

Roots Manuva
Words: Stewart Dalley

Title: Truly, Madly, Deeply.

After securing a MOBO for Best Hip Hop Act, a nomination for the Mercury Music Prize and having one of his tracks voted the greatest UK hip hop tune of all time you'd be forgiven for thinking that Roots Manuva would be as happy as Larry, but alas this can not be said.

Cause 4 Pain

Before you rush to judge, you may wish to bare the man out and read what he has to say on the juxtaposition he's found himself in following the aforementioned successes of his previous work. Namely, facing the demons that a lot of serious musicians find themselves dealing with when pandering to record company plees for a quick turn around of an equally commercially successful album, all the while staying true to his originality as an artist and moving forward creatively. Summerising the process Roots first offers this insight into his creative and emotional state. "I feel like a guinea pig on a wheel running for the cheese and I can't get to it." Which for any artist to admit is something in itself but when pressed for further clarification the floodgates are opened and an image of a young man wrestling with the burdens of success become apparent.

"It's a pain in the arse because there is no gauge on how successful or how recognisable I am to people. I can never tell if someone is staring at me because I've got a bogey hanging from my nose or if it's because I'm familiar to them. So I needed to make this record to be able to make more records and I needed to be hurt by this record in order to carry on as an artist. I took a lot of time {four years} and I made loads of tracks, from outrageously poppy things to the most inaudible abstract madness. In essence, I had too much music to choose from when it came to putting the album together. I just went at it hammer and tong, all the while saying to myself that there were no rules and it doesn't matter how it comes out. There is a false sense of security in listening to all the other stuff out there and trying to follow that style, you've got to look into the crystal ball and see the future as yours."

Colossal Insight

Artistic struggles aside what has emerged is as personal a hip hop album that you are likely to come across. The album's title track 'Awfully Deep' details his near mental breakdown and his record label's attempts to send him off for some rehabilitation "at the farm for the funny" and his fight against said problems. With 'Colossal Insight' he tackles another bugbear, offering up his contempt for the music press's insistence on referring to him as a UK rapper. As he explained to M8.

"I hate the term UK rapper, I don't give a fuck about UK rap and have nothing to say about it. If they referred to me as UK hip hop I'd be happy 'cause I could tell them that hip hop culture is very successful as everyone is thieving from it and also effected by it, from Robbie Williams to Damon Alban – it's a very successful form of artistic expression."

With this dub infused hip hop personal odyssey Roots Manuva is a truly unique voice in what is an increasingly formulaic musical form. And he deserves peace and love for that alone. Big up yourself.

'Awfully Deep' is out now on Big Dada Records

Roots Manuva Top 5 Must Haves

- Roots Manuva 'Witness (One Hope)
- Roots Manuva 'Dreamy Days'
- Roots Manuva 'Brand New Second Hand'
- MC Pitman 'Witness the Pitness'
- Leftfield feat Roots Manuva 'Dusted'