16 and Counting West Coast Pioneer Too Short Returns with a Vengeance

By Davey D

Todd Shaw aka Too Short is a Hip Hop pioneer and the Godfather of West Coast Hip Hop. His involvement in Hip Hop dates back to the late 70s when he first started busting rhymes for fun. His first recordings came about in the early 80s when he started making customized tapes for local dope dealers and players in his native East Oakland.

Because Short is so down to earth, unassuming and fairly accessible, its easy to forget just how important he is to the development of Hip Hop. There are many artists and Hip Hop movements that were born or influenced by Too Short. Because he has never ever rolled around with a phalanx of bodyguards, adorned bullet proof vests or sported crazy amounts of bling, it's easy to forget Short's OG status both as a Hip Hop pioneer as well as someone who has come to epitomize the gamesmanship and hustle mentality of Oakland's streets.

It’s like this when Too Short is around, there's instant respect. At age 40 and 16 albums deep with damn near all of them going gold or platinum, one has to sit back and admire how Short has consistently managed to stay relevant year after year.

In a recent interview we talked to Short about turning 40 and why he decided to keep the gray in his beard and openly show it off. He says it's important that people see that Hip Hop is grown

up and can still be relevant and that it's not just something little kids do. He said that when he turns 45 hell still be making records and will gladly admit to his age.

In our interview Too Short talked about the importance of passing down wisdom and knowledge to the younger generation. He wants them to build off the legacy of those who came before them, not reinvent the wheel. Dozens of youngsters sat around Too Short on his recent visit to the East Oakland's Youth Uprising Center and listened intensely as he laid down the blueprint and dispense time tested wisdom of how one should go about conducting their business in the treacherous arena known as the music business.

Whereas most artists have gotten ripped off and cheated because of shady record executives and lopsided sharecropper-like contracts, such has never been the case with Too Short. Its him, not Russell Simmons or the guys from Wu-Tang who invented the independent rap game. Its Short that first ran around selling tapes and records from the trunk of his car. Were talking 1982-83. Prior to that Short made his mark alongside his rap partner Freddy B selling customized tapes on the back of AC Transit buses at a time when they were terrorized by the infamous AC Mob gang.

During the talk, Short emphasized to the youngsters the importance of ownership. He told the crowd that folks should be finding ways to make money off the Hyphy Movement and not to let big companies who are now showing an interest in the Bay Area to be the only ones to profit. be the only ones to profit. He talked to the folks about the legacy of Bay artists being entrepreneurs and that he expects the young cats coming up in the current Hyphy movement to Go Dumb in their dance moves and Go Smart when it comes to making money and capitalizing off this culture they helped create. This was a point that Short underscored when we did our interview. He talked about history of Bay cats getting their hustle and getting their money right.

It was Short who first put together a formidable all-star crew known as the Dangerous Crew, which included well known West Coast artists like Spice One and Rapping 4Tay. It was Short who first came out and decided to keep his West Coast accent and mannerisms intact while recording records. Unlike so many other early artists outside of the Big Apple who were fascinated and obsessed with New York, Short clearly understood and operated from the standpoint that Hip Hop culture should always be a reflection of the musical traditions. This meant he rapped over live instruments. His music of choice was bass driven funk.

He talked about pimping, which was a dominate part of street culture in Oakland. He cursed on records to get his point across and to evoke reaction. And years before artists like 2Pac came along and kept us on our toes by offering conflicting messages of empowerment on one song and gangsterism on another, Short was doing that as far back as 1983 when he recorded one of Hip Hops first songs that dealt with the emerging crack epidemic like Girl, That's Your Life alongside overtly misogynistic songs Invasion of the Flat Booty Bitches.

Shorts trademark, laid back slow rolling rhyme flow and subject matter led to him catching lots of criticism and hate in New York, with more then a few highly visible artists including most recently KRS-One declaring him Not Hip Hop. At the same time, Short not only was the face of the West Coast rap movement he also garnered legions of fans throughout the South. In fact when you talk to pioneering artists from the South, they will often point to Short as their inspiration. More then a few artists including Lil Jon got their first big break through Too Short.

As for the New York criticism, many have overlooked that Short has done more in NY and made major inroads than those who like to talk bad about him. For example, he's been on two or three Jay-Z albums and vice versa. He's done joints with DJ Premier, Lil Kim, Erick Sermon, P-Diddy and Biggie to name a few. Many artists from NY who toured with him as headliners found themselves having to suddenly open up for Short especially when the tour was hitting all the Southern cities. They often discovered to their surprise that he was the main draw and not them

to sold out shows. We won"t even go into great detail about what he meant to Oakland and the Bay Area. Long before the Bay had a Hyphy Movement or even cats riding hard for artists like 2Pac. Everybody rode for Too Short. Like Hip Hop founding fathers Afrika Bambaataa and Kool Herc, Short was one of those unique individuals who's charisma enabled him to bring rivals cliques and factions together to end feuds.

In this interview we did with Too Short we cover a lot of ground. We talked about the West Coast's early days in Hip Hop and the important role Funk Music played in terms of establishing the sound and artist's approach toward music. Too Short talked about musicianship and how he along with many other west coast acts played in high school bands and how those skill sets were reflected in their recordings.

We talked about the important role artists like 2Pac, E-40, Richie Rich, Mac Dre and numerous others have played in the development of Bay Area Hip Hop. We also talked about the important role the so called backpack cats like Hiero, Zion I and Blackalicious and Living Legends have played in elevating West Coast Hip Hop and how their influence is felt and reflected in the current Hyphy Movement in terms of the lyrical prowess brought to the table by artists like Mista F.A.B.

We also talked for a long time about the influence New York had on the West Coast Hip Hop and what it didn"t influence. Short talked about how he was inspired by the pimp player mentality of Spoonie Gee and how artists like Jimmy Spicer were heroes to him and other local cats in Oakland while not getting their just due in New York.

Peep the Too Short Interview Here:

http://www.odeo.com/audio/1050275/view

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