

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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INTERVIEW WITH THE EGYPTIAN LOVER - PART 1

FUNKMODE recently did a performance where we crossed paths with none other than Greg Broussard, better known to most at the Egyptian Lover (EL). He is a living legend and pioneer of west coast Hip Hop, paving the way for artists like Dr. Dre, Ice Cube and Snoop Dogg. Building on the Electrofunk sound of Afrika Bambaataa, EL also helped to lay the foundation upon which popular music styles such as dub step and trap were built. One of the first things on our mind when we learned we would be performing together was, "We have to ask him for an interview for a SCHOOL'd lesson!" We humbly asked and he generously agreed. Therefore, for today's lesson, we present part 1 of the highlights of FUNKMODE's interview with the one and only EL.

FM: When do you first remember encountering anything that you would have called "Hip Hop"?

EL: That would be listening to "Rapper's Delight". In a way, it wasn't yet called Hip Hop, but it was different. I think the word Hip Hop came from those first lyrics in the song.

FM: How tied in were you to what was happening in the New York scene?

EL: I hardly had any idea what was going on in New York. I was strictly west coast. But then I met Afrika Islam (a protege of Afrika Bambaataa) who had come out to LA from New York. He was DJing at a club called "Radio". Somebody told me that there was a DJ who wasn't copying my style like everybody else but who had his own style and I should check him out. We had some mutual friends, like Ice-T, and he had heard of Uncle Jamm's Army (the party promotion crew that EL DJ'd for) and heard of me. So we just met and became friends ever since. It was cool to talk to him and he told me how they had recorded "Planet Rock" (one of Afrika Bambaataa's biggest hits). He showed me what the drum machine was about and how to program the 808 (Roland TR-808, the sampling machine that was the foundation of early Hip Hop instrumentals), and I fell in love with it.

FM: Obviously Ice-T has come a long way since that time. What can you say about him back then?

EL: We were all just kids having fun. It wasn't about business. We all wanted to rock the party. And Uncle Jamm's Army was the team of promoters that put on the best parties. So, when I became a DJ for them, it was like, that's the lotto. And when Ice-T got a chance to rap for them, it was like now he was down with LA because he did it.

FM: What was the experience like at one of those Uncle Jamm's Army parties?

EL: At the time, there was nothing like it ever. We'd rent out the LA Sports Arena. There were a hundred speakers with music that you'd never heard so loud. The DJ was cuttin' it like you'd never seen before. And you're hearing a drum machine live for the first time ever in your life. I mean, this was all brand new to the whole culture. So, Uncle Jamm's Army was puttin' it down like that. There were so many people from all different high schools around LA, Riverside, they'd drive from San Diego, some would come from San Francisco, all just to come to this one party.

FM: How did people dress at the parties?

EL: You dressed how you wanted to dress for the people you were trying to attract. Some were freaky. Some were crazy. We had all kinds of people at our parties. Some would wear just a long black trenchcoat and black pants. Some would have a shirt with a bunch of Prince buttons on. Some people were wearing jeans and a polo with the Hollywood logo on it. We had people dressed like Michael Jackson. We had the Poppers. We had all kinds.

FM: What was the age range, cost and hours?

EL: The age range was 16-20. Back in the day, it probably cost \$5-\$7 and it went from 10pm-2am.

FM: And with those kinds of hours and that age group, there were no problems?

EL: No problems at all, or very few problems. There is a lot of gang violence out here but there were few problems. In later years, gangsters started coming more, but they had serious security and everything was good.

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FM: What songs were you playing as a DJ with Uncle Jamm's Army?

EL: Anything by Prince, "Let's Work", "Lady Cab Driver". Those were hot, hot songs because everyone was doing a dance called the Freak and those songs were it. And maybe, in the beginning of the night, we'd play all the new rap that came out, like if Run-DMC had a new record or Whodini had a new record. Then, later on in the night, we play songs like "Planet Rock" (Afrika Bambaataa), "Electric Kingdom" (Twilight 22), "Scorpio" (Grandmaster Flash) and those songs were just super hype Freak songs. And this was all a big programming thing from Rodger Clayton (the founder of Uncle Jamm's Army). So, we'd play all the new rap from 10-11pm. From 11-12am, we'd play all the hype rap. From 12-1am, we'd play all the Prince stuff and anything freaky like that. And then in the last hour, it was all the "Planet Rock" stuff. So, they whole night was built up from 10-2am and there was never a dull moment.

FM: How did people hear about these parties?

EL: Uncle Jamm's had serious promotions. They had posters on every pole, up and down every main street where the kids hang out, at every high school. They'd also have dances at the high school to promote. Like, we want to do a LA Sports Arena dance in December. Then, in the Summer, we're doing high school parties to promote the Holiday Inn party. At the Holiday Inn party we're promoting the Coliseum party, that holds maybe 1,000 people. At the Coliseum party we're promoting the Veteran's Auditorium party that holds 800 people and at that we're promoting the Sports Arena party with 10,000 people. So, it was little steps we took to promote bigger and bigger and bigger, almost like a pyramid. And all of it was to get to the next party.

FM: Who's idea was all of that?

EL: That was all Rodger Clayton. It was his brain and his whole plan to build it up like that. It was perfect. I think he may have had a little bit of marketing background but his main thing was promotions and he promoted records and music groups. And he would make radio spots that were unlike any other radio spots. He would actually go into the studio and record a commercial like he was recording a record. We would put the instrumental tracks down, mix em up a little bit, and these were songs and breakdowns that no one had heard on the radio before. So, the commercials were actually getting more people saying "What song was that?" than what the radio stations were playing. And he had a brilliant radio voice, so when his voice would come on with a commercial, everybody knew, "This is the party. Let's go!"

FM: Did you play a part in these commercials?

EL: I was picking out music and helping produce, but he was the whole brains behind the commercials. Someone had told him that I was a great DJ. When I went to the studio with him for the commercial, I started scratching and mixing and he said, "that's cool, let's put it in the commercial". And then the people heard that but it wasn't big in LA yet. So, when they came to the dance and saw me do it live, it kind of brought scratching to LA.

FM: Was there anyone who influenced you in those early days?

EL: In the beginning there was no one. Later on there was Magic Mike, who was a west coast DJ on the FM stations. Michael Mixin' Moore was a really good LA DJ. Then, there was this guy named Bleeps (Rene Williams) at Uncle Jamm's Army, who would start the records over and make it sound like an instrument, so I definitely learned his style. And there were a lot of other DJs that were really good, if not by mixing and scratching, then at least by picking the right music and knowing when to mix the next record in. Out in LA, Mix Master Spade was doin' his thing.

FM: Do you ever look back on any of those times and wish something could be different?

EL: No. It was all love and having a good time. Towards the end of the movement, I was already making records and doing my thing, but then the gangsters started coming to the party and we had to judge who to let in and who not to let in. I think they let in some people that they shouldn't have. That's how the run of Uncle Jamm's Army ended. But all good things must come to an end so it wasn't a big deal.

... but this interview isn't over ... check back next week for part 2!

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HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

5150: to go crazy on someone or freak out about something. Named for the California police officer's code for someone being detained due to mental disorder or distress.

EX: "I asked him to borrow his shoes and he straight went 5150 on me. Never ... asking ... again!"

Song reference: "5150" by Luniz

BONUS: NAME ANOTHER SONG/ARTIST THAT HAS USED THIS HHWOTW

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) How did Egyptian Lover create his name?
- 2) What would you ask a famous/legendary Rapper or DJ if you had the chance?
- 3) What was EL's biggest hit as a Rapper?