

Mr On vs. Jungle Brothers
Words: Stewart Dalley

"It's a long story." Sates an ominous sounding Mr On, as he reflects on the process that has finally lead to the release of his 'Breathe Don't Stop' bootleg - a record he started to create a little over two years ago. And he's not kidding. It's a journey that has seen him on the trail of the world's most elusive pop star, Michael Jackson, and one of the world's shyest MCs, Q-Tip. "An emotional roller coaster ride", is one way that Mr On describes the frustrating ordeal of sample clearance but ultimately its one that has made him a very happy man indeed.

For those unfamiliar with the tune (where have you been?) Mr On's reworking of Michael Jackson's 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough' and Q-Tip's 'Breathe and Stop' was one of those bootleg mixes that really awoke the world outside the confines of the bootleg community to the possibilities of the genre. With it people soon realised that you could take two polarising songs and mash them together to make something so perfect you'd have sworn they'd originally been produced to sound that way. For Mr On his introduction had come a few years earlier while rummaging through his mate's record bag, as he continues. "I came across some of the first Girls on Top - the first Richard X - bootlegs and I thought it was pretty mad, especially since they were on sale in high street record stores. So I though this would be a really good project for me that would help me learn about arrangements and production. From there I started doing a lot of research on the net and found a lot of stuff very quickly and I was able to put that process into use very quickly. The thing that took time was finding two things that fitted so nicely together."

And that's how it all started for Mr On, the search for an acappella and a break that he could merge together to make one outstanding cut, and in December 2001 he hit upon two such tracks. "I always really liked that Q-Tip song and I was a really big Michael Jackson fan as well and after I heard the 'Billie Jean' bootleg with Bushwhacka - which I loved - I thought to myself no one has done anything with 'Off the Wall' (Michael Jackson's 1979 debut solo album), which is my favourite Michael Jackson album. So I put this track together and it got a really good response. Then it got picked up by Incentive which was great news but Q-Tip didn't seem to be interested; obviously he's busy he's got a lot going on, so this was the furthest thing from his mind. After that initial disappointment we started to talk about who we could get to do the rap, as we were very keen to put it out in some form, and once we got talking the Jungle Brothers emerged as people who made sense, cause they (Q-Tip and Jungle Brothers) were both from the Native Tongues collective, both old skool and both came up around the same time. So the label contacted the JB's who were well into it. When I heard the finished rap I kind of laughed, I was really surprised and very pleased because they'd elevated it into even more of a party record."

Having now solved the problem of Q-Tip's quiet disinterest by hiring in the Jungle Brothers there was still the little task of convincing Michael Jackson to allow the sampling of his track. "That was a very long and arduous process, which Incentive eventually sorted out by going to a sample clearance company in America." Says Mr On. "Before that my mate Simon Marks, who used to run Azuli Records, made numerous phone calls to people and at one point he sat next to the guy who runs Giant Steps (Media) out of New York whose wife is apparently one of Michael Jackson's nurses or something. At one point we considered approaching Michael through her because we were so desperate. As I say it was a roller coaster ride, one minute it was going to happen then the next minute it had gone onto this next person who was impossible to get hold of. I was really positive about it one minute and then pretty disheartened the next cause I never thought it was going to happen. You know, after a while I though, shit I just want to get this record out of my life and move on. But then I got the phone call one day to say it was cleared and I couldn't believe it - it had taken over a year to get all the clearance and it was finally ready for release."

NB: Michael Jackson was unfortunately unavailable for comment.

Mr On vs. Jungle Brothers 'Breathe Don't Stop' is released on Positiva Records on 19th January 2004.