

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]

Kickmag’s 2009 Picks

1 .Q-Tip *Kamaal The Abstract*

Q-Tip does funky reflective fusion and it works.

2. Raekwon *Only Built For Cuban Linx 2* More than competent return from Wu-Tang grime master.
3. Al B. Sure *Honey I'm Home* Classy R&B from a New Jack Swing era survivor.
4. Teena Marie *Congo Square* More timeless soul from the original vanilla soul child.
5. Sa Ra *Nuclear Evolution: The Age Of Love* Freaky free funk in the middle of a calcified R&B mainstream.
6. Blackroc A hodgepodge of mostly New York rappers backed by the hillbilly rock of The Black Keys presented by Damon Dash
7. Chico Debarge *Addiction* Soulful sensuality from the Debarge tenor on par with *Long Time No See*
8. Chrisette Michele *Epiphany* Jazzy R&B sweetness mediated by pop sensibilities.
9. Jay-Z *The Blueprint 3* Hova representing for his hometown with his superior slick hardness.
10. Mos Def *The Ecstatic* Dante Smith may act most of the time but he still raps well.
11. Jesse Johnson *Verbal Penetration* Former Time guitarist releases first solo album in thirteen years and his chops are still intact.
12. Maxwell *Blacksummer's Night* Everyone's favorite male "neo soul" singer makes good again after an eight year hiatus.

13. J.Dilla *Jay Stay Paid* Another lovely but sinister posthumous release of divine beat science from the Detroit master.

14. Whitney Houston *I Look To You* A nice comeback record from the '80's and '90's pop darling

15. Living Colour *Behind The Sun* Funk metal kings assert their deadly acumen once more after scaring fake rock fans with the brilliant *Collideoscope*.

16. Meshell Ndegeocello *Devil's Halo* The R&B deconstructionist rightfully picks apart the usual musical assumptions proving again why she is the most important R&B artist of her generation.

17. Ledisi *Turn Me Loose*— The singer reinvents her sound with a much needed faster pace and fire.

18. Buckshot & KRS One *Survival Skills* The Boot Camp Click hustler and the legend collaborate on a back to the basics type of hip-hop album.

19. Melanie Fiona *The Bridge* Sassy but not tacky R&B from the Canadian newcomer.

20. Snoop Dogg *Malice In Wonderland* Party music from everybody's favorite West Coast rapper.

21. The Clipse *Til The Casket Drops* Potent cocaine rap.

21. Shabazz Palaces *Abstract funky hip-hop* from Digable Planets' Ishmael.

22. Souls Of Mischief *Montezuma's Revenge* A much appreciated

reappearance of the West Coast's Wu-Tang Clan type crew.

23. Kam Moya AKA Superstition *Splitting Image* Down to earth lyricist willing to be himself in world of flossy rappers. Refreshing.

24. Wale *Attention Deficit* Punchy delivery from the D.C. rapper with one of the biggest buzzes this year.

25. Q-Tip *The Renaissance* Ok it came out at the end of 2008 but it's nominated for a Grammy and it should be. Soulful hip-hop without the extraction of the boom bap.

Shabazz Palaces-Bellhaven Meridian

[vimeo]14561393[/vimeo]

Lo-fi funk from [Shabazz Palaces](#) turned into exquisite cinema by direct Khalil Joseph.