

Signif The Gift and The Soul Of Hip-Hop (Interview)



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The battle over the soul of hip-hop is always a pessimistic one. Questions of authentic prescriptions to folk art get posed and then disposed by the dominant argument that capitalistic imperatives have to be the ultimate concern. But the human spirit will never tire of the need to hear stories that speak to the heart. Signif the Gift is answering that question with her brand of no-frills hip-hop that recalls the early days of MC Lyte with a timbre in line with Jean Grae. Her video for “Drifting” is a pared down aesthetic sustained by her coherent rhyme style, self-affirming lyrics and the background of New York City. The former Milwaukee resident has laid down her music manifesto with her *Beautifully Flawed* EP from 2009 and 2010’s *The Transition*. Unsigned and free to follow her creative whims, the artist is looking to make her sound translate to hip-hop’s conflicted mass of fans.

Where are you from?

Born and raised in Milwaukee, WI.

How did you start rapping?

After watching my brothers partake in rapping I decided to try it. I was already writing poetry so I tried converting some of my favorite poems I had written previously, and it sounded awful. So I figured I better start from scratch. I quit more than a few times it was frustrating knowing what I wanted to

say but not executing it on paper properly.

Who produced your album *The Transition*?

More than a few people helped with the production on the *Transition*. Tay Lee's a producer from Memphis ("Drifting," "The Transition," "Never," and "Flaws Remix.") He delivers a 16 on the "Flaws" remix too. JBM's from Fayetteville ("The Wake Up," "Make Moves," and "Magnetic") Gee Wiz is out of Baltimore ("Welcome Intro", "High," "Gone," and "New Shit.") Wiz is also behind my new EP *Significant Wizdom*, which will be available for free download soon. Haz Solo from Milwaukee ("Afternoon Jazz," and the "Transition" remix.) Haz and I also put out a *Transition Remixes* EP as well. Lucchi's from the UK ("Pure Pleasure") and TrellMatic from Milwaukee "(What's Going On.)" Each producer has a different sound that worked in the direction I was shooting for so it was definitely a pleasure working with these guys. As an artist for me I'm on an all time "high" when I collaborate with other artists that see my vision and the main thing that matters is the art, that's a beautiful thing! Finding people that see and understand your vision will eliminate a lot of BS out of the gate. Shout out to Darren Cole as well, he directed a few videos for me so check those out as well.

[vimeo]16432896[/vimeo]

Why is your album called *The Transition*?

I named my album *The Transition* because it seemed fitting at the time. I felt my state of mind was different from the previous years. I had evolved and it was important for me not to only show it but also express how I was feeling. With that theory in mind I was listening to Elzhi's *Preface* album one day and the "Transitional joint" came on, I was like that's it, *The Transition*! That's one of my favorite songs. The beat and his flow are flawless.

Who are your musical inspirations?

I have a lot of musical inspirations from jazz to hip hop to rhythm and blues. James Brown, Teddy P, EWF, Marvin Gaye, Mos Def, Elzhi, Pac, PE, Common, The Roots, Jill Scott, and Erykah Badu just to name a few.

What's the story behind "Drifting"?

"Drifting" is about losing yourself in this crazy world. It's about taking chances while leaving your troubles, and the naysayers behind. "Drifting" is knowing if one door closes, then another one somewhere will open just waiting for you to walk through it. "Drifting" owns up to your mistakes and taking responsibility for them, it's about conquering fear. I was going through changes with my music and people when the song came about. Tay Lee hit me with the track out of the blue one day, and needless to say it was right on time. The same day he sent the track is the same day I wrote the song. I called my mom up and started reciting it to her. It was like a revelation for me in some ways, and from there the Transition began. I kept a journal I brainstormed a lot of ideas and watched them come into fruition.

Your style takes it back to the old school of rap, how and why did you choose to express yourself in that way?

The thing is I'm not trying to sound like no certain style or era but I'm definitely pleased when people say my music has an early 90's vibe type of hip hop feel to it. That's not what I'm shooting for but I'll definitely take it!

If a major label comes knocking do you think you would compromise your brand?

It would have to be worth the risk. I'm really watching to see what happens to some of these front-runners putting themselves in certain situations that look bleak from the start. Some of these artists have great potential too but it's like why would

you sign with that label and the last few guys before you that signed still haven't dropped? I would have to have a good buzz and or hit because that's the only way they come correct nowadays. I would most definitely rock out with a few Indie labels though.

Who do you listen to in today's music?

I listen to a lot of underground and local music nowadays since the industry likes to regurgitate so much disposable music. I also listen to a lot of classics and oldies to mellow out.

How did you come up with your MC name?

Signif is short for significant. It just came to me one day while thinking about what my name would be for a while. It was supposed to be spelled Sig Nif like Mos Def but that was too much.

How would you describe your style?

I would describe my style as laid back, realistic, and honest. It really depends on my mood and the tone of the music I'm working on. My vibe right now is focused on the listeners getting to know me, and where I come from.

Have you toured or opened for anyone yet?

I haven't had the pleasure of touring yet, but I have shared the stage with some notable names. I don't think that matters when you're trying to build your own foundation. It's like I rocked out with so and so and now I'm back at my 9-5 the next morning. I don't want to use the same recipe that so many rappers are using to try to gain exposure.

Where do you want to go with your career?

Honestly. I want to reach as many people as I can, if I can make a good living off of my music I'll be more than happy.