

Locksmith's (Interview)

Keywords



“I know for a fact that there are elites, the one percent whatever you call them that control the distribution of wealth”

Locksmith's diligent battle stance, social criticism and regional commercial success as one-half of The Frontline put him in serious view of underground rap fans 12 years ago. He and rhyme partner Left appeared on the *Watch Out Now* and *New Bay* mixtapes in 2002 as a way of branding their sound in the Bay Area that had only received national rap recognition from the successes of MC Hammer, Too Short and E-40. The duo made brief inroads on MTV with the singles, “What Is It,” “Bang It” and “When You Want It/The Truth” and four albums before breaking up so Left could get his PHD and Lock could go solo. In 2009 Locksmith released the *Rare Form* EP and in 2011 the full-length album *Embedded*, which was solely produced by Ski-Beatz followed. Earlier this year the *Labyrinth* album was distributed on his [IAMLock](#) website and it has given him his biggest notice with “digital diggers” who choose their music beyond the usual confines of terrestrial radio. Fans have already chosen him as the strongest lyricist in the area and the ferocious phonetics and political content of songs like “Slight Disgust” support that sentiment. *Labyrinth's* sturdy wordplay and meditative videos raised his rank in the section of underrated rappers but he is still working to create momentum with the breakout piece that will reach a critical mass without compromise. There is another album on the horizon coming before the year's end and he says it is the next exciting step in his

career because it will surprise listeners with its uniqueness and surprise collaborations.

How did you start rapping?

My sister was a rapper. Her name was MC Spice and she was doing her thing in the late 80s. I watched her and then eventually it was like I want to do this, she's 10-11 years my senior. I went to Cal C Berkley and I graduated but still wanted to do music. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college.

What did you study?

African-American studies.

I know you have an African-American and Persian background, have you studied your Persian history as much?

My father is from Iran and my mother is from Chicago. In the beginning my father was the only one from his side of the family out here. My mom had my siblings from her previous marriage and so I was schooled in my Black family. But later different members from my father's family moved out here and they didn't speak English so I had to learn these things.

[youtube]nuQJxp1ZFMc[/youtube]

Tell me about your group Frontline, I know that you all have had commercial success on your coast.

Yes we started doing things and we had our first show back in '99. We had these songs that were successful on the radio and that allowed us to perform at all the summer jams that came out here like 50-60 spins a day.

How would you describe your rap style? I've seen you compared to Slaughterhouse and even Dead Prez.

I would say it's just me being me. It's hard to say it's

like real life. Some people know me from the battle rap thing and some know me from the songs and some people think Iâ€™m the political rap but itâ€™s a mixture of all those things. Iâ€™ve been doing this for 12 years and people are starting to comment.

What are some of the things about Richmond that have influenced you?

Everything. It was a hood area but not as bad then as it is now. There were drive-bys and the whole drug thing that was going on in the â€™80s but I had my mother and father. Itâ€™s a small community but they say it takes a village and I had a village to look out for me.

What statement are you making with *Labyrinth*?

People think a labyrinth is the same as a maze but in a maze you are trying to get out. You are trying to get to the center of the labyrinth and I feel that the songs serve that purpose. You have some dubstepâ€¦

Is being a Muslim ever in conflict with being a hip-hop artist?

No. Because of the jurisprudence I use in my life itâ€™s never an issue. Maybe when thinking about things that could make me commercially successful but I remain true to my art so itâ€™s not a problem.

[youtube]0FD6cTLy3aY[/youtube]

What can you tell me about â€œIlluminatiâ€ from your *Labyrinth* project?

The Illuminati is something I was aware of years ago. Some people are into conspiracy theories there I know for a fact that there are elites, the one percent whatever you call them that control the distribution of wealth. The president is

elected by the electoral college. The president only makes a couple hundred thousand dollars a year so why does he raise millions of dollars? Because of the power and those donors know their interests will be served.

How would you describe the Bay Area hip-hop scene?

Diverse. Very diverse. It's a weird area because it's connected to the south and New York but it doesn't have a regional sound. Artists like Tony, Toni, Tone, Keyshia Cole, MC Hammer, etc. don't have a particular sound. Too Short found a particular niche and then he went down south and came back and they loved it. The area is not like the south where they have a lot of Black people to support their sounds. First they had the booty music, then the Lil' Jon sound and now it's trap music. The Bay Area does not have a sound. People here may be listening to hip-hop one minute and Green Day the next. I tell people just because you have success here does not mean you will be successful nationally. You need to bring more to the table and this is why I just came back from recording in New York for the last month and a half and I'm going to all these different places to see what it is I want to use in my sound.

What's next?

I have another album coming out before the end of the year and I'm very excited about it because it's so far ahead of what everyone is doing right now. I don't want to say too much about it but I am putting together the collabs and it's 90 percent done.

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