

# THE UNKNOWN LEGEND

## Divine Styler On the Eve of Resurrection

**DIVINE STYLER. RING A BELL?** Depending on which side of the vinyl you're on, he's either in a class with Kool Keith, Del, Aceyalone and De La Soul, or he's "Who?" Remember '89's "Ain't Sayin' Nothin'" video, the crazy gear, bugged dance moves, a CIA-agent looking dude narrating the nonsense and the calm MC filling your ears with abstract truth? It caused thousands of kids just like me to go their local record store and pick up *Word Power*, on Rhyme Syndicate's (yeah, Ice-T) major sub-label. The same way Del tha Funkee Homosapien surprised the hell out us when the Lench Mob member/ Ice Cube protege first dropped "Mistadobalina." We couldn't believe Divine was down with Ice-T, better known for peelin' caps back than breaking branches of linguistics. It turns out, he wasn't.

"All the hype was through our own self-promoting," states the Styler via phone from L.A. "We got the video put on BET. The record company didn't even do it, we got a copy, taped it, called BET and sent it to them. They started playing it."

One of the first artists signed to Ice's production deal, Divine was uneasy from the start, with promises coming up shorter than his money. He was then signed by Syndicate management to Giant Records without even being told. "They signed me as a rapper, but I went in there and started doing live stuff, experimenting. They were pissed, everybody was pissed off." But it was a good thing. "I got to do what I wanted to do, and I got to get out of my deal, 'cause they dropped me."

Performing industry sabotage surgery on his own career, the *Spiral Walls...* album contained one of the best rap songs ever made, "Grey Matter," and is something no acid-tripper should leave home without. The following few years were a mixed bag of drug-induced meditation, folklore, obscurity, travel and coexistin' euphoria. The legendary Scheme Team (Divine's Brooklyn crime unit turned LA freestyle dancing innovators) broke up, "Everyone went crazy." The D-I-V-I-ne made a couple of vocal appearances, popping up briefly to give a shout to De La Soul at their funeral, then making a more substantial contribution to House of Pain's *Truth Crushed to Earth* album in '96. Friends

from the Syndicate days - Divine actually got bumped from Ice T's *Rhyme Syndicate Coming Through* album for Everlast, who Ice saw as a money-maker, the "only white rapper at the time who sounded good" - D-Styles and the future Whitey Ford created the best and most slept on House of Pain album. For past fans, hearing D come on a track saying "this is for all the dirty bitches out there" was a surprise, but for Divine, it was a way of letting go.

"Number one, it was a transition from the street, to me finally closing that door behind me. I got that anger, that energy, that negative thinking off my chest. That album didn't solicit Divine Styler, what Divine Styler carried. It solicited what this Brooklyn nigger carried, that album solicited bullshit... the street side of me, so that's what I put into it."

**SICK OF EGO CLASHES, GETTING** jerked, and negative thinking, Divine traded in his weed for a snowboard, his 40 for a mountain bike, and potentially his career for his sanity. "So I got my head together, started to go in the studio myself and, you know, get my production back up, get my rhymes back up." A distribution deal with upstart Ground Level quickly fell into his lap via the Wake-Up Shows DJ Revolution, a longtime fan. But heads looking for some more Div-insanity, *Word Power 2: Directrix* is "a lot more controlled and harnessed and focused. People might expect things to be more loose-fitted, but I'm not a loose-fitted person anymore. I'm not out-there like that anymore."

Indeed, the new record is not what I expected at all, but is so much more. A true album in a world of singles and filler, *Word Power 2* is the perfect reintroduction to the man simultaneously legendary and unknown. "It's hard to accept that word, legendary. People don't know what I have inside, the picture I have that I'm

trying to create. But the other side of that, being not known, that's a good thing cuz the people who support Divine Styler, the Divine Styler movement, are gonna be with me for a long time. The slow road is better than the fast road anyway, you create a bond with people that doesn't break, you don't lose that, they're gonna be with you."

Divine Styler is not back, he's been here since the beginning, and the support from all over has been letting him know that we won't let him go away again. With a single and video coming soon for "Make it Plain," appearances on Styles of Beyond's *2000 Fold* LP (being re-released in March, they also return the favor twice on *Word Power 2*), numerous compilations, freelance production, and two new albums in the works (*Divine Balance*, remixed outtakes from the current album, and *Echtochrome*, scheduled for a 2G release), everything is being done in divine style. It's been a long strange trip, but "somehow, I happened to survive. Things happen, it's real bizarre but... God is in my corner, definitely."

FRITZ LE CHAT

*Word Power 2: Directrix* is available now on DTX Records/Ground Level Distribution (310.417.8713)



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