

WYCLEF JEAN Biography

In the pop 'n' fresh world of music, it's not that difficult to make a splash and become a phenomenon. What's really hard is becoming an artist and sustaining and developing a legitimate and substantial career.

Those wanting an answer to that question might look to Wyclef Jean, because in this superstar you have the blueprint for both commercial success and creative potency.

From his groundbreaking work with the Fugees to his genre-defying solo debut *Wyclef Jean Presents The Carnival* to his acclaimed and Grammy-winning production and songwriting credits for, among others, Destiny's Child, Whitney Houston (the top ten smash "My Love Is Your Love") and Carlos Santana (the number one hit "Maria, Maria"), Wyclef Jean broadened and expanded the reach of hip-hop culture.

With his latest album *The Eclectic—2 Sides II A Book*, he brings it to a whole new level.

Like the multi-faceted multi-hyphenated performer who create it, *The Eclectic—2 Sides II A Book* embraces many forms of music and all expressions of culture: Wyclef takes it all—from classic rock to ska to down-and-dirty bass to country to thugged-out rap to folk and reggae—and finds a home for it in hip-hop.

Recorded mainly in New York and at Clef's New Jersey studio, produced by Clef and Jerry Wonder, with additional production from Sedeck Jean and Salaam Remi, *The Eclectic-2 Sides II A Book* is fearless, funky and fluid.

"I'm a scientist," Wyclef offers. "The fusion of music has once again combined into one thing and that's what I'm all about. I go back and listen to all those Stevie Wonder records or (Miles Davis's) *Bitches Brew* or Marvin Gaye and Donny Hathaway. The music back then wasn't all hip-hop. But what that artist did was stay credible to their original form and that's what I do. No matter what I'm doing, I am a hip-hop artist. Those are and still stay my roots and my inspiration."

Those hip-hop roots make themselves felt on the fierce- and sure to be controversial-opening cut "Where Fugee At." Asked about the track, which pointedly addresses the question of when the Fugees might be reuniting, Wyclef responds, "All of the stories are in my songs. Most of the lyrics are just me freestylin', most of it, even with the serious stuff, I'm just buggin'."

Another track sure to make conversation is "Dirty South," the first single to hit the streets. Set to a raw rump-shaking groove, "Dirty South" addresses the growing vibe of materialism that flavors certain strains of hip-hop. Rugged and righteous, the track has a message that is close to Clef's heart. "I wanna show that with this whole thug phenomenon, there's something deeper than that. I wanna talk to the hoodlums...because those same kids come to my shows and hear what I have to say, as well."

Equally cautionary, but in Clef's unique comic style, is "It Doesn't Matter." Featuring wrestling superstar The Rock and set to a bouncy ska beat, "It Doesn't Matter" lets people know that bling-bling isn't all its cracked up to be.

"I think that people wanna hear 'I got 50 Bentleys in the West Indies, it doesn't matter,'" Clef quotes from the track. The average person who works hard wanna hear that. I wanna be the person who can talk to the people who can't afford all that stuff. That's where I come from."

Further evidence of where Wyclef comes from is the haunting "Diallo," which features Senegalese singer Youssou N' Dour and addresses the killing Amaou Diallo at the hands of the New York City Police. "I'm just one of those people who cares," Wyclef says, "and will always care because there's too much going on not go. When I was coming up hip-hop talked about things like Amadou Diallo."

On a lighter note, but no less in keeping with hip hop's spirit, is a remake of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here," which Wyclef record to remind naysayers that even a kid from the projects can feel rock 'n' roll.

“Plus,” Wyclef adds, “if you’re a guitar player like me, you gotta be in to Pink Floyd, so I just put my own spin on it.”

Wyclef has been putting his own spin on things since he first began making music. The son of a preacher, Wyclef was born in Haiti and, over the years, has emerged as a leading champion of that country, serving as a spokesperson for many issues and heading up the Wyclef Jean Foundation to help children both in Haiti and the United States.

Wyclef moved to Brooklyn’s Marlborough House when he was nine years old. “I’m all about the projects. I was raised with this training from the church and the streets and the parks and it’s what developed me as a person and as an artist.”

Wyclef received his first guitar from his mother. By high school, he had moved to New Jersey and he majored in jazz in high school. By the early 1990’s he had formed a hip-hop group, the Fugees, with Lauryn Hill and Pras Michel.

The trio toured non-stop and their 1993 debut *Blunted On Reality*, earned them good press but not much commercial attention. Undeterred, Wyclef and his cousin and musical partner Jerry “Wonder” Duplessis seized production control of the Fugees next effort, which, in 1996 would emerge as *The Score*, one of the largest-selling and most influential hip hop records in chart history.

The Score’s staggering sales (more than 11 million units worldwide) and critical acclaim helped secure Wyclef’s status as one of hip hop and R&B’s hottest producers. He went on to produce a diverse roster of acts including Cypress Hill, Sublime, Bounty Killer and Simply Red.

In 1997 Clef released his solo CD *Wyclef Jean Presents the Carnival* which spawned the hits “Staying Alive” and the moving “Gone Till November,” which earned Clef a Grammy nomination for Best R&B Vocal Performance, Male. Praised for its freewheeling, multi-cultural sound, *The Carnival* has been certified double platinum by the RIAA. Following the album’s release, Wyclef toured, produced a slew of hip hop and R&B recordings (including fellow Fugee Pras’s hit “Ghetto Superstar”), participated in a televised tribute to Johnny Cash, and hosted two all-day fundraisers benefiting the Wyclef Jean Foundation.

A musician with an activist’s heart, a guitar-slinging microphone bandit, a seasoned veteran with an ear to the streets, Wyclef has come a long way and brought hip-hop along on his journey. That growth and his continuing maturation as an artist is evident on *The Eclectic—2 Sides II A Book*.

Asked to sum up his purpose, Wyclef answers. “60 years from now, you gotta be able to look back at this record and ask yourself, ‘who was this Wyclef Jean guy? And, ‘can I still put one of his CDs in the deck? With *The Eclectic—2 Sides II A Book*, I know that you will be able to do that.”