

# NEW SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER

## Hip Hop Got too Big So Anti-Pop Took it Over

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It's a cold day in New York City. Freezing rain/snow falls on the Gotham-like office tower housing the new offices of Billboard Magazine's Next Big Thing, Anti-Pop Recordings. Shivering and damp, I kick the slush off my Lithium hikers and await the arrival of artist/vice-president Beans.

"He's in a meeting right now, won't be long," the receptionist yawns to me while blowing bubbles and answering endless phone calls. A young man - obviously a rapper - decked out in a sheepskin jacket, shoulder-length dreads and an African medallion (when did those come back in style?) sways into the office with a demo package under his arm, asking for A&R man E. Blaize.

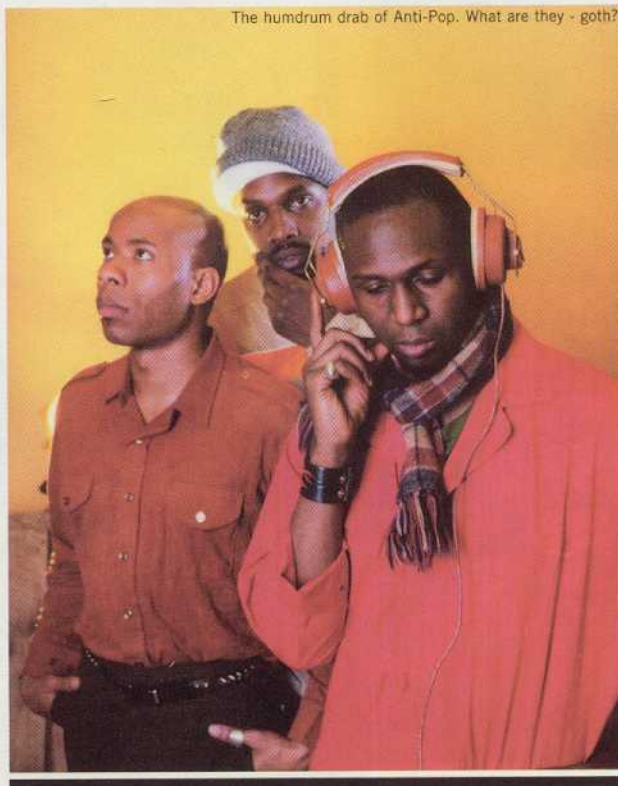
"He's in a meeting right now," the receptionist deadpans, without looking up, "but I'll take that for you." The kid gives me a glance, shrugs and slides out into the drizzle, gripping hopes of being signed to Anti-Pop, the label of the moment.

It's been exactly five years since the now infamous *Tragic Epilogue* LP dropped on 75 Ark Records, introducing the world to the crazy poetic stylings of Priest, Beans, M. Sayyid and producer-du-jour Earl Blaize (often called the Primo or Pete Rock of the '00s). In a year dominated by ruff ryders and boys of both bad and hot variety, the Anti-Pop Consortium planted the seeds of a musical revolution. The crops are currently being reaped worldwide. I hear a door open and look up to see Beans pop through, rocking one of his trademark pairs of shades (in love with eye-wear, he's almost as famous for his 100+ collection of sunglasses as his poetics), dark chocolate leather pants and black Italian shoes with small holes in them resembling the knuckle holes on motorcycle gloves. On our way down the hall towards the elevator I notice the gold on the walls and ask him about his eclectic fashion sense. No platinum?

"Nah, I'm not really into platinum. Only in plaques, hopefully one day. One day." It's been a few years since we've seen each other, and for a nouveau riche music executive I thought he'd be sporting the latest in hip hop fashion, such as the current fave, Like Us Like U. "I'll never wear that shit. It's carbon cut-out shit, it doesn't reflect who I am."

**WE MAKE OUR WAY DOWN THE BLOCK AND STEP** into Like Madd, a coffeehouse/pub recently opened up by fellow New Yorker Mike Ladd, who greets us at the door and escorts us to Beans' regular corner table. Beans, Priest (founder and current pres/CEO of Anti-Pop) and M. Sayyid (co-vice-pres) met in the early '90s at a series of "Rap Meets Poetry" events held at Fez. They came together through different friendships and affiliations ("as a means for survival," Priest will later reveal), eventually releasing their musical experimentations for public consumption.

"Nobody wanted to fuck with us label-wise," Beans notes between bites of soyburger and sips of protein shake, so in '96



The humdrum drab of Anti-Pop. What are they - goth?

Priest started Anti-Pop. They started putting out mixtapes then dropped the "Mind Control"/"Disorientation" 12", which led to other projects and collaborations with the likes of DJ Vadim, Vernon Reid, DJ Logic, DJ Spooky, Alec Empire, etc. But why Anti-Pop?

"It's actually a stance to affirm the type of music we're doing." And its relevance back in 2000? Beans compares the movement they championed (along with artists like Pharoahe Monch and Aceyalone, who both appeared on *Tragic Epilogue*) with punk rock, which came about "as a result of people's disillusionment of arena rock. [We took the] same stance with hip hop. It was getting too big, nah, not too big ...too shitty. The New York shallowness, that was bullshit. That didn't represent who we were as people, how we expressed ourselves. But rap needed to be where it was right then, so we could kill it and start over. A lot of people held on to what hip hop was, but if you really want to bring things

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