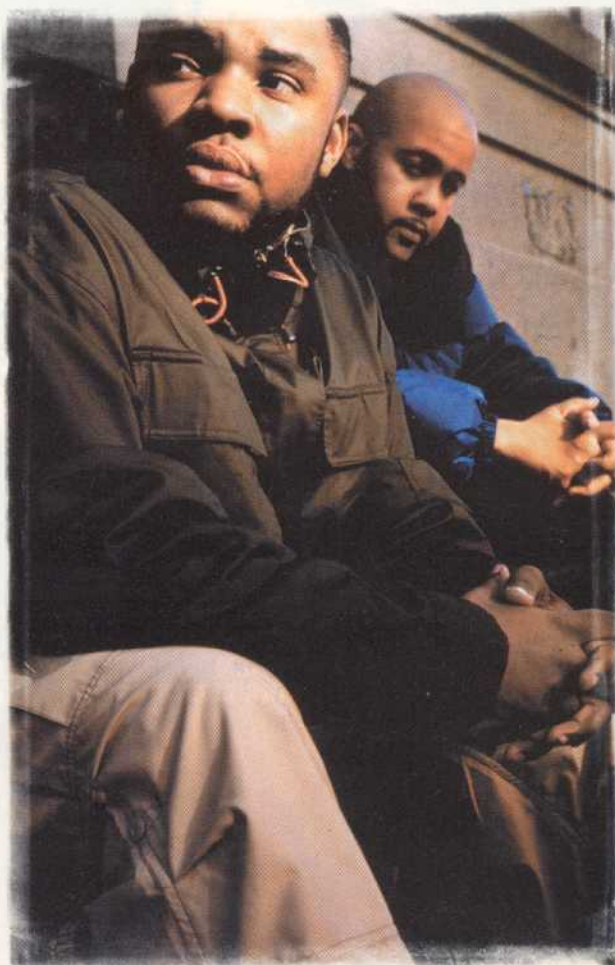


# BLACK AND DELICIOUS

## The Suspicious Superstitious of Blackalicious



**B**Y NOW YOU'RE NO DOUBT FAMILIAR WITH THE Solesides story. A group of B-boys filled with creative passion bump hip hop heads at KDVS, the radio station at UC Davis. The Solesides label is formed with releases manifesting from DJ Shadow, Asia (later, Lyrics) Born, Lateef and Blackalicious, a duo comprising MC Gift of Gab and DJ Chief Xcel. One cup of "Swan Lake" with a couple spoonfuls of "Lyric Fathom", followed by a decently *Melodica* meal. Wake up the next morning with a 40 oz. for breakfast and then go back inside for a few years. Or so it seems. But while Shadow was introducing us to his uncle and Latyxx were combining rhymes like their names, X and Gab were back and forth from studio to stage, putting it down for the day they could do it up proper. "We've just been all over, especially in the past year," says Xcel. "In 1999 we spent about seven months doing shows. In Japan, Europe, Australia, America..." A few of us, one of a kind, touched the stars in anticipation, then ate up A2G lunch. But a lot done changed. Solesides made mo' wax, then reflected quantum spectrums.

"In the end of '97, we all got together and assessed our achievements and plans for the future," explains the Chief. "Solesides had done everything we intended. After five years, all of our visions and focuses had expanded. We needed to create a vehicle strong enough to support our expansion. Plus, Zen (Jeff Chang, one of the Solesides founders) wanted to focus on the editing world."

The change was more abstract and spiritual than structural, it seems, cause ain't a damn thing changed.

"It's a matter of building and destroying. We built one thing, took the principles of that, then tore it down to build something stronger."

But Blackalicious specifically? *Nia* is different, but the difference is exactly what you'd expect. The only constant is change, in this case in a more, dare I say it, "musical" direction.

"This album represents a comprehensive growth since *Melodica*," Xcel

says, "both for Gab as an MC and songwriter and for myself as a producer, composer and arranger."

Eighteen cuts. All stronger than what you've got in your walkman right now as you read this on the bus (unless you're already rocking *Nia*). Love-making music. Club-jumping music. Thought-rocking music. Youthful energy chilling in the unified wisdom fields.

"Gab's about four million years old," estimates Xcel. "I'm about two and a half million years old. So Gab's the elder." A tight squad, respect. Speaking with Xcel, there's no dirt on Gab to be had. "He eats grits with ketchup. That's the key to being a dope emcee."

So much going on around and so much about to go down. Legends in the living. After *Nia*, look for *B-Sides Live*, an LP of B-sides from forthcoming *Nia* singles, bonus tracks and live recordings; *Solesides' Greatest Bumps*, a sort of a hits and misses LP with some unreleased material; new LPs from Shadow, Lyrics Born, Maroons (Xcel and Lateef), Joyo Velarde, Poets of Rhythm, the Lifesavers and a Gift of Gab solo record "produced by Quincy Jones and Rod Stewart."

### HE EATS GRITS WITH KETCHUP. THAT'S THE KEY TO BEING A DOPE EMCEE.

It's been a while since those first hand-drawn 12" center labels. Who knew? "We knew it would [happen], we just didn't know when," says Xcel. "We didn't know it would take 13 years to happen. Me and Gab have been together 13 years. We always knew it was our calling, something that was just sort of meant to happen. I'm definitely grateful." As am I.

FRITZ MOHAMMED

*Blackalicious' Nia* is out domestically in February on Quannum/Caroline.