

STRAIGHT  
FROM THE  
**SOUL**  
THE DE LA INTERVIEW  
BY JOEL MARASIGAN



I didn't want to believe the offer e-mailed to me. De La Soul was performing on the "Late Late Show" and the studio was opening doors to press. I asked for my slot—and got it. It was way too easy. I kept thinking I'd get to some hotel conference room and see a lone chair in front of a speakerphone. The day of the interview I invited a friend to tag along—actually he drove my ass there. He's known for being late, but it was De La; he'd never be late for that. We were an hour late. Fortunately, Mase missed the plane out of New York. Lady Luck threw me a bone. We checked in at the hotel and set up my laptop in a small, decorated room where I could do the interview. The hotel manager gave me that "are-you-the-guy?" look, did his introductions and said, "Come on." There was better spot to do this thing. We went up to the fifth floor and into a hotel room where Posdnous and Trugoy were just wrapping up some grub. Damn. I love Lady Luck.

ZNR: What's the most fun you've had together as a group?

Trugoy: Doing the first album. We wanted to be in the studio every day. We were kids goofing around. Back then we didn't have creative interferences like family or children. When we were in the studio from midnight to 8 a.m., we were working the whole time. Now I have to see if I can fit studio time into my schedule. But when we finally get into the studio, it's just as fun and creative as it was.

ZNR: Does anything break your creativity?

Posdnous: The biggest thing for me is being at home. It's not that my kids are a distraction, but I want to gravitate to what they are doing.

ZNR: Is there anything you've done that, in retrospect, you shouldn't have?

Trugoy: I don't think there was anything that we shouldn't have done. It was an exciting. I think we made some of best decisions then on things to do. Although we did have ideas on direction—we wanted to go in the opposite direction but we ran with it anyway. We didn't like the album cover we went with it the idea of design. We were hangin' around with the Jungle Brothers and q-tip then. Then had a management company called rythem records and we decided not to go with them. We went with our gut feelings and I think, not to say it was perfect, but it might have been perfect at that time. The decisions that we made were not regretful in anyway.

ZNR: You guys are so down to earth. Does it ever hit you that you are De La Soul?

Posdnous: The other day in New York there were two kids who pulled up as I was walking. I was thinking to myself, "What do they want?" I realized it was the De La Soul thing. Sometimes I forget. A lot of the things we did on our

albums were almost purely for fun. How could a skit where we were acting silly mean so much to someone 10 years later? It's weird.

ZNR: You've been in the industry for 15 years and you're talking to kids half your age. How does your music relate to them?

Trugoy: We don't purposefully make an album for those kids. We'd like to introduce ourselves to them, but sometimes we don't because De La is more mature. It may not be what my daughter likes to hear. I think kids get hooked on our earlier stuff. I think we have a fan base who understands where we're coming from, knows what we're talking about, and understands what we're saying. It's kinda cool to have fans who will be here regardless.

ZNR: I was reading in the paper that 30 is the new 20. That makes you 25. Will you ever grow up?

Posdnous: I think we have. We're responsible. Just because we're getting older doesn't mean we shouldn't be a part of hip hop. I dislike seeing people abandon hip hop 'cause they think it isn't for them anymore. Hip hop is for you if you want to be a part of it. It's ridiculous to think you have to be into stuff like R&B when you get older.

ZNR: What responsibilities do you have as a hip hop artist?

Posdnous: Be true to yourself and who you are. In some cases it might be bad but at least you are being true. For me it's not so hard to understand. We learned from Afrika Bambaataa and the Kool Hercs and the furious fives and the

treacherous threes and what have you. We took all that in but still created something different. I couldn't say what Fresh Prince did wasn't hip hop. He was from a middle-class area, and he wasn't trying to be something else. I think you should talk about your life situations. Hip hop can be anything as long as you're doing it from your heart.

Trugoy: At the same time, an artist does a disservice when he doesn't show the other side of his life. He does a disservice to hip hop's growth, understanding and respect when he doesn't talk about things like attending college and only talks about his the struggle in the hood. He might not talk about how he loves his grandparents or important things in his life. I think he does a disservice when he only talks about one message—he is only being true to one of his selves. And vice versa, I'd like to hear all those conscious rappers talk about all the mischief they've done. Some of the artists out there who seem so positive and so in love with black women are out there cheating. Let's really be true to ourselves. That will let hip hop grow.

ZNR: Do you know any artists who have done this?

Posdnous: De La Soul.

Trugoy: Tupac. He talked about his struggles and his successes. He talked about being a thug and loving his mother. When an artist isn't afraid to speak his heart and soul, you will see excellence and greatness in whatever he does. If he only shows one side and hides the other three, he's cheating us.

ZNR: You spoke at New York University.

Posdnous: It's a series the University does. People in the industry talk about their lives and students ask questions. It was great. There were people of all colors and all genders listening to what we were saying and writing information down.

Trugoy: The class was called "Tomorrow's Hit Makers" and it was filled with kids who wanted to be in the industry.

Is there still something that still excites you about music?

Trugoy: For me personally and from the aspect of going to a show to experience something and going to a show to feel special as an attendee isn't really there for me. I think that so many people don't go to a show to enjoy it—they go to be down. It's cool when a person feels like they have that talent and they want to do it...they want to experience writing a rhyme or what have you. But I think it's been made too easy to feel like you could be the next star opposed to the idea that you could enjoy this art form.

What's messed up the game and made it not special is the idea that anyone can be a rapper and that's not the case I think it's something that you have to have a love for first. That's what's messed up the stage from an audience standpoint.

ZNR: How much does each of you contribute to the whole?

Trugoy: For the most part, Pos gets 80 percent of it done. Mase and I might cover the other part. Everyone gives their all but it might not be as

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much as the next person. We don't want to hand out job descriptions because without them any one of us can take us where we need to go.

2NR: A lot of groups come together and then break off to do solo projects, but De La is one of the few groups that stayed whole.

Trugoy: There's a feeling; there's a magic; there's a high that happens when we're with one another making music. I wouldn't get that high—I'd be chasing it for the rest of my life—with two other members or by myself. In order to get that high, that fix, that satisfaction, I need to be smoking with these two right here. There's no other way to enjoy it. There is no other way. There was no agenda to come in and consider a solo career. All we know is each other. All we know is how to feed off each others energy. At one time there was a fourth member, Prince Paul, who we fed off. He kind of like raised us and conditioned us to create that energy between the three of us. When it came time he sat back and had other things to do but let us know that we had the aura of energy that we needed.

2NR: You've been hanging out since you were kids, so you are basically brothers.

Trugoy: Basically. We've known each other since junior high—since seventh or eighth grade. You know there might be times when Mase does something we don't like or I do something that Pos doesn't agree with, but what are you gonna do? Stop this friendship? Stop all the great things we do with one another over that?

2NR: What made you want to be in music?

Trugoy: For me it was about the samples like Buffalo Gals and the presidential impeachment snare.

Posdnous: For me it was the vibe and the culture.

2NR: What are your three rules of business?

Trugoy: Rule number one, and not in a cocky point of view, everyone works for you. If you didn't create the sound, these people wouldn't have jobs. You should never feel leery of asking questions. BMI and ASCAP work for you.

Posdnous: There are too many rules of business.

2NR: What was your favorite car before you made it? And now?

Trugoy: Mine was a Volkswagen Golf. I saw Puffy driving a white one back in '87. I was like, "Damn! I have to get one." Now I think the hottest car on the market is the BMW 740.

2NR: What advice would you give an up and coming artist?

Posdnous: Find something in yourself that is a tad-bit different. Don't be afraid to read your contract. Don't be afraid to be part of business. Don't ask your manager to tell you what it means. It'll take a while to go through that white paper with black ink, but if you sign something you could be stuck in it for 5 or 10 years. It really pays to read.

Trugoy: Don't be afraid to step outside your circle. Everyone around you will say the song is hot. But you might be thinking it's kinda wack.

Posdnous: Get away from all the "yes" men. It's great when you have a group of honest people around you. When someone says every song is bangin', there's a problem because everything ain't bangin'.

2NR: Is there anything you'd want to do over?

Trugoy: Yes. I wouldn't of handed over the *Bionix* masters to Tommy Boy. That's the only thing I'd want to do over.

Posdnous: Instead of selling it we should have just let the label fall and then we would have ended up with it.

Trugoy: We were kind of tricked into releasing *Bionix*. We knew the label was going to go under. We were tricked into believing Tommy Boy was going to live a long life. The album was done to basically make some quick cash.

Posdnous: Tommy Boy doesn't do rap anymore. The company couldn't pay its \$40-something million debt to Warner Brothers, the parent company. So Warner Brothers took the masters—it took us, it took Prince Paul, Bambaataa, Queen Latifah—anyone who had existing masters. It auctioned the masters to sibling companies. Tommy Boy now focuses on dance music. We were either going to be at Warner or Electra. We realized we couldn't be at Electra because it didn't want to reproduce *Bionix* and the label wanted us to come up with an album in four months. Atlantic wanted us but its roster was too big, De La would have gotten lost in the shuffle. With all the stuff going on at Warner we would have

been sitting on the shelf. We asked to be let go. Tom at Warner Brothers didn't want to let us go, but as a fan, he knew if he didn't let us go he wouldn't be hearing any more music from us at Warner Brothers. So he let us go.

Sounds like a trading card game.

Trugoy: Pretty much. I think we traded the right cards to be where we want to go. I think Sanctuary Records and Beyonce Knowles' dad is going to be a good relationship.

2NR: If you wanted to make a series of pop hits, which artists would you use?

Trugoy: We joked around about making a pop record. When we did "Baby, baby, baby, baby," it was a joke.

Posdnous: "Me, Myself, and I" was a joke.

Trugoy: Making a pop record wouldn't work for us.

2NR: Maybe you should just make more jokes.

Trugoy: Yeah. Basically go into the studio and not give a damn. Hopefully we'll go quadruple platinum.

2NR: When did you start making money?

Trugoy: We started doing business—hiring and firing—when we first went on the Nitro tour with LL Cool J, Slick Rick, EPMD and NWA. This was back in '89. That's when we understood the concept of salaries, jobs and things like that. Before that it was more like, "I'm going to the store and buying me some kicks. The label just gave us a \$6,000 check; let's go spend it."

2NR: What were some of the jobs you had before you made it?

Pos and Trugoy: Oh shit. Burger King. I worked stock at a clothing store in the mall. Custodial work. A gas station attendant.

2NR: The key to making it?

Posdnous: No fear.

An hour later the manager came in and asked us to wrap it up. I wrapped it up quick because I would have killed myself if I didn't get them to sign my book of hip hop and an album cover. Plus I wanted them to pose for a couple of shots. I got what I came for, thanked them and saved my giddiness for the hallway. Too bad I didn't get Pasemaster Mase.

I got down to the lobby and damn-near bumped into a dude checking in. It was Mase. It really was a great drive home.

*The Grind Date* is available now and features artists Common, Butta Verses and Spike Lee, Flavor Flav, MF Doom and Carl Thomas.

STATS

Posdnous: August 17th, 1969, Leo

Trugoy: Sept 21, 1968, Virgo.

Maseo: March 24, 1970, Aries.

Website: Spitkicker.com