

R.I.P. Zumbi

Stephen "Zumbi" Gaines died August 13th at the age of 49 after being hospitalized with COVID-19. Zumbi was the founder of the Bay Area hip hop group Zion I with members Kev Genius and Amp Live. They formed in 1996 and released their debut album *Mind Over Matter* in 2000. Zumbi and his crew that would change down the line were known for music that was heavy on spiritual and politically conscious lyrics. He became known for his ability to freestyle an entire show and adapt to any style of music. *Mind Over Matter* was respected and called the Independent Album Of The Year by The Source. K-Genius left the group in 2002 and Zion I became a duo. They recorded albums that most would classify as backpack rap that defied mainstream trends. Zumbi's profile was raised by his appearance on the 2005 "Bay" remix alongside rappers from the hyphy movement like Casual, San Quinn, Turk Talk and The Team. His hyphy song with Too Short "Don't Lose Your Head" also came out in 2005.Â

Zion I never wavered from their need to make music with substance and true to their sonic choices. Collaborations with Talib Kweli, Black Thought, Locksmith, Guru and Goapele among others are scattered through their catalog. Zumbi was just as comitted to his community as he was to his art. The concern for social issues he rapped about was present in his daily life as he looked for ways to partner with others to help those in the neighborhoods. TheyÂ released 13 studio albums with *Ritual Mystik* from 2018 being their last one. Amp Live left Zion I in 2015 and Zumbi carried on solo. He released his last song "Back To Life" in July.Â

Zumbi's passing shocked the Bay Area and they are still in mourning. On August 22nd his life was remembered at Brooklyn Basin's Township Commons in Oakland. Sway's Universe live-streamed the event from the Hierogylphics complex and it is archived online. There was a [fundraiser](#) launched for Zumbi's three sons.Â

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