear from clearing rare and not-so-rare samples, not so much.

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CUT CHEMIST met future Jurassic 5 MCs Chali 2na and Mark 7 at a park jam in Silverlake, while attending an arts-based high school in the center of Los Angeles, which boasts other famous alums such as Leonardo DiCaprio. The three were part of a group called U.N.I.T.Y. Committee (which made its cassette debut in 1991 and played at shows with Tupac Shakur, among others). By the next year they were enjoying the unexpectedly fertile talent scene at the weekly open mic night at the Good Life Café, a health-oriented restaurant in South Central LA's historic Leimert Park area. The Good Life helped nurture the careers of Freestyle Fellowship and Pharcyde, among others. It also facilitated the formation of Jurassic 5, when these three U.N.I.T.Y. members joined forces with another group, Rebels of Rhythm. Cut Chemist's first original production came on "Lesson 6" from the *Jurassic 5 EP*: A cheeky head-nod to the pioneering sample-based cut-ups of Steinski & Double Dee (who first gained attention in the early '80s via record called "Lesson 1").

Now, 13 years since the formation of the internationally successful Jurassic 5, there's a new school in session. The first lesson with *The Audience's Listening* is that to call it a hip-hop album would be to miss the point entirely.

"I think this album mirrors the world palate – there's Brazilian stuff, rock stuff, Eastern European influences and many others," he notes. "I wanted it to be that way, to kind of give it a texture of, 'Hey, I go all over the world and buy records!'" The album has allowed Cut Chemist to get back to the root of his DJ self; back into the crates, though these days that means vinyl, CDs *and* digital files.

Bookended by what he would call the more "classic Cut Chemist" styles ("Motivational Speaker" and "The Audience Is Listening (Theme Song)," the meat in between often leaps into new sonic territory. The Kraftwerkian "Metrorail Thru Space," or the lushly guitar-driven "The Garden," recorded in Brazil. The legacy of hip-hop is still a firm root, which might be best evinced on "What's The Altitude" featuring Hymnal. The song was inspired by the hissy and muffled (yet unbelievably dope) recordings on widely circulated cassette tapes of old-school hip-hop DJ battles, like the 1978 face-off between the L Brothers and the Herculooids.

Speaking of battles, it's audible that Cut Chemist has given his all for this project, fighting with his heart and soul: "I treated songs as if they were the last I was gonna make," he says.

As he reveals, it's all still resolutely from the DJ's perspective. He mainly just uses a turntable, mixer and computer to create the songs on the album.

"The J5 stuff, that's 'real' producing: Getting people together, getting a song together, directing, arranging," he says. "This is more like a late night jam session."

*The Audience's Listening* is a product of a Los Angeles native who's lived in the bustling metropolis for all of his 33 years. It's what's shaped his sound and diverse outlook, his playfulness *and* his edge (as camouflaged in sweetness as it may be). It is also evocative of an era when sound enthusiasts put out records for the adventure of it,

not just as a vehicle tied to hit singles and booty-shaking videos. It is an homage to all that is musically possible from the fingertips of a gifted DJ and imagineer.

“Everything on the album was uncharted territory, something I’ve never done before. The only thing that’s worth doing is exploration.”

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