

Interview: The Pharcyde  
By: Stewart Dalley

The Pharcyde are well known in hip hop circles as the guys who nearly made it big, they are also known as a group who possess a razor sharp wit. Unlike many of hip hop's misogynists Pharcyde have never been afraid to wear their hearts on their sleeves, when the time is called to do so. And unlike many of their fellow rappers you'll be hard pressed to dig up a Pharcyde track that actively encourages you to 'pop a cap in someone's ass', 'deal some crack' or 'fuck up some bitches'. No ladies and gentlemen the Pharcyde are as removed as removed can be from that section of the hip hop movement.

The Pharcyde first happened upon an unsuspecting public, starved of conscious lyrics back in '92 when they appeared on the Brand New Heavies 'Heavy Rhymes Experience' album with the quirky and still fresh 'Soul Flower'. That album acted as an introduction to the Pharcyde sound that was quickly snapped up by the real headz. Once that track had dropped it was only a matter of months before seminal hip hop stable Delicious Vinyl unleashed 'Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde'. The launch party for the album is still ingrained in the group's memory some eight years later, as Imani tells us. "We hadn't even practised with the band we were supposed to be playing with, the whole show was a mess. It's something that mentally scarred us and we made sure it never happened again. For that one whack gig we've now done a billion great shows." And after just witnessing them at a recent gig at Glasgow's King Tuts I can hand on heart go along with that massive understatement.

The album 'Bizarre Ride' picked up plaudits from across the globe and with the single releases 'Passing Me By' and 'Ya Mama' a whole legion of Pharcyders were hooked forever. 'Ya Mama' is by far the single most quoted track when people talk about the Pharcyde, thanks to its tirade of abuse about your mummy. You know the stuff: Ya mamas so ugly she's got hair right down to her dick. Ya mamas so fat she's got her own postcode. Or to quote The Pharcyde, "ya mama so fat, her peg legs got a kickstand." The 'Ya Mama' phenomena may have been introduced onto vinyl by the band but the art of slagging off one of your pals by dissing their mother has always been around. Like similes and other grammatical thingermygigs that I can't be bothered thinking of, the 'ya mama' is now a recognised literary concept. The internet is crammed fool of dedicated sites on the subject matter, with lists of thousands being added to almost daily. Even after all this time the band remains philosophical about the beast they have created "To be honest it doesn't really bother me, we don't have the type of fans that shout shit at you in the street. For me 'Passin' Me By' seems to be the track people speak of most because it got so much radio play. I don't like to pat myself on the back but the world has convinced me we made great tracks."

The Pharcyde today consist of Imani and Booty Brown, after loosing Fatlip and Slimkid on route and releasing the '95 class outing 'LabcabinCalifornia' LP; so called as it was where it was recorded. "Rommi and myself were in another group when I ran into Booty and I convinced Rommi to join together to make the Pharcyde. Booty was already down with Fatlip. When we first got the group together I never thought Fatlip would last, maybe 3 albums tops....I was proved to be right. As far as Rommi's leaving that was a whole other thing...but if a man has some sort of angelic voice telling him to do some other shit who am I to argue? Although you've probably not heard the last of him."

Don't be fooled by all this memory lane stuff because the Pharcyde are still considered to be a band of the future. '99 marked a turning point for the group seeing the scaled down Pharcyde dip their toe in the hip hop pond with the limited release EP 'Testing the Waters' under their Chapter One guise, as I learned from Imani. "When we released that EP we didn't know whether we were gonna get sued or whatever but we just said fuck it. Delicious Vinyl did a lot of stuff that helped us get out of the contract. You know a lot of people ask us how the Pharcyde ended up on a German label and basically it's down to the unprofessional manner of Delicious Vinyl. To cut a long story

short Delicious Vinyl owes Four Music an album and we said we weren't going to do it unless we got something out of it. And what we wanted was to retain our name and get out of our contract obligations to Delicious. In doing that we've put ourselves in the position that our next album (Plain Rap) will be totally controlled by Four Music in Europe and Delicious in America. But henceforth we'll own all our masters, all of the recordings. You know, we control the destiny of the Pharcyde."

Aside from Pharcyde activities, the group have been busy with other things, keeping themselves trim for the big fight once they are finally set free from Delicious. The first fruits of that is a joining of forces with another respected rap force, as Imani explains. "We've joined forces with Souls of Mischief to put together a group called Almighty Mighty Pythons. We started out doing a collaboration but it felt like we were trying to push a whole bunch of experiences into one record. So we said fuck it lets become a group. Pharcyde is a priority for us and Souls of Mischief is a priority for them. But on the back burner we both got Almighty, it's just a matter of time before it's released."

Never a man to be content with doing one thing at a time Imani has also found time to do his own solo thing called the Pharcyde presents Strange Projects. "The slogan I came up with for that is 'enjoy strange, respect the rights of the unpopular'. I came up with that because basically what is popular isn't necessarily good or the shit to me. I'm a different type of guy, you don't have to like it, just respect it. And hopefully you can enjoy strange."

The Pharcyde in its many guises is sure to take them to a whole new level and a new generation of listeners. The future looks good for the group and similarly for us as consumers. And although the group seem less than pleased to be doing the 'Plain Rap' album I'm sure it will be full of the insightful lyrics that first brought them to our attention some eight years ago. Because when you are in the process of rebuilding you can't afford to drop sub-standard material and it's a concept not lost of the group themselves.