

Hip-Hop Gets Personal in ‘Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 15, 2011 - 12:45pm

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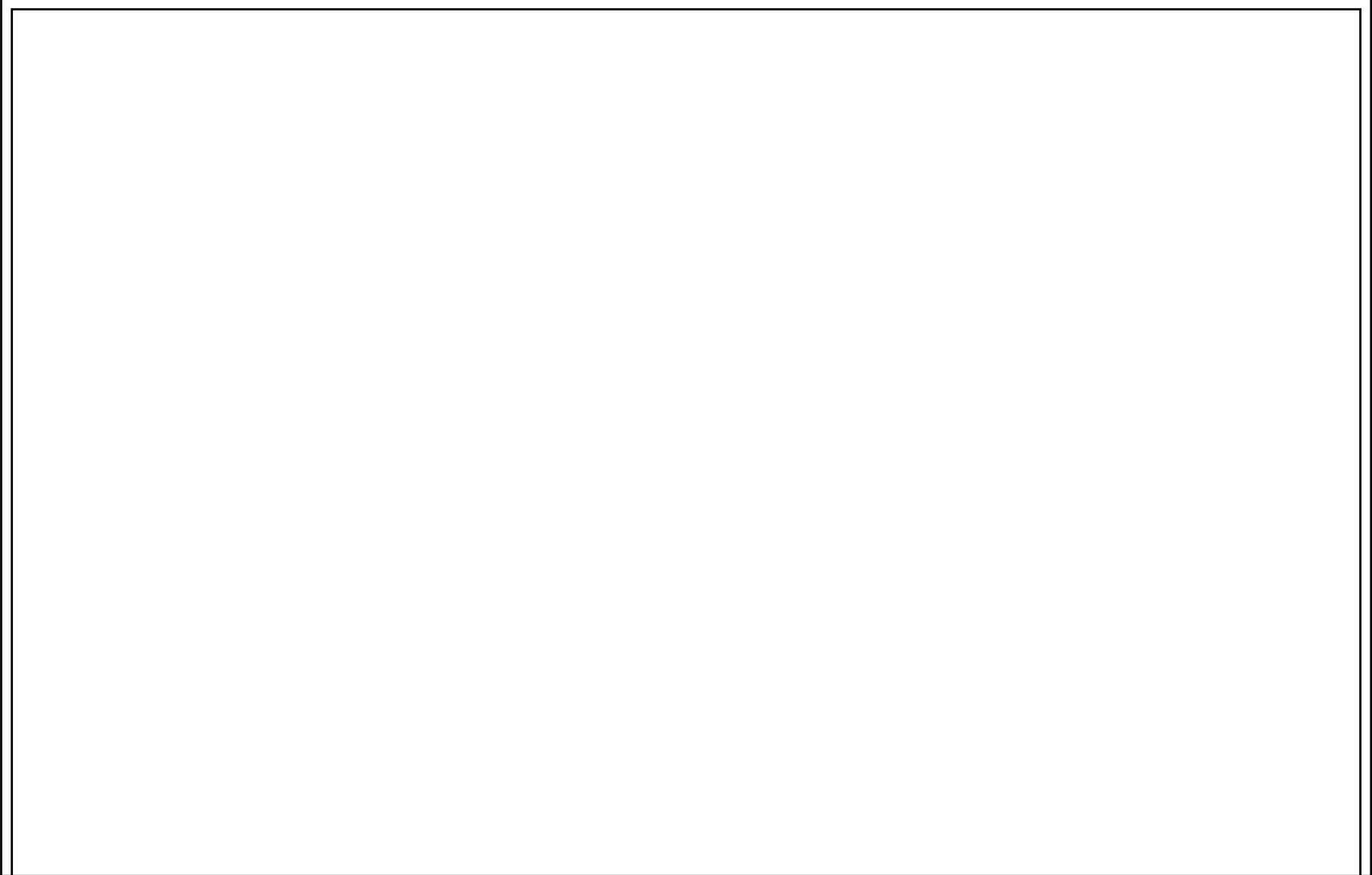


CHICAGO – Fueling his passion for hip-hop, director Michael Rapaport premieres his new documentary, “Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest”. Proving that show biz never changes despite the category, this is a backstage look at the triumphs, misunderstandings, fall and rise again of the rap group “A Tribe Called Quest.”

It all comes down to the human beings trying to create in a cooperative, and basically this document exposes a brotherhood gone a bit sour, given the trappings and distractions of the very fame they sought to create. For hip-hop neophytes, this is an essential chronicle of the time, when A Tribe Called Quest rocketed to the top of their game, turning rap on its ear with a bold direction. For fans and genre admirers, it gets inside the group members themselves as they struggle to make sense of it all, including the relationships that have been left behind.

Q-Tip (Kameel Ibn John Fareed) and Phife Dawg (Malik Taylor) were childhood friends from Queens, New York. The rhythms and pure musicality of the streets were their lure, and it was Q-Tip who convinced his friend Phife to join in with the MC/DJ street phenomenon. Teaming with DJ Ali Shaheed Muhammad and Jarobi White (who left after the first album but returned later), “A Tribe Called Quest” was born. The name of the band was suggested by the “Jungle Brothers,” a group that went to the same high school as Phife and Q-Tip.

On the strength of a five song demo, ATCQ eventually signed with Jive Records. Several classic albums followed, including “People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm,” “The Low End Theory,” “Midnight Marauders” and “Beats Rhymes & Life”. With their mix of jazzy loops, characteristic lyrical content and connection to the “Native Tongues” movement, ATCQ touched a nerve in the emerging art form and obtained mega-success.





Phife Dawg, Q-Tip and Jarobi White in Concert from ‘Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest’

Photo credit: © Sony Pictures Classic

But with that success came the backlash. Citing personal and record label issues, the group split after 1998’s “Love Movement.” The documentary traces the roots of A Tribe Called Quest, the success and the split. ATCQ has since reformed for various tours post the millennium, and their catalog continues to be a direct inspiration for the evolution of hip hop artists.

In an [interview with HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com), [15] director Michael Rapaport physically stood up to describe the energy that Phife and Q-Tip would generate during on of their “ask-and-answer” signature raps. Rapaport is a real fan, reaching back into his New York City roots as an urban kid who loved the sounds coming from his brothers from Queens. He did the film out of true love, wanting to give ATCQ the same treatment as their classic rock forebears.

The style of the film is electric, using the beats and samples from the group as a jumping off point for the visual acuity. The credit sequence alone is a phantasmagoric montage, and the clips of the band’s early days (in 1980s/early ‘90s video) add to the almost dream-like quality of the rise and success. ATCQ’s music videos were pioneering as well, does anyone remember “Yo! MTV Raps”? Then you’ll love the journey back there.

Rapaport makes sure that contemporary and past hip-hop stars pay their respects to ATCQ. Interviews with Common, De La Soul, Ludacris, Adam Horovitz and others who were influenced or worked with the group punctuate the story nicely. A highlight is the time capsule of the third album, “Midnight Marauders,” which featured as album art a creative line-up of a veritable who’s who of hip hop, circa 1993. It’s fascinating as history as well, because the emerging 1990s scene had been underground in the late 1970s through the ‘80s.

The personal issues between the band members emerges as well, and that caused some controversy before the film was released. Q-Tip tweeted that he felt slighted in the film, given the emphasis on Phife Dawg and his illness. Phife got the gift of a kidney from his wife, and the process toward that inevitability brings out the nervy nature of the relationship between the old friends and rap gods. The conflict was settled when Q-Tip saw the final edit, and even in Phife’s interview with HollywoodChicago.com, it seemed like there was no overt animosity.



Director Michael Rapaport of 'Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest'

Photo Credit: © Sony Pictures Classic

The urban art of hip-hop brings a different attitude and background to the typical show business story. But if there is one thing that this documentary proves, that despite the different planet-like nature of the hip hop beast, the relationships, slights and misunderstandings of a famous music group remain the same. As what "he said," and "they said" and back-and-forth it goes, longtime friends and creative companions are like longtime lovers...they know what gets under the skin.

Even someone with no knowledge of hip hop can enjoy this documentary, just for the sheer energy of the movement. If you lived through the era but didn't know, you will be astounded on what was going on. And if you were there, all the better.

"Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest" has a limited release in Chicago and elsewhere July 15th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring interviews with group members Q-Tip (Kameel Ibn John Fareed), Phife Dawg (Malik Taylor), DJ Ali Shaheed Muhammad and Jarobi White, plus Mary J. Bilge, Common, De La Soul, Mos Def, Ludacris and Adam Horowitz. Directed by Michael Rapaport. Rated "R." [Click here](#) [15] for the HollywoodChicago.com interview with Phife Dawg and director Michael Rapaport.



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