Keeping It True School with Hip Hop Pioneer Monie Love - Interview by Tony Muhammad

In the beginning of January UAN had the distinct honor and pleasure of meeting with London-born Hip Hop pioneer Monie Love at The Marlin Hotel in South Beach for a fun filled True School Party, featuring super dope DJ and producer 9th Wonder on the 1s and 2s, where we reminisced while jamming to 80s and 90s Hip Hop and R"N"B hits all night long. Without question, Monie has come a long way since back in the late 80s and early 90s when she hooked up first with the Native Tongues Crew and later with legendary producer Marley Marl, producing vibrantly spunky jams that were guaranteed to "hype up the party."

At age 36 and being the mother of three children, the Monie of today is a much more mature Monie, not only on a personal level but with her level of consciousness of how the industry works, landing work as a DJ on an MTV game show in the 90s and as a morning show radio personality in Philadelphia in recent years. This interview was very timely as it came two weeks after Clear Channel 100.3 and Monie had a "falling out." It is speculated throughout the industry that this was actually an act of termination in response to an on-air argument Monie had with Young Jeezy just weeks prior.

It is believed that the incident ruined some "back door" payola (pay to play) agreement between Jeezy's label or management and the radio station. With the overall message of Nas" new album sparking endless debates among Hip Hoppers everywhere, it found itself in a big way at the radio station that morning. What was supposed to be a discussion promoting Jeezy's new album turned into a debate about whether or not "HIP HOP IS DEAD" and whether or not Nas truly has "street credibility." Based on the manner in which Jeezy interacted with Monie on the air, you could tell that he did not have a good idea who she was. Throughout the interview, Jeezy continuously disrespected her; first by questioning her background (being from England) in relation to Hip Hop and second by constantly interrupting her when she was about to respond to his statements. After Monie lashed out at Jeezy by explaining why she felt that "HIP HOP IS DEAD," Jeezy walked out of the station (Peep the discussion on Odeo.com for yourselves).

Beforehand, Monie and I agreed that the interview was not going to be focused on this incident that has had Hip Hoppers talking all over the World Wide Web through e-mails, blogs and message boards. Yet, if you pay close attention to Monie's commentary she makes some very strong general statements about Hip Hop artists of today that truly do not have knowledge of Hip Hop's history (probably referring to Jeezy) and how commercial (terrestrial) radio and media has played a strong role in dividing the Hip Hop generation of 15 years ago from the Hip Hop

generation of today. This is a very powerful and emotion filled one and one that is sure to get Hip Hop fans all over talking. Next month, look out for another powerful interview with co-founder of True School Corp., 9th Wonder of Little Brother. For now, enjoy this exclusive piece:

UAN: What is True School Corp. and how are you involved with it?

Monie Love: True School is an organization put together by several college alumni and one of them being the youngest set of alumni which is 9th Wonder, producer and DJ and member of the group Little Brother. I have been a member of the organization for about a year exactly and what the true school movement is about is creating a venue, whether it is a place to go, station to listen to, music to listen to for the non-represented Hip Hop fans which I would say range from about 23 and up. Many of them really don"t feel represented, especially 25 and up. Many of them really don"t feel like going out.

I love Hip Hop and I listen to it in my car and in my house, but I feel like I can"t go listen to it in a club because I"m going to find myself fighting to get in the club. So, what we are trying to do is create a venue and a forum for them to let them know that there is an audience out there that is just like you and we need to represent ourselves and we need to create venues to go out and party. We need to create stations and music formats that we can listen to that play the kind of things that we want to hear. It's crazy to me how you can find 15 and 16 year old kids wearing a Led Zeppelin t-shirt and knowing the lyrics to a Rolling Stones song. That doesn"t happen in Hip Hop. It doesn"t happen because we don"t carry our own traditions, which True School Corp. is definitely an organization interested in carrying on tradition and passing it down.

UAN: I heard Chuck D once say that many in the older generation have compromised planting little seeds of knowledge on the youth in exchange for "looking good." Would you agree with this view?

Monie Love: Absolutely and wholeheartedly! You know, speaking for myself, I do not compromise.

UAN: We know that for a fact!

Monie Love: I do not compromise, but in general for my generation a lot of us do compromise. We are so fixed on remaining in the 18 to 34 bracket or even younger that we end up not focusing much on the 34 end of it. Many of us are paying much more attention to the 13 or 14 year old age bracket and do not realize that it is not our audience and they aren''t really interested. It's crazy that a lot of the kids are fixed on a lot of the snap dancing and all of that, but you put on some "boom bap" sh*t on, they do not know what to do. They do not know how to dance to it. It's the craziest thing to watch because it's like "Oh my God!" This came out before the snapping. The "boom bap" came first. It just bugs me out how these little white kids know about Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones and Def Leopard.

UAN: Well, a lot of the young white kids now know about the history of Hip Hop.

Monie Love: That's ludicrous to me and we are partly … I wouldn''t say that we are 100 percent to blame because we are not. Radio has given a lot to Hip Hop and taken away from Hip Hop because radio has assumed the position of dictating what's "in," what you should be listening to now, what is "old school" and what is "too old." Radio does that. TV does that. TV video shows do this. Media does it in general. Media does this by eliminating talent; creating hierarchy within Hip Hop … you could go as far back as Ed Lover not doing Yo! MTV Raps anymore. (Yo! MTV Raps had its final episode in August 1995)

UAN: I remember at one point MTV moving the show (Yo! MTV Raps) at some crazy hour in the middle of the night and Ed Lover and his partner Dr. Dre looked angry and were actually saying some things real negative things about MTV, about how messed up they were being treated.

Monie Love: Yeah, that was towards the end. You can even bring it up to speed more recently with BET getting rid of AJ and Free. They were the landmark of 106 & Park. Basically, media has this real fickle attitude towards Hip Hop and as far as it being on TV and on radio; they determine that someone is too old to be delivering it anymore. There's no too old! It's ours and it belongs to us! So we can be old, freakin'' grand parents, which some of us are. Like the set before me, they''re now grandparents. It's ours and it belongs to us and it will be ours until we die therefore there is no better messenger for its history to come from than from us. The stories of old Hip Hop shows, of when this one got on stage and this one was at the park jams … because it all brings it up to speed. Everyone and everything has a history. You can not act like it doesn''t exist because then you''ll just sit there and ask, "Well, where did Hip Hop come from?"

UAN: Right! …. Uuummm … RUN DMC? (Laughs)

Monie Love: You know what I"m saying? … And yes, you know, right! But a lot of these kids can"t even sing a RUN DMC song from start to finish. It's ridiculous and it's stupid and it partly has to do with how media handles Hip Hop and promotes it like some disposable music form.

UAN: I remember back in the day when MTV had segments called "Closet Classics" and they would show TV broadcasted performances by Rock artists from the 60s and 70s. Even though kids that were into hard Rock in the 80s didn"t really grow up with Black Sabbath, yet and still many of them were very quick to identify a personality such as Ozzy Osborne as "God."

Monie Love: That's exactly what I"m talking about. Now, the other end of the responsibility comes from us, myself, Chuck, Flav, Ed Lover … you name it! It is partly our responsibility to do as Nas says on the Hip Hop is Dead album. On one of the tracks, he talks about carrying on tradition. We have to do that! It is our responsibility to do that. We have not been doing that! So, partly what is happening to some of the youth who are not Hip Hop fans … and you can tell someone who is making music today and put records out and are not Hip Hop fans … and the easiest ways to detect one of these people is if they have absolutely no clue of people who came before them. And not just knowing the obvious cuts it. Everyone pretty much knows about RUN DMC, Doug E. Fresh and Slick Rick. That's not hard. When you start getting into Sweet Tee and Jazzy Joyce …

UAN: Well, let's take it back to Kool Herc and Bambaataa.

Monie Love: You know what I"m saying? Let's talk about Diamond D, Boot Camp Click … all of these people. You need to know this kind of stuff! If you don"t know this kind of stuff then you"re not really a fan and if you are not a fan, then what the f*ck are you making Hip Hop music for?

UAN: Generally what artists today would you consider to be "True School?" What is the definition of "True School?"

Monie Love: Everything that you do not hear on terrestrial radio!

UAN: Well, what about someone like say a Busta Rhymes who is still trying to maintain the appeal of the younger audience? And some may argue that he has gotten legally in trouble for trying to lead the particular lifestyle he is now rhyming about. For instance, on his most recent album, on certain songs he mentions how he is a crack dealer. How do you view this?

Monie Love: Actually, Busta had his stint with that and was constantly getting into trouble as a young kid. Young kids find themselves sometimes walking a path that they have no business walking along and can get in all sorts of trouble. Some get saved, others don"t. Busta got saved through family and friends, through people that loved him and his group Leaders of the New School … But, I can tell you that Busta did have his stint of walking the wrong path totally.

UAN: So what would you say about the content of the album?

Monie Love: I love Busta's album. Busta is able to mix it up. In listening to that album you can tell that he is able to bridge the gap with the youth today without artistically selling out where the hell he comes from. In order to do that all you have to do is listen to track number 8 which is a cut with him and Q-Tip.

UAN: What are your views of what may possibly be the future face of MTV as far as Hip Hop goes – the more abstract and content filled underground genre of artists?

Monie Love: I totally agree that there is a tremendous amount of talent out there that has not been tapped into yet. They are the emcees of the future and they are the people that are going to carry on Hip Hop for years to come. I would like to think that they would learn from their predecessors as far as … It doesn"t make sense saying anything if no one is going to hear it. If you make things so tremendously difficult to understand and you spend time constantly only within your own ciphers that have the same mental orgasmic intensions with their lyrical content people outside of your circle aren"t going to listen to you. You need to broaden what you say in order to bring some people in and understand what you are doing.

UAN: Right now, for True Schoolers, what is the best way to bridge the gap between generations?

Monie Love: By carrying on tradition, by passing the stories down, by creating an environment that people can get to their 30s and not think "Oh well, I need to hang Hip Hop up now. There's nowhere for me to go and nothing for me to listen to." That's crap! There is an entire legacy of music, whether it is R"N"B or Hip Hop or whatever. There is a legacy of music that needs not be forgotten and therefore tradition can be carried on into the following generation. Those Hip Hop heads that are saying things that are so intricate and so crazy and so deep that the masses outside of them don"t understand, broaden your horizons, flow in a manner that you can invite others from the outside and what we are doing right now as the older heads is we are trying to create an environment that will set the tone so that when your sh*t comes out and your sh*t has had its run and your sh*t is now old, there is an environment for your sh*t to continue being heard!

For more info on True School Corp, visit www.trueschoolcorp.com

*Sources - http://www.uannetwork.com and http://www.daveyd.com