

Tim Westwood  
By: Stewart Dalley

This isn't my first time interviewing Westwood - in fact it's my fifth. In the past I've chewed the fat with him in person, on the radio and over the phone. I've also witnessed him live on the decks on numerous occasions and in equally different settings. And the one thing I've found is you always get him the same way - super enthusiastic about hip hop and all that it stands for.

With the most listened to specialist shows on Radio 1, a career that spans nearly thirty years, a few Sony radio awards, a couple of MOBOs and a string of gold discs to his name, Westwood is quite rightly considered to be the biggest dawg in Europe when it comes to hip hop. He's conquered everything there is to be had in hip hop and he's still hungry. He co-owned Kiss in its pirate days, before transferring from there to Capital Radio where he threw some of Notting Hill Carnival's most outrageous parties before being banned by the police. Then Radio 1 came a knocking, who he turned down at first, before taking to a national platform and one of the station's most popular shows. TV has also featured sporadically, hosting programs back in the day on ITV's night network and UK Play (former incarnation of BBC3). TV also features in his future with a couple of projects on the way. There's a DVD due out in Easter, containing, what Westwood describes as "real hot shit", then there's a new show on Channel U on Sky Digital.

On the cusp of releasing his forth compilation for Def Jam UK, 'Westwood Present the Platinum Collection', he's mega busy. Having pestered his press people at the label and his PA for a good week, I've eventually got the man on the phone, he's created a window in amongst a barrage of meetings but as usual he's all smiles. "Hey how's it going brother? Thanks for doing this interview." He's thanking me! "This new album, it means a lot to me to see it blast off - I'm looking at doing it up crazy with this one." He's on top form and I haven't even asked a question yet. His life is his business so there really is no need to go through a set of warming-up pleasantries. I suppose it's got a lot to do with the nature of the big personality US hip hop DJs that he has not so much mimicked but emulated. A simple question like 'You been busy?' merely opens the floodgates for Westwood to throw in some gems.

"I love working man. I've always looked at people in New York, like my man Funkmaster Flex, and just saw how crazy busy those dudes are. And I've always been, not so much envious but just wishing I had a situation where I was that active and that busy. So now that I've got that I'm really running with it and enjoying it man." And as the most widely recognised hip hop DJ in Europe, Westwood is always busy. He's the man all the stars flock to, tune in to his shows and you're going to hear the likes of 50 Cent, R Kelly, Nas, Jay-Z and Eminem dropping by for a chat, with what sounds like their best mate, Westwood. Not that he's under any illusions about their supposed friendships. "Yeah they are all cool man. It's a working relationship but its love."

While the artists may have love for Westwood its not a feeling that is always shared by certain sections of the press, who have always taken great pleasure in giving the man a hard time, namely because of the way he presents himself. It's a situation many people in the spotlight find themselves facing, which is all good if it's balanced, but it's something many of Westwood's critics seem to forget when they are slagging him off. Their venom seems to centre on the fact that a white guy is a key figure in a predominantly black culture. Something I personally find ironic given that it is usually white journalists writing about black music who are slinging the mud. I could take their point if they were having a go at everyone who spoke like Westwood, black, Asian, white or whatever but it seems, for the white middle class press, its only okay for black people from the 'proper ghetto' to speak hip hop slang but not anyone else. It's a racist argument if ever I heard one. Surely if you are a tosser you are a tosser regardless of your colour or creed.

While I might get my knickers in a twist about the negative press the man receives Westwood has heard it all before and brushed it aside. For him the people who really matter are the ones who tune into his radio shows, turn up at his gigs and buy his albums. And as second time winner of Best Radio DJ at this year's MOBO awards, Westwood is all too aware where his recognition comes from. "That was a great look man. That's love, that's people saying they love what you do and support what you are doing. That love means a lot man, this isn't something that has been voted for by your peers it's like the street has spoken, so I'm really happy about that." As for the detractors, Westwood spares no thought for them. "I pay no attention to that, my focus has always been about what I do and what I got to do to achieve...so I don't get caught up in none of that bullshit. Come on man, I've been shot so that shit does not faze me. I didn't lie down when I was shot I just came back fighting stronger than ever. I believe if something doesn't kill you it makes you stronger. I believe in what I do man."

Whether its being brought up by a former Bishop or the fact that he was shot – he was the victim of a drive-by shooting in 1999, leaving him with a bullet in the arm and another which narrowly missed his spine – that gives Westwood his outlook on life I'm not entirely sure; I never met him before the shooting. Regardless, he is something of a contradiction in hip hop. He doesn't smoke, drink or eat meat and does a look of good work for charity. Although, in the best traditions doesn't really like to talk about it. Really! This is the fifth time we've spoke and I had to twist his arm to address the subject. So how does he think the socially conscious side of Westwood sits with the bling bling mentality of the hip hop lifestyle? "Life has been so good to me; the hip hop generation has supported me and made me what I am today so I feel I have a moral obligation and duty to put some money, time and energy back into it. I'm the patron of Feltham YOI (Young Offenders Institute) they've got a prison radio station there and I'm involved in that. I'm also the patron of Body & Soul (Teen Spirit), which is a charity for teenagers with AIDS and I spend time with them, which is very important to me. I'm not doing that for press, I'm not doing that to big myself up, its something I feel uncomfortable talking about, cause Body & Soul that's private stuff – people I see at my parties, who've got HIV, I then see at Body & Soul so that shows how real that situation is."

But anyone who knows Westwood also knows that he doesn't dedicate all his time to helping the kids. Sure he puts a lot of time and effort into that, but he also finds time to indulge another of his passions – cars. "Oh yeah, I specialise in that." He says, with newfound guile. "I buy them in New York; I get my man Funkmaster Flex to customise them and then it's a go. I've just bought a new car, a Chevrolet Suburban (nine seater V8 - circa \$46,000 as standard); I'm just waiting for it to pass its British driving test. I also just bought a 1965 Chevrolet Impala (shit hot classic much used to turn into a low rider, as depicted in many hip hop videos) cause the thing is if you are going to have a fleet of cars you've got to have a classic, so that's my classic joint. The one I'm driving at the moment is a GMC Yukon, which is pretty big out there. But this new joint (the Chevy) is incredible; I've had so much non-factory work done on that. I'm at the top of my car game I don't think there is another car as hot as this in the UK."

Like his new cars Westwood is equally enthusiastic about his latest album. Where others falter when it comes to self-promotion, Westwood is a master. You set them up and he'll knock 'um dead. "All my albums have sold well – we've always gone gold – but with this one I'm looking to elevate the game. The mix is real smooth, something you can just bump in your ride, something you can listen to in your crib, something you can roll back the carpet and put the furniture to the side and have a party to. It a great album, a lot of great reggae on there, a lot of very hot hip hop and a bit of smooth R'n'B. Basically its heavy, I'm really proud of this album, very, very proud." Exactly!