

Music Review-Shabazz Palaces: Black Up -Subpop



Black Up is Shabazz Palaces'™ third installment of Afrofuturist dissonance that started two years ago when Ishmael Butler reinvented himself as the emcee Palaceer Lazaro. Looking something like Dr. Funkenstein's™ son, an Afrika Bambaataa devotee or a Rammelzee offshoot, Lazaro defends his pro-Black stance with his longstanding jazz influences shaped into hip-hop effusions. By song number two ("An Echo From the Hosts that Profess Infinitum") ghostly gospel choirs have swerved around electronic cymbals that simmer and chunky reverb has opened the way for eerie birdcalls of the Hitchcock ilk. The sentiments are always the same; white supremacist mind junk is useless and submitting to one's™ own distinct Black culture brings freedom and sanity. Butler and his band (percussionist Tendai Maraire and collaborators THEEsatisfaction) are lead by intuitive emotion that takes the music into semi-Sun Ra like abstractions. Butler's™ boredom with conventional hip-hop made him a maverick in the genre from the days of Digable Planets

"Are You Were You Can You (Felt)" coasts on a Freddie Hubbard styled lick as bass, a tipsy piano chord and Palaceer's™ funky affirmation, "It's a feeling/ a feeling" that builds then subsides into a Weather Report type ambience.

"Youlogy" takes a "toast of champagne to commemorate the year thuggin'™ went mainstream" as moody bass, classic b-boy beats and the sound of a possible spaceship flight form a rhythm vortex. The critique of mainstream hip-hop continues and "Yeah You" indicts the lyricists who cheer for the boardroom by identifying them as: "Corny niggas they coming

for me with mink coats pink throats weak quotesâ€¦Eurocentric zero pimpishâ€¦.â€¦ But *Black Up* is not a self-righteous whiny complaint about â€œgood versus bad rappers.â€¦ If anything, the project is a nuanced celebratory ritual that wishes to uncover hip-hopâ€™s heart that seems at risk for smothering by Americana music industry pathos.

Appearances from the cultural crusading duo [THEESatisfaction](#) places Butler as a proactive and optimistic elder. His usage of Catherine Harris-Whiteâ€™s and Stasia Ironâ€™s jazzy scat poetry on â€œEndeavors for Neverâ€¦ and â€œSwerve the Reaping of all That Is Worthwhileâ€¦ is a direct challenge to the supposed artistic authority of their more commercially successful peers. Their voices counterbalance the machine power of the record with Maraireâ€™s spell-inducing congas.

The quirky left field aesthetic of *Black-Up* is necessary and exciting in the midst of a commercial hip-hop workforce rushing to alabaster beaches staked with umbrellas made of greenbacks and bloody pens that threaten to sign away creativity for all but a limited few.

Watch: "The King's New Clothes Were Made By His Own Hands"

[vimeo]27758516[/vimeo]