

Roots Manuva
By: Stewart Dalley

Back in the dim and distant past to proclaim a predilection for UK hip-hop was to commit fashion suicide. Wee Papa Girl Rappers, Derek B, the Cookie Crew et al were the public face of a cringe-worthy industry. But behind the commercial successes of these hip-hop atrocities were the underground heroes who refused to adopt a fake American accent – people like Blade, people like Hijack and people like Roots Manuva.

While some of Hijack's rappers have changed their spots by becoming the voice behind the incredibly catchy garage anthem 'Do You Really Like It?' by DJ Pied Piper - and Blade hooking-up with producer Mark B - Roots Manuva stands out as the one man who refuses to give up. His belief in himself and his music is hardly surprising given his beginnings – being the son to a strict Pentecostal minister, Rodney Hylton Smith had to conceal his burgeoning taste for reggae and hip-hop like other boys might hide a torn out page 3. With a MOBO Award for Best Hip Hop Act under his wing he is in no doubt as to what his Jamaican heritage has done for his music. Marrying ska, roots reggae, rap, break-beat and a kitchen sink full of bleeps and swirling noises – Roots Manuva's take on hip-hop is without question a by-product of his heritage that is uniquely British black.

Coming to prominence back in 1995 alongside Black Twang and then with the seminal 'Brand New Second Hand' – a reference to his mother's description of the gifts he would receive – Root's may not have made a bucket full of cash but he's built up a loyal base of fans.....which brings us nicely up to the present. The new album 'Run Come Save Me' debuting at number 33 in the charts and an impending tour makes his chance of winning the Best Hip Hop Act at this year's MOBOs look rather sweet.

On the new album Mr Manuva was keen to take his writing and production up a notch, going as far to say, "The whole recording process involved more attention to detail and a lot more time to freak out and be totally creative. I was left to mess about. I felt like Quincy Jones! Just there giving Jamie [the engineer] orders....a total kid in the sweet shop." With comments like that you'll see why Roots Manuva is unlike other artists in many ways - none more so than in describing his music. Where other artists may state that they like to leave the descriptions to the journalists Mr Manuva is not short on words exclaiming that his new album is, "a patchwork reflection of the bittersweet-tainted joys and pains of progress.....so this be a declaration of good-hearted ghetto hoorah joyous intent."

With a little help from Radio 1's playlist and an incredibly funny video – that sees Roots taking part in the races at his old primary school's sports day - the first single released from the album 'Witness (I Hope)' scraped the top 40. With the release of the new single 'Dreamy Days' on October the 1st, Root's label, Big Dada, are hoping for bigger chart action, telling us that "This tale of love, underpants and wooden spoon will have remixes by MJ Cole, the Super Furry Animals and Roots Manuva himself."

The album and live presence of one of Britain's – no scratch that – the world's best rappers demands your attention. Don't miss out on what promises to be a gig to treasure.

Roots Manuva plays The Arches, Glasgow on Thursday 13th September. Aberdeen's, Liva on Friday 14th and Edinburgh's Bongo Club on Sunday 16th.