



DL INCOGNITO – BIOGRAPHY

“Hip-Hop’s been dead for years. Witness the resurrection.” – DL Incognito

When DL Incognito’s first record came out in 2002, he was proclaimed as Canada’s best-kept urban secret, a newcomer breathing life into a semi-comatose hip hop scene. The album, called *A Sample and a Drum Machine*, dug deep into the crates to bring the authenticity of old school hip-hop back to the forefront.

Earning his hip hop stripes the old-fashioned way, DL Incognito began his hip hop career in 1998, performing at showcases, rhyming on mixtapes, appearing on radio shows and steadily developing the reputation he has grown to deserve.

Nine years later, and all the buzz about DL being someone to watch out for in the future has been replaced with acclaim for his present accomplishments. A veritable presence in Canadian hip-hop, DL Incognito has succeeded in building on the success of his first album.

DL Incognito released his sophomore album in 2004, called *Life’s a Collection of Experiences*, which received a 2005 Juno nomination for Best Rap Recording. This nomination served to cement his status as one of Canada’s premier hip hop artists, and was a reflection of a career that had taken him from music showcases, such as NXNE and the CMW to headlining his own shows, opening for major hip hop acts on tour and featuring on several seminal Canadian hip-hop tracks.

As an emcee, DL Incognito (which means ‘delivering lyrics on the low’) has been consistently recognized for his lyrical ability and his flow. Music magazine Exclaim! praised his first album, stating that “he [DL] came out of the box slinging similes and metaphors with punch line swagger, dope self-production and a voice reminiscent of the celebrated late MC Big L, earning the respect of those who heard it.”

In 2006 DL Incognito followed up quickly with his third full length recording titled “Organic Music For A Digital World.” The album was also nominated for a Juno in the Best Rap Recording category. The album was DL’s first release widely distributed in the US.

DL Incognito’s appreciation for hip-hop is demonstrated by his dedication to his craft – his music achieves authenticity in a music industry that has become commercialized almost beyond recognition. Known for his live shows where DL delivers “a trip down memory lane, you get beats, rhymes and life. No gimmicks just straight hip-hop.”

DL Incognito’s fourth album, *A Captured Moment In Time*, is slated for a Fall 2007 release on URBNET Records.

**For more information please contact:
URBNET Records – (647) 271-7736 or info@urbnetrecords.com**



DL INCOGNITO – PHOTO FILE



High resolution colour photos are available in the Press section at www.urbnetrecords.com



DL INCOGNITO – PRESS FILE

Exclaim! – Review/interview – July 2006

All Natural

DL INCOGNITO

Organic Music for a Digital World

Hey Jay, forget dirt: Can-rapper DL Incognito has a chip on his shoulder and it would take a fucking bulldozer to brush it off. Maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration, but the Ottawa-bred MC is hungry, and has directed his rage and frustration at the anti-meritocracy that is the commercial rap biz. He has a point: the fact that one of the best MCs Canada has to offer isn't anything close to a household name in his native country is an injustice, one that *Organic Music for a Digital World* will perhaps help to rectify. But DL isn't really bitter; his third LP is positive, conscious hip-hop, and not in the syrupy, pseudo-spiritual way either. DL is direct, honest and angry, and is driven more by his passion for hip-hop than anything else. With the gradual convergence of indie and corporate rap over the last decade, DL's anti-mainstream, underground bomb-tossing persona seems refreshingly 1998. The fact that he's armed with a quick delivery, prickly wit and smooth voice plus catchy beats helps, as does the way he explores a variety of topical tracks and resists the urge to skit. DL Incognito is sick of being ignored and it's a good thing: *Organic Music for a Digital World* deserves attention in a big way. (Urbnet, www.urbnet.com)

Do you think there's an anti-commercial rap element to your message?

I don't know if I have a pro-underground or anti-mainstream kind of message, but it's mostly trying to concentrate on doing good music as opposed to necessarily following the

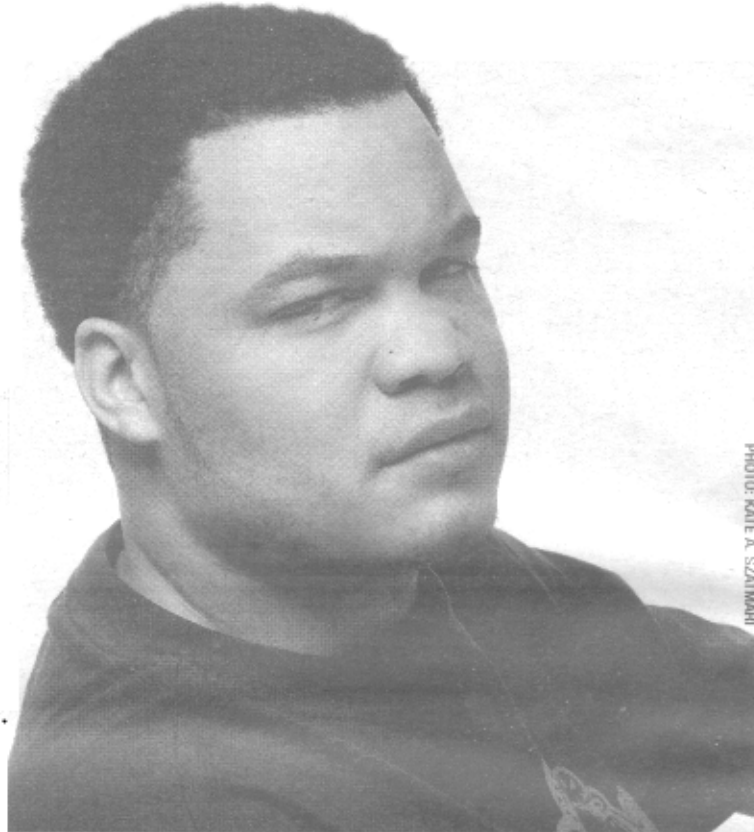


PHOTO: KATE A. SZATHARI

trends that are happening right now with urban music. I mean, from a fan's perspective — and obviously I'm a hip-hop fan first — it is kind of disappointing to see how the machine has been able to infiltrate a culture that at one time was so pure. It seems as soon as the money came into hip-hop, as soon as artists started selling big numbers, the focus is just on making money and the commercial aspect and it takes away from the art.

Was it a conscious effort to keep your album skit-free?

Definitely. I've never been a big fan of a lot of skits. I've never been a big fan of extra talking, so on this record we did make it a point to not have any guest appearances or any unnecessary skits. We really just wanted to focus on the music, and originally we were just going to do about 12 tracks, but there were a few other tracks we really wanted to get in there.

Nick Patch

CHART MAGAZINE – NATIONAL HIP-HOP CHART – JULY 2006



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CHARTS

HIP-HOP CHARTS

Top Ten Chart For July 28, 2006

| L | T | # ARTIST | TITLE | LABEL |
|---|----|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 5 | 1 | 3 DL Incognito * | Organic Music For A Digital World | Urbnet |
| 2 | 2 | 4 Aloe Blacc | Shine Through | Stones Throw |
| — | 3 | 1 OK Cobra * | OK Cobra | Urbnet |
| 9 | 4 | 6 KRS-One | Life | Image |
| — | 5 | 1 Jurassic 5 | Feedback | Interscope |
| 1 | 6 | 7 Mr. Lif | Mo'Mega | Definitive Jux |
| 8 | 7 | 2 Psalm One | The Death Of Frequent Flyer | Rhymesayers |
| 6 | 8 | 2 Various Artists * | Up North Trip Vol. 4 | Under Pressure |
| — | 9 | 1 Lady Sovereign | Size Doesn't Matter EP | Chocolate Industries |
| 3 | 10 | 3 Dr. Octagon | The Return Of Dr. Octagon | International |

This Week's Contributors: CFBX, CFCR, CFOU, CFRO, CFRU, CFUV, CHRW, CHRY, CHSR, CHUO, CHYZ, CILU, CIUT, CJAM, CJSF, CJSR, CJSW, CJUM, CKDU, CKUT, CKXU

RAPATTACKLIVES.com – US COLLEGE RADIO #1 – JULY 2006

ISSUE #240

[[July 24, 2006]]

TOP 30

| LW | TW | ARTIST | TITLE | LABEL |
|-----|----|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 7 | 1 | DL INCOGNITO | Live In My Element | Urbnet |
| 6 | 2 | SLUM VILLAGE F. DWELE | Call Me | Barak |
| 5 | 3 | RAYDAR ELLIS | Graffiti Rock | Brick |
| 13 | 4 | 7L & ESOTERIC | Play Dumb | Babygrande |
| 9 | 5 | PSALM ONE | Rap Star | Rhymesayers |
| 8 | 6 | SUMKID MAJERE | Ninjas & Flies | VJC |
| 12 | 7 | RESINATION | Big Noise | Verizum |
| 16 | 8 | VARIOUS ARTISTS | Natural Selection | Nature Sounds |
| 10 | 9 | RHYMEFEST | Fever | J Records |
| 18 | 10 | PLASTIC LITTLE | The Jump Off | Tone Arm |
| 11 | 11 | CHORDS | Knocking On My Door | Empire |
| 14 | 12 | STORM THE UNPREDICTABLE | Grown Folk Biz | Ty-She |
| 24 | 13 | JAKE THE SNAKE | Kilograms (I Know) | Marxminship |
| 15 | 14 | LORD JAMAR F/ RZA | Deepspace | Babygrande |
| 17 | 15 | EL GANT | So Simple | Nacirema |
| 21 | 16 | THE ROOTS | Don't Feel Right | Def Jam |
| 23 | 17 | ALOE BLACC | Dance For Life | Stones Throw |
| 20 | 18 | MOS DEF & SIZZLA | Victory | Shining Star Music |
| NEW | 19 | BOSSMAN | You're Wrong | Virgin |
| 22 | 20 | BIG MEG | Italian Icy's | Jambetta |
| 1 | 21 | BASIC VOCAB | Come Get With It | AVX Music Group |
| NEW | 22 | THE AB'S | Boombox | 6 Hole |
| 27 | 23 | OH NO | Gets MIne | Stones Throw |

Okayplayer.com – Album Review

DL Incognito - Organic Music For A Digital World (Nine Planets/ Urbnet)

written by: Andrew Hsu

Rating: 3.5/5

After “breathing life into a semi-comatose hip-hop scene” with his first release in 2002, DL Incognito’s third release, Organic Music for a Digital World is a great display of hip-hop as some of its finest moments—both producing and lyrically. DL Incognito’s lyricism is only matched by his backdrop of beats; the two (lyrics and beats) seem to be intertwined and play off of each other, feeding off of the others energy to create a fugue-like structure throughout the album.

There is little doubt that DL Incognito could create an album of this type of caliber. However, that being said, within Organic Music for a Digital World’s lies flashes of brilliance that DL Incognito shows sporadically throughout his third album. After these brief flashes, it would seem that DL Incognito has the potential to create even a better album. Allow me to explain. The overall album is better than solid—the beats and lyrics are great, neither overpowers the other and both have their moments to shine. The beats aren’t the loud mainstream ones; however, you could still easily bump Organic as you cruise around in your ride and still maintain your credibility as a hip-hop head. However, this record sounds very similar to a Jay-Z album for the majority of the album. It is the brief minority of the time that DL Incognito works his magic and shows that he can provide a new and unique sound.

Overall, this is a solid release for DL Incognito. Organic Music for a Digital World is a fun album and leaves listeners anticipating DL Incognito’s next release, which has the potential to be devastatingly good.

RAPNETWORK – US COLLEGE RADIO CHARTS – JULY 2006

| TOP 30 | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| July 24, 2006 ¶ | | | |
| | ARTIST | TITLE | LABEL |
| 1 | DL INCOGNITO | Live In My Element | Urbnet |
| 2 | SLUM VILLAGE | Call Me | Barak |
| 3 | 7L & ESOTERIC | Play Dumb | Babygrande |
| 4 | RAYDAR ELLIS | Graffiti Rock | Brick Records |
| 5 | PSALM ONE | Rap Star | Rhymesayers |
| 6 | SUMKID MAJERE | Ninjas & Files | VJC Recordings |
| 7 | RESINATION | Big Noise | Verizum |
| 8 | VARIOUS ARTISTS | Natural Selection | Nature Sounds |
| 9 | RHYMEFEST | Fever | J Records |
| 10 | PLASTIC LITTLE | The Jump Off | Tone Arm |
| 11 | CHORDS | Knocking On My Door | Empire |
| 12 | STORM THE UNPREDICTABLE | Grown Folks Biz | Ty-She Ent./Domination |
| 13 | J THE S (JAKE THE SNAKE) | Kilograms (I Know) | Marxlinship |
| 14 | K-SALAAM PRESENTS MOS DEF & SIZZLA | Victory | Shining Star Music |
| 15 | THE ROOTS | Don't Feel Right | Def Jam |
| 16 | ALOE BLACC | Dance For Life | Stones Throw |

Rapreviews.com – Album Review

DL Incognito - Organic Music For A Digital World (Nine Planets/ Urbnet)

written by: Rowald Pruyn

Unintentionally, some MC's turn themselves into gimmicks. They get a strange stage name, conjure up fictional worlds with their words, put themselves in the shoes of people they couldn't or wouldn't be in real life. That's good. Hip-Hop fans need gimmicks, fiction, and horror to escape real life from time to time. That also means we only get to see the side these artists decide to show us. He, or she, stays one-dimensional, not necessarily shallow, but one-dimensional. The Canadian underground dweller DL Incognito shows it isn't always necessary to resort to gimmicks, and isn't afraid to show the good and bad sides of his personality. Get your 3D goggles ready for "Organic Music For A Digital World."

People who make a living with the pastime they love to do most, shouldn't complain. I have heard this catchphrase come out of the mouth of countless extreme sports professionals, movie stars, and random celebrities with unclear pastimes. It's no coincidence, every single one of them is successful at what he or she does, and popular with the general public. In their shadow, there is an army of security guards, busboys, and waitresses who think they have every right to be in their shoes, struggling for stardom. Hip-Hop artists are unequalled in giving a voice to those injured wannabes. Always trying to preserve their art, but also in eternal search of the appreciation of the large audience which could give them fame and fortune. Maybe DL Incognito has a right to complain when he speaks of his inability to breach the gap between the underground world and the surface dwellers. His previous album were heralded by both critics and music lovers alike, and his sophomore album "Life Is A Collection of Experiences" was awarded the esteemed Juno Award. Juno Award? One of the most prestigious musical awards in Canada, which is DL Incognito's home country. This geographical misfortune has caused DL to be largely ignored in the neighboring country he so desperately wants to take by force (not Russia). Being Canadian must be the only reason he hasn't made his break in the US, because his confident flow, distinct tone-of-voice, and steamroller bar spitting would have given an American cat a definite head start.

DL Incognito, whose name he interprets as 'delivering lyrics on the down low,' has skills on the mic which are surpassed only by his ability for self-reflection. Which MC you know of would willingly apologize to two women on a record: one his girlfriend, the other his mistress? Most artists would have you believe they are just as skilled at polygamy as they are at rhyming. In real life, they might be latent lap dogs, at the whims of their mistress with a credit card in hand. Somehow DL Incognito wouldn't be caught in that switch stance, but he would be willing to use that same credit card for other enjoyments. DL Incognito doesn't mind speaking of his fetish for rare, luxury footwear ("S.Y.S.G.U"), and cars ("Keep it Movin"), which he can show off "stepping out of a Benz. That's how I want to represent." He reveals how he wants to pay for all those goodies in "Commerce," which has an infectious hook with a generic outlook and a twist at the end.

Nine Planets Hiphop resident DJ Techtwelve, largely responsible for the production on "Organic Music For Digital People," shows as much versatile prowess as his lyrical counterpart. Without creating new musical boundaries, Techtwelve manages to concoct a different sound for every single composition on the album. "The Masses" contains menacing classical theme music, which Jerry Bruckheimer and the producer of the cartoon show 'Transformers' both could have used. "Horoscope" blends in Grant Green guitar notes with smooth night club piano tunes, and "Newera" features a wild guitar riff, which sounds like Pink Floyd (but probably isn't).

The only criticism I could think of is DL Incognito's occasional sidesteps into societal analyses, like he does on "Reality Bites," On the second-to-last official track on the album, his lyrics become somewhat generic, with common places like "Racism is real," and "The family is the most important thing in your life." Without denying these words are very true, they do not fit in with the rest of the album.

DL Incognito isn't the most revolutionary artist in the game, but I doubt he is trying to be. With the help of Techtwelve's innovative boom bap treats, "Organic Music for a Digital World" is an album enjoyable for both backpackers and heads who don't feel like listening to the insightful thoughts of this Canadian cat. That makes him, musically and lyrically, a three-dimensional artist, hopefully on his way to a fourth album and dimension.

Music Vibes: 9 of 10 Lyric Vibes: 8.5 of 10 TOTAL Vibes: 8.5 of 10

Rapsearch.com - Album Review – July 2006

DL Incognito - Organic Music For A Digital World (Nine Planets/ Urbnet)

reviewed by By: Hermes

Rating: 4/5

The streets want an anthem. Backpackers crave captivating content. DL Incognito desires both. His third album, Organic Music for a Digital World, tries to realize this dream. From struggling to get heard on his debut to being Juno-nominated for Best Rap Recording in 2004, DL's flavour is now an integral spice in the hip hop melting pot. Teaming up with a duo of complimentary producers and doing his own work on the boards, it's the first solo album I've seen in a long minute without guests lacing the tracklisting.

This is because DL Incog has more than enough on his mind to rap about. Each song deals with personal problems and airplay-worthy topics, without the need of a second-opinion. His egocentric verses aren't brag-based, but they do over-indulge when it comes to what the audience may find relevant. Perhaps it's the fight for an identity in a dog-eat-dog-and-everything-that-moves industry keeping DL like an animal in the corner defending his skills, but for someone with such critical acclaim over the years, it's nice to see an artist with tenacity and hunger for more than money. When commenting on fighting radio's stranglehold on music, DL, with a voice reminiscent of Big L, rhymes: "Disgrace to the race/ We battle for a place in society's food chain/ No black face/ No shackles, ropes, chains/ Some we still slaves/ Dazed by the diamonds, the cars, the cocaine." Perhaps at the pinnacle of his preach game, this track slaps the listener with the chorus "I'm fighting for my free speech/ Can't get too deep/ I need to dumb my music down if I wanna reach/ The masses." It's powerful to hear him on this track, "The Masses," but when this resistance seeps into each track, the themes begin to spin into a two-dimensional tailspin. To be fair, however, the title hints at this duality, and DL sticks to his thesis for the whole album.

In a few spots, he slides in delectable treats to quench the monotony, like the second single from the disc "Live in my Element." DL quits his predictable intonation; discontinuing the end-rhyme flows and giving tremendous texture to Techtwelve's grandiose beat. Did I mention that this producer is a beast? His instrumentals are epic with timeless orchestration of a wide range of sounds and minimal samples. Undoubtedly, the production of this album is standout. Due to the cohesiveness in which it flows between each song, DL Incognito is provided with the soil to plant his "organic" music. "Surplus" follows up with a big sound of banging kicks and violent violins striking at the end of each bar like the Gods of Olympus are pissed off. There are a number of spots that awe. "Two Chicks" courts the sexiest drum pattern, for example.

I've always maintained that Canada has some of the dopest production, and this showing just gives more ammunition for that argument. The sole failing point from Organic Music for a Digital World is the clichéd, sweeping commentary that DL likes to incorporate into some of his lines, like on "Reality Bites" where he says, "Racism is real/ People do kill/...Alcohol and bills/ In and out of jail/ We gotta learn to chill." It's when he's not saying anything new that I grow weary of his itinerary. I'm glad to see that much of this tendency was ushered out with his last album, because he now brings unique experiences to combat the manufactured digital world's mould of what's hot and what's not.

Exclaim! – Album Review – February 2005

DL Incognito - Life's A Collection of Experiences - Urbnet

By Del F. Cowie - February 02, 2005

Despite the low-profile nature his name would imply, Ottawa-bred MC DL Incognito wants his props. And so he should, as the second album by this now Toronto-based MC is a tightly constructed and consistent effort worthy of praise. As a virtually unheard of MC when his tight debut *A Sample And A Drum Machine* dropped, he came out of the box slinging similes and metaphors with punch line swagger, dope self-production and a voice reminiscent of the celebrated late MC Big L, earning the respect of those who heard it. While many of those ingredients are again present, they are tempered by a noticeable personal growth. While he's not shy to remind you of his copious skills, as on head nodders like "Proof" and the brass-section propelled "Fully Armoured," he makes sure he's not pigeonholed as an MC. Insistently imparting his concern for hip-hop as an art form yields "Winds Of Change" and the certified heat of "Wild Style," where he's joined by Tara Chase and D-Shade; he also drops plenty of introspective lyrical nuggets throughout. "Verbalerity" and "This Song" show the innocence and pain of relationships respectively, DL Incognito's latent down to earth honesty and vulnerability come to the fore. If he continues to put out the top quality material on display here, chances are he will eventually get the recognition he deserves.

There are few hip-hop artists who can both produce and MC well. What motivated you to do both? I was first an MC and second a producer. I used to go to my boy's crib and he had an MPC and I'd see him just digging through the crates and doing that grind with him and I always felt I had a good ear for sampling and stuff like that. I was like, "Well if he can do it, I can probably do it too." Production came from the fact I needed beats and that was pretty much the drive. I think that all comes from being in Ottawa, which is very limited. We've always been forced to do it by ourselves. There's no industry there to kind of help you. It's either you do it and you do it on your terms or you don't do it at all. So if you're not willing to do those things then you're not going to go very far.

You've had bilingual tracks on both of your albums. Is it important for you to do this? Some of my favourite hip-hop CDs are French hip-hop CDs. For me I like both elements, the French language has more words than the English language, so they get a lot more intricate with the rhymes but I always want to at least represent that element even if it's just one cut or one verse.

Montreal Mirror – DECEMBER 2005

DL Incognito - Life's a Collection of Experiences (Nine Planets/ Urbnet)

DL is not the guy from CBC's *The X*. He is, however, one of the hardest-working MCs in Canada. With his first LP *A Sample and a Drum Machine*, people caught on to how this MC/producer worked, rapping about reality from his own unique point of view while lacing himself with beats for days. *Life's a Collection...* continues in the development of this growing force, alongside his boy Techtwelve and a little bit of help from Tara Chase and D-Shade on "Wild Style" and French MC Mic Check on "Fall Back." Choice tracks include "Me and My DJ" and the drama laden "Hard to Do." A nice piece of work from a cat you know is just getting started. 7/10 (Scott C)

RapReviews.com – Album Review - March 29, 2005

DL Incognito :: Life's a Collection of Experiences :: Nine Planets Records

as reviewed by Pedro 'DJ Complejo' Hernandez

Ridiculing Canadians seems to be one of America's favorite past times. Though I am not aware of how or why Canadians have become the butt of so many jokes, I do know that shows like *Southpark* will make sure that the tradition stays alive. Even Hip-Hop tends to look down on Canadian rap acts, dismissing them for the most part. Aside from a few acts, such as *Kardinal Offishall*, and Hip-Hop's embracement of Canadian model chicks (*Melyssa Ford* comes to mind), Canada remains ignored in the rap game. This has understandably caused great frustration for many a Canadian rap act who can't understand why they have to put in twice the work to get respected in the U.S. While I do believe Canada is slept on in a major way, I tend to side with the Americans on this issue. Though it may seem snobbish to those on the outside, Hip-Hop's

attitude towards foreigners is justified. As much as Hip-Hop is seen as a universal form of music, its origins were the product of a very unique social environment. The angst and frustration of a society forgotten by mainstream America led to the creation of Hip-Hop and to this day rap music remains the main voice for America's disenfranchised. With Hip-Hop holding such an important place in so many people's lives, it's only natural for them to be protective of it and try to make sure that it's done right. With that said, DL Incognito is a Canadian emcee/producer who does hip-hop and does it right. Not only does DL Incognito make hip-hop good enough to get America's nod of approval, he does it well enough to put most of his American counterparts to shame.

With "Life's a Collection of Experiences," DL Incognito is out to prove that it doesn't matter where you reside, as long as you have talent and something to say you can make good hip-hop. Whether it's on the mic or behind the boards, DL consistently creates dope, though-provoking, and universal music. It's actually odd to hear DL embrace himself as an underground rapper and a backpacker, as many of his songs contain a sincerity and realness that many people can relate to.

DL's production alone would garner praise. A self-professed crate-digger, DL shows us that the old school approach to production still works wonders even in an era where technology reigns. It's difficult to pinpoint standout tracks when every song is equally satisfying. The driving piano sample on "Proof" is the perfect way to jumpstart the album with some energy. "Fall Back" features an intricate mix of piano and string samples. "Me and My DJ" sounds straight old school with DJ Premier-influenced approach to the production and the hook. The trumpet sample on "Fully Armored" is the perfect centerpiece for DL's lyrical anthem. DL doesn't stop with dope production as he makes sure his lyrics match his potent beats. Despite his struggles and frustrations, DL's album is as uplifting and positive as they come without sounding cheesy or preachy.

Other noteworthy tracks include "ANR" and "The Ending. On "ANR" DL relates the struggles of trying to balance artistic integrity with record sales and the frustration of dealing with major labels. "The Ending" is an extension of the intro track, "The Beginning," and finds DL pouring his soul into the track and giving a fitting tribute to his mother. These three tracks are really not superior to any other track on the album but are only noted to give you an idea of what DL is about, the rest of the CD maintains an equally high quality level.

At the end of the day it doesn't matter whether DL Incognito is from Canada, Antarctica, or Planet Beldar. "Life's A Collection of Experiences" is good music for one and all, regardless of geographic location. DL's perspective and attitude in approaching life is commendable and translates perfectly to wax. "Life's a Collection of Experiences" will uplift you if you're down, get you off your ass if you're feeling complacent, and make you appreciate what you have if you're happy. Regardless of where they were compiled, DL's collection of experiences has created an outstanding album with universal appeal. (**Music Vibes: 9 of 10 Lyric Vibes: 9 of 10 TOTAL Vibes: 9 of 10**)

RapReviews.com – Album Review - April 19, 2005

DL Incognito :: A Sample and a Drum Machine :: Nine Planets Hiphop/URBNET Records

**** RapReviews "Back to the Lab" series ****

as reviewed by Matt Jost

Pablo Picasso is quoted as saying: "A painter is a man who paints what he sells. An artist, however, is a man that sells what he paints." It's a distinction often used to divide practitioners of an artform into those who do it for the love of the art and those who do it for the love of money. As soon as our music ascended to an artform, when Rakim declared that "rap is rhythm and poetry" and Chuck D aspired to be the "next poet supreme," hip-hop became subject to this debate. As such, it is a welcome debate, a sign that rap music can indeed be art. But it would be foolish to blindly support the apparent good guys, those who do it for the love of it. Without the participation of business-minded people, hip-hop would never be what it is today, a great opportunity for many to realize their dreams, artistic and otherwise.

Personally I don't buy into any attempts to divide hip-hop and therefore don't engage in that kind of debate. Others for instance make a distinction between the terms rapper and MC. I don't. But to play along for a minute, translated to hip-hop, Picasso's maxim might read: "A rapper is someone who records what he sells. An MC, however, is someone who sells what he records." Notice that they both manage to sell the fruit of their labor, with the fundamental difference that one makes music he thinks will have the most mass appeal, while the other makes highly individual music that people listen to because of its quality and originality. Taking that sales angle, it would be difficult to imagine a hip-hop version of Vincent Van Gogh, who sold but one painting while he was alive but whose body of work is now worth millions and millions. That's not how rap music works, whose performers are deeply embedded in the here and now. You're neither a rapper nor an MC if you can't make yourself heard. Without an audience, no matter how small, you're but a fool talking to yourself. Because what to onlookers often comes across as ego-tripping is really interaction, where the parties involved feed off each other.

Like it or not, in modern times sales are just that - crowd response. That doesn't mean that today's biggest stars will still shine the brightest ten or twenty years from now. Aftermath-affiliated artists are not that much better that they sell twice or three times more records than everybody else. They're just better than everybody else at capturing the imagination of kids who succumb to peer pressure. These statistical outliers tend to skew our view, to a point where we think a handful of megasellers are able to define hip-hop. We should know better than that. But by the same token, can you imagine a rapper who would be happy if he sold virtually no records at all? How could he be happy if nobody estimates his work? Do you think it made Van Gogh (yup, that's the guy who cut off his ear) any happier? Wouldn't it be great if he had lived to see the day his self-portrait was auctioned for 65 million dollars? So I won't knock a rapper for proclaiming he's out to "Get Rich Or Die Tryin'," because if he does get rich, it means people appreciate what he does, and if he dies tryin', well at least he tried. Trying always deserves respect.

Whether you're successful as an artist, painter, rapper, MC, whatever, there's always more than one side to the success story. It's like James Brown says at the beginning of "Damn Right, I Am Somebody": "To me happiness is Fred Wesley playing his horn." That's the happiness of Fred Wesley as he plays his horn, and the happiness he evokes in those who hear him play his horn. There's the fulfillment that comes from expressing yourself, and there's the fulfillment you feel when others show interest in what you express. See how it's all tied together? Could it be that rap can easily bridge those oft-discussed gaps between art and entertainment, between major and independent, between underground and mainstream, between rapper and MC? It should seem that hip-hop, with all the artistic and commercial growth it experienced, has also matured since the rift first appeared at the dawn of the 1990s. Maybe the key players art and money haven't grown apart but found a symbiosis. The clichéd starving artist and the filthy-rich entertainer slash entrepreneur do exist, but they don't sufficiently characterize hip-hop today. Not everybody gets rich, but many manage to make a living. Not everybody reaches the artistic apex, but many put out quality material.

Take Canadian rapper DL Incognito, whose second LP "Life's a Collection of Experiences" was nominated for a Juno Award. Which means he must have been on the right track with his 2002 debut "A Sample and a Drum Machine." Running his own label with his brother, we're likely dealing with someone who realizes that hip-hop is both an art and a business. From jump, DL introduces himself as a passionate rapper and producer. "I spend most of my time with the beats / I'm really hard to reach / In the studio my time is increased," he offers on "Cool, Calm & Relaxed." A voice constantly raised above conversation level and a brash demeanor soon make it evident that DL is a competitive guy who strives for more:

"I might be greatest in the future
Nigga, don't be a loser, fuckin' buy my shit now
It's an underground classic you want in your collection
Hip-hop's been dead for years, witness the resurrection"

If he continued in the same tone, DL Incognito would be another delusional rapper unable to realistically assess his situation. But as it progresses, the album gains stature. On the superb

"What Dreams Are Made Of" DL still waves that IOU check hip-hop handed to him, and the amount of trains, planes and automobiles he lists might be asking for too much, but the song's real message is that doing it for the love of the art and doing it for the love of money are not mutually exclusive:

"I raid crates, got 20 Zips of beats made
I've paid my dues, now I'm waitin' for change
Waitin' for planes, waitin' for the 4.6 Range
Outside of my league? You must be ill in the brain"

While its title puts a clear emphasis on production, "A Sample and a Drum Machine" pays equal attention to the vocals. On no other song do DL Incognito the producer and the rapper coalesce as well as on "Audio Coke," a combo of quite literally dope beats and rhymes:

"My shit sells, tell your folks, nigga, I'm no joke
My lines make your ears bleed, I'm audio coke
I'm audio blow, absorb this through your earlobes
A natural high, this is pumped all over the globe
It's worth more than gold
Got pushers on every corner
I take control of these so-called streets
My whole network is underground, kept underneath
The black market sell my rhymes and my beats
Now weak niggas OD off my music
If I told you once I told you twice not to abuse it
I bake, niggas lose it, they fiend for mine
Your heart start racin' like the deep bassline
They say I committed a crime by comin' on in
like heroin, in a syringe; a friend to a friend
A testament that the war on drugs just ain't workin'"

Guests Techtwelve and DJ Grouch shine on "Rugged Raw," a slice of underground hip-hop with musical finesse, where Grouch's cuts harmonize well with Tech's sly trumpet sample, while DL solidifies his position as a surprisingly comfortable and confident rapper. Other highlights include the bilingual collaboration with labelmate Mic Check, a forceful combination of piano loops and heavy drums entitled "Savoir Faire," the anthemic "Universal Love," which seems suited for live performances, and the Techtwelve-produced "Spit Forever," which breathes new life into an oft-used sample by way of clever chopping. Too bad the sequel, "Spit Forever 2," pales in comparison with its stiff drums and lofty keyboard stabs. Is this the same guy who made his entrance boasting: "A sample and a drum machine is all that is needed / your keyboard is defeated"?

Like many debut albums that incorporate earlier material, "A Sample and a Drum Machine" isn't as cohesive as it could be. The use of the n-word is slightly excessive, there are very Primo-influenced scratched hooks, weak drums play tag with strong drums, insightful lyrics get replaced by lyrics whose only object is to rhyme, etc. Ambitious songs like the pensive "There's Something..." or the wistful "Anticipation" - as good as they are - lack the finishing touches that transform something good into something perfect. But through it all, DL Incognito's young, clear voice speaks of ambition and determination, two elements that are always liable to take a rapper and an album to the next level:

"I started from the bottom, made my way to the top My art is modern for the moment, so in time I get props It's like a painting by Picasso, graffiti on the block, though I'm soon to be followed like the twelve apostles I'm dope like Rasco, but this is 'how the north was won' With no guns, just with snares, hats and drums"

Music Vibes: 7 of 10 Lyric Vibes: 7 of 10 TOTAL Vibes: 7 of 10