

BUILDING A BRAND ONE RECORD AT A TIME

You've been featured in tons of publications, been on countless TV shows really before it became popular. When it comes to DJs wanting to expand thier brand outside of DJing, you've been pretty much a pioneer in that. So how does a young kid from Queens grow up to be a DJ?

I was walking through a park on the way home from school one day and there was a party jam going on. This was when I first moved to Long Island in Elmont. There was this kid, his name was DJ Squeegee. He was the first one I seen doing it. I was just drawn to it. After school, I would end up going to his house to go practice and eventually I would go to get my own turntables and the rest is history. I would become a nerd rat and practice everyday.

Around that time period, did you have a path or direction where you wanted to take it?

I had no idea in a million years that it would take me where I'm at. I love music. This is what I came up on. My dad was in a duwap group called The Ovations and The Velvet Ones. My father is the reason I'm in music. I mean, I grew up on hip hop in the 80's. I use to pop and of course do graffiti,

which is how I got my name Skribble. My first gig was when I was 14 years old with LL Cool J, Hank Shocklee, Dougie Fresh and I was opening for Dre (East Coast Dr. Dre). I was kicked off the turntables in less than 15 minutes because I was horrible.

You were a DJ first. Then you transitioned into a group, Young Black Teenagers. How did that come about?

I love making money, so I worked to support my DJ habit. I was in this place called Roger's Stereo in Long Island and met Gary G-Wiz who ended up being the Young Black Teenagers manager. We would talk and I told him I DJ. He said he worked with Chuck D and all those guys and that Hank wanted to put a group together. He wanted all white dudes and I had First Born because he was dating my sister. He had Tommy Never and I was best friends with Rodney ATA since we group up together. Gary and Hank had Kamron. So eventually we met up and were put together. We didn't have a name at the time. Originally, they wanted to



call us Leaders of the New School and they wanted us to battle Charlie, Dinco and Busta for the name. We told them we wouldn't do it. That's their name and we couldn't disrespect that. So we tinkered around with names and Hank came up with Young Black Teenagers. The whole concept of the group came around that. It was a lot of white kids doing Hip Hop especially in the suburbs. Our first tour was overseas before our album was done. All our shows were done on break beats.

Doing the time with the group, did you think that would overshadow you wanting to be a DJ career wise?

I was already a DJ career wise even before that. That 5 year run was college to me. That's how I learned the game in this business. It's how I learned this is a business and wanted to make DJ Skribble a brand. I didn't want to leave the group. The way I left was bad business. We were getting screwed royally. I got a lawyer on the case and got us out our contract. They wanted to stick around maybe because they didn't want to leave the situation, but I left. I speak to ATA all the time. Tommy I speak to from time to time. First Born I hear owns tattoo shops and I speak to Kamron from time to time.

At one point did you realize that you could be more that the traditional DJ doing gigs in clubs and radio?

I was doing radio with Dre, I mean me and Dre had gotten real tight I was running with Dre for awhile and that's how I met Charlie Settler who was Dre and Ed Lover's manager. I was torture his life to try and get him to manage me. To

him I was just a DJ. I would always tell him that there's more to it than just being a DJ. I invited him and his wife to come see me live and he would become my manager. Then I would be involved with things like Yo MTV Raps. And how I got on Hot 97... I wanted to play Hip Hop but they had no slots. This was like 94. So I got my slot on the Saturday Night Dance Party, but I was told I couldn't play Hip Hop it's a dance show. My friend DJ Razor came and played with me on the first show and was feeding me records live. The Saturday night show was live back then and was broadcasted from the club. So every Saturday I was in a different club but I was broadcasting live. So one day after work maybe at about 5 in the morning they took me to see this other DJ spinning House music and the crowd was going bananas. I've never seen that type of energy before. Now I wanted to be in both worlds spinning both types of music. I went and learned everything about it just like I would Hip Hop. Then I got mad when they told me I couldn't spin Dance music anymore because the station was now all Hip Hop. So Charlie Settler got me on the morning show with Dre and Ed Lover then I got the traffic slot in the morning. I did that from 95 - 98.

I did the big Mountain Dew battle with all the DJs around the country. DJ Nabbs, DJ Vice and some other cats. I beat them, I won. Flex was the big dog at Hot 97. He was the number 1 DJ but he couldn't do the tricks I did so they had me represent the station. Then 2 weeks after I won, Hot 97 fires me. I thought my life was over. To this day I don't know why, but I get it. Flex was the top dog. Coincidentally, this was right when I did the Traffic Jams album and I thought my career was over. I'm running

around crazy asking Charlie what am I gonna do. I was literally a mess. Couple months later I got the call from Charlie, I was on MTV Spring Break. I had freedom and could play what I wanted. I just had to make the kids dance. Later on I got another call that Funkmaster Flex just turned down MTV Jams with Tyrese and wanted to know if I'd do it. Of course. I remember back then there was a question rather or not Tyrese was street enough for Hip Hop. I guess Flex was on his street grind and Tyrese was a R&B dude so Flex didn't want to do it. Of course, this is what my manager told me. As you know MTV Jams was the highest rated show next to TRL. And that's when it exploded for me.

From that alone, you obviously began to realize the power of branding yourself as a DJ. I mean, we're talking the 90's still.

I'm not tuting my own horn, but I was a national household name first. Who else was there besides Jazzy Jeff?

I agree. Maybe Kid Capri being on Def Comedy Jam but your right, not too many can claim that. How important is branding for a DJ?

Nowadays the culture has been watered down. Everyone wants to be a DJ. Even my dog wants to be a DJ. Technology, unfortunately is a double edge sword. The new programs are cool, but what it's done is take the creativity away. It's taken skill away. These kids that are coming out today, no disrespect, but they don't have a clue or don't care enough to study the culture. They just go to these sites, pay the subscription and download the top 20 of the chart.

Do you think its a disrespect of the art, more of a hustle or lack of knowledge

Its a little bit of everything. We have more knowledge at the click of a button that we can learn via the Internet now than when I had growing up. What I'm saying is if you get into this game just know its not all about the money. Lately it seems that DJs are getting all the attention and everyone thinks thats the way to go. Thats not how it works. I wanted the longevity. For everyone to say Skribble gets down! He can do it on 2 turntables and a mixer. Again I use alot of technology. I love pressing buttons like everyone else but I use it a a tool with my turntables. I don't depend on it. I have a 4 terra-byte hard drive I take with me everywhere I go that I can play anything. From Dolly Parton to old B-Sides... everything. But, unfortunately with technology talent don't mean anything anymore.

What about the DJs who rock the turntables and want to take their craft to the next level. What kind of advice can you give?

Today, you're fighting a more of an uphill battle. You have to show what you're able to do. Ive survived 3 decades just by knowing how to mold with the times. The kids I play for today, I use to play for their parents in Cancun. Same Skribble, new music. What I value the most is learning the history. That is going to make you respect the culture more. I never take no as an answer. There is always a way around it.

When it comes to breaking new artist, again you've touched that lane early by helping with the Fugees first album.



Wyclef wanted me to do some scratches on the album, of course this is before The Score came out. So I'm listening to the project with Wyclef and Pras in the basement. They're playing Killing Me Softly. I was amazing. I heard the album before it came out and went in and did some cuts on The Score, Pras and Wyclef's album. That was big.

NY Hip Hop. Who's the next to come out the city, well at least on your radar?

Can you tell me? If you know them, tell them to call me. Id love to hear the next one. No one is impressing me. I'm not trying to sound like an old dude, but come on... rap. You got the J Cole's, Kendrick Lamar's, the Hopsins. I mean nowadays what makes a hit record? Its the

hooks. Lets face it, none of these kids are musically inclined so they get these monster hooks and now they have whats considered a hit record. Tell me, who's really doing it big?

So in 2016, whats the plan?

I'm looking to put Traffic Jams 3 out. We're coming up on the 21st anniversary. IDML working with alot of producers I respect. Alot of artist I respect. With this album, either my head will knock or you'll be able to dance in the club. Without saying too much, its energy party music. As far as the artist, it all depends on who I'm able to pull. I will say this, ever producer is a DJ first. A DJ that became a producer second.