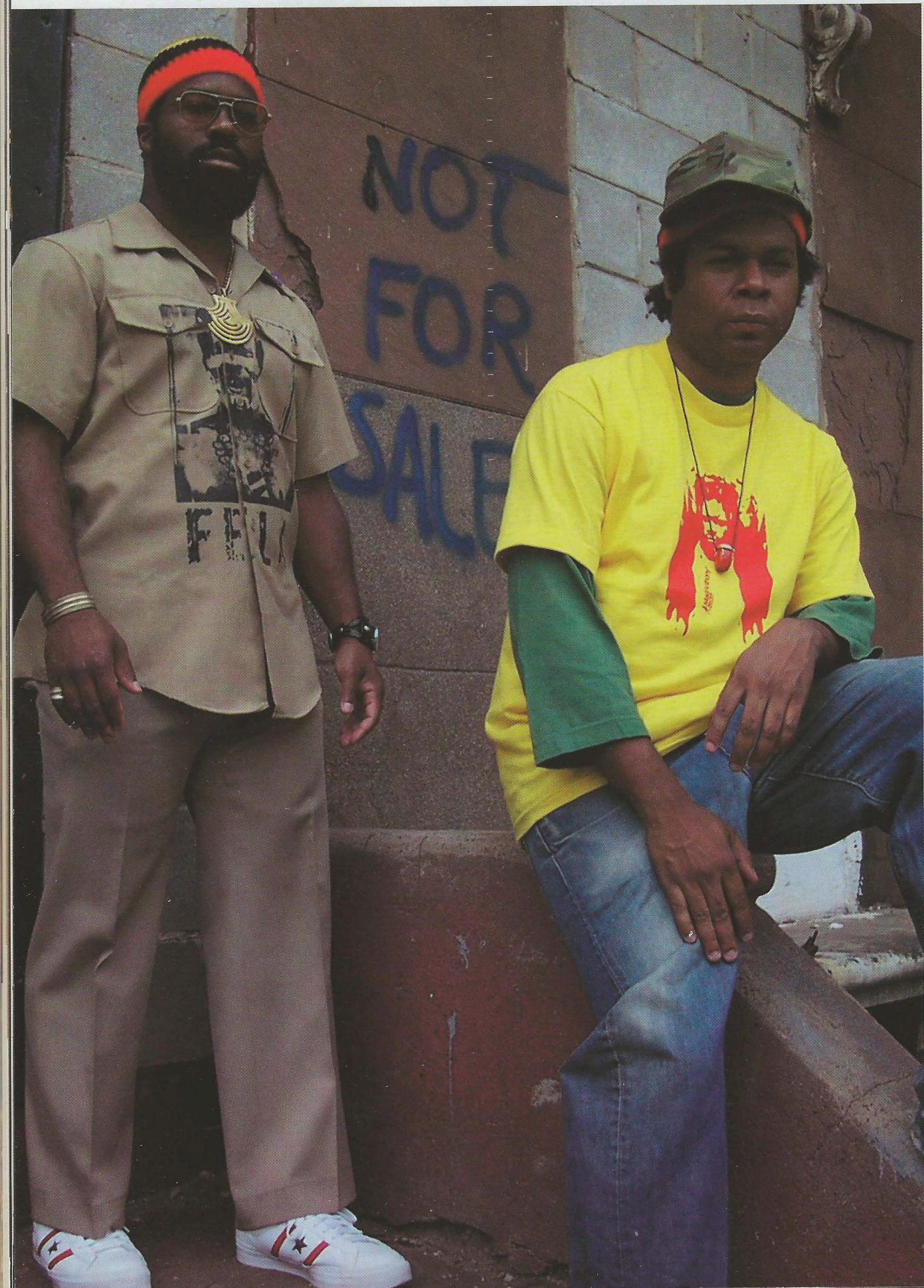


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Champion Soul

Fist Full of Funk

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Andrew
Brown



Malik
Williams

Andrew Brown and Malik Williams make soulful music. On the surface, their spell-binding grooves and lush vocal loops are as light and sensual as a Mediterranean breeze. But on a closer listen, there is something emotionally and spiritually challenging – one might even go so far as to say heretical – looming inches beneath the surface: heretical, not in the religious sense, but in the larger socio-cultural sense.

Working under the moniker of Champion Soul, the duo (who met in Philadelphia during a DJ set at which the then Boston-based Malik was filling in for King Britt) are hardly prudish in their tastes. Their cross-breed of genres – Latin samba, dub, funk and soul, broken beat – and their unique vision – laying a folk-flavored vocal over dub-injected four-four drum programming – points to a quietly revolutionary approach. Quiet because you wouldn't know about the far-flung ingredients unless they told you. Their music ebbs and flows, again with the ticklish familiarity of an ocean-side breeze. But it is a loaded breeze, bearing a contemplative, questioning voice, which addresses music's rich history, the impact of black heritage, and the complex landscape of the human soul.

TRACE: Your studio production is based on the classical foundations of jazz and blues and afro-beat, and incorporates the progressive values of dance.

Malik Williams: We've both been going to clubs for so long – hanging out and listening to electronic music – so that side was always there. But when we started to make music, all these other influences started to come out – all the music we had grown up with.

Andrew Brown: We listened to Marvin Gaye, Roy Ayers – that kind of thing. The jazz influence – the whole soulful end of it – was always there. In high school, it was L.L. Cool J., but also Depeche Mode and Duran Duran.

How do you fuse all of these somewhat disparate influences into a cohesive sound?

MW: Some of it comes from travel, especially with music from Black-American culture. When you travel to Europe, all of the sudden you get a different angle on it. All these people are listening to music you know and grew up with – and they're digging even further than you into it. You start to separate yourself and look at it objectively. You're not restricted by the definition of it.

You're more attached to the feel of it.

AB: We have several different vibes – Latin samba, soul, dub, reggae, and broken beat.

MW: It's also about timing. I don't want to say it's a movement, I don't like that term – but there are people who have been doing this for as long as we have and it's all starting to push into the

forefront. It's a global feeling that's going on.

AB: It's global and it's soulful.

How do you feel about this trend for contemporary artists to reclaim the word jazz?

AB: Know what the problem is: people don't know how to construct a proper groove. They use a sample – an old jazz vocal. They'll cut it up. But, you know, it's like a Billie Holiday sample. I think that's what's watering the whole thing down. It needs to be very authentic. We're programming drumbeats, but we have musicians that come in and play, we have vocalists that come in and sing. So it gives you that real feel.

MW: If somebody takes a sample and it comes out dope, that's fine. Just don't do a cliché. I think we have jazz influences and we're part of that scene. But I would not consider myself a jazz musician. I grew up around jazz music and I've seen the amount of work it takes – I can't claim that. We come from the generation that got into samplers and DJ culture.

What's the London connection?

AB: I've been going – we've been going – to London for years. We've gathered so many friends – people who are in music; people who aren't into the whole scene. Nowadays, we are meeting people such as Attica Blues, IG Culture. Usually our politics are similar, our taste in music, in fashion. I grew up in Philly, but I can still vibe with this guy who grew up in London, even if he has this whack accent – just joking!

It is important for the culture of music to have that level of connection and exchange.

It hasn't fully happened in hip hop.

MW: I think there's a democratic level to it as well. The music industry is so powerful it kind of overshadows everything else. But people with a creative vision give the music room to experiment and through that we can communicate. AB: You have your Angie Stones, your Erykah Badu, from that so-called nu-soul generation. Hopefully we're going to start to see the production of more experimental sounds.

What makes your music specific to NYC?

AB: On our album, we did a dub-reggae type track, but we added a white singer, kind of folksy. Normally, you would think to put a dred' or a nice soulful type singer. But after hearing this woman, I felt the soul within her. She's this quirky, Connecticut chick. When you put her vocals on the track, it takes it somewhere else.

In the best sense of the word, do you see music as a weapon?

MW: We're just trying to open up and make music more free. If that's a weapon, whether it's political or theoretical, then yes.