



RADIO-INACTIVE

The production on “Radio-inactive” is the perfect example of the new style I developed after the release of my first solo album. On the *1988* album, the making of every beat started out with the arduous task of listening to vinyl in search of loops and small pieces of music to sample. Once I found something strong enough to sample, I would chop it up and try to make a beat out of it. It was amazing when I was on a hot streak and finding good loops, but there was no feeling more demoralizing than spending four or five hours listening to records and not finding anything to sample. I felt like I had wasted an entire afternoon listening to a bunch of bullshit. Unfortunately, there was no way around putting the time into listening to records, so everybody who samples just accepts it as a part of the game. I loved making beats but I hated searching for samples, and I was never comfortable with the fact that I was totally at the mercy of the records I collected. Sure, there were guys who could make “something out of nothing” so to speak, but most were only as good as their source material allowed them to be. That being said, my first attempt at making the beat for “Radio-Inactive” was in the same vein as something that would’ve been on *1988*. For a while that was good enough, but eventually a new style that was in my head started to chip away at my satisfaction towards it and I was forced to try a different approach.

The new style I envisioned was characterized by beats that sounded like they had samples in them, but actually didn’t. It would have digital influences, but not be electronic. It would feature live instrumentation, but sound nothing like a band. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with bands per se, but I do think most hip-hop bands are cheesy, especially when they try to play shit that sounds funky. Their hearts are in the right place, but their music usually sounds like a sappy version of The Roots, made by people who put ten times more effort into jamming than into writing songs that are worthy of the jam sessions

themselves. Don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of The Roots, but I hate most of the terrible hip-hop bands they've inspired into existence.

I quickly realized that the path to my new style would be paved by my ability to write music that was as compelling as the music I would normally sample. Writing music wasn't new to me, but it had been a long time since I did anything but sample. I was so far removed from playing that I didn't even have a keyboard to practice with anymore. When I was involved in R&B groups back in high school, we would write all of our own material, but I hadn't used those skills since then. Furthermore, since I had no formal music training I knew it would take a while to get my chops back. This is what I considered the "adventure" aspect of *Adventures in Counter-Culture*, because I couldn't just sit down and write good music—I played, I explored, and I experimented until the material I was playing finally matched the ideas that were in my head. The music that was in my head was useless until I could learn how to play it. This inspired me to get a MIDI keyboard and force myself to sit down at the piano for an hour a day with no real goal other than to play whatever came to mind. The majority of the things I wrote either sucked or didn't fit the vibe of what I was working on, but even when an idea was unusable it still helped me get better at playing. I started getting into the process and eventually wrote something that fit the emotion of what I thought "Radio-Inactive" should sound like. Once I played it, I knew it was right.

When the demo-version of the beat was finished, my friend and fellow musician Tyler came over to record guitar overdubs of the main melody. His recordings were then chopped up into individual notes and loaded into REASON. From there, the process was no different than when I was sampling from vinyl, except this time around the music was my own. To remove the smooth and fluid sound of Tyler's original recordings and add some imperfection, I intentionally played some of the notes off-beat and other notes shorter than their original length. For the first time in the making of *Adventures in Counter-Culture*, I successfully executed the new style that was in my head. To be honest, it wasn't my first attempt. I had previously tried it with strings and drums with

marginal success, but “Radio-Inactive” was definitely the first time that I nailed it. It felt good to be able to make music that played to my original strengths of sampling and chopping, yet added a new dimension of writing. Furthermore, the new style completely removed the concerns about sample clearance that haunted me in the past.

The lyrics to “Radio-Inactive” were inspired by the events that occurred when I was invited to appear on Power 107.5 FM, the largest urban radio station in Columbus, OH.

2005 was a great year for my career and for the local hip-hop scene. In the two years prior, local artists Illogic, Copywrite, SA Smash, and Spitball all released projects that found a national and international audience. RJD2 and I released two widely successful Soul Position projects and toured the United States and Canada, as a duo and separately. Inspired by the success of Soul Position, I completed my debut solo album *1988* and was scheduled to release it in March of 2005 on Rhymesayers Entertainment. To tell the truth, I never envisioned myself as a solo artist and got much more joy out of making music in the group settings that Soul Position and Greenhouse Effect allowed me. However, I knew it was finally time to take a chance and step out on my own.

The buzz for the *1988* record was high, so I wanted to schedule my release party in the largest room available at the time, Little Brother’s. The venue was about 550 capacity, and because of its size, almost no local hip-hop artists had ever played there. The only exception was our 2003 Soul Position show, which didn’t have the best turnout. While the Columbus rock scene had played shows in venues like Little Brother’s for over a decade, the hip-hop scene was just now getting large enough to justify rooms of that size. To make matters worse, underground hip-hop was still a new concept and many of the talent bookers in Columbus didn’t understand what separated us from commercial hip-hop. Hip-hop in their minds was nothing more than gangster rap and the negative images they saw on television. As a result, it wasn’t uncommon for some of them to either blow us off completely or try to charge us an arm and a leg to book hip-hop in their venue. For

us, it was just a room that we felt we deserved to play. To them, we might as well have been asking for their permission to shoot up their club. That was a far cry from what we actually did, but we fought those stereotypes for many years in order to gain access to the clubs and venues we needed to play. From 1999 to 2005, it took a lot of work to get the local venues, press, and record stores to take Columbus hip-hop seriously, and my crew was right at the forefront of that movement. We saw it all back then: doormen that tried to steal our money, clubs that refused to pay us what was promised (even when we packed their club), soundmen that didn't show up but expected to be paid, and even racist club managers. But despite those setbacks, things were looking much better for the 1988 release party. Little Brother's was secured as the location of the show and we were excited. I had an in-store appearance at the Magnolia Thunderpussy record shop on the album's release date and I was also confirmed to appear on the cover of *The Columbus Alive* magazine that week. My Weightless Recordings team and I started promoting the show almost two months in advance because we wanted to make the statement that Columbus hip-hop artists could pack shows and deserved to be in rooms like Little Brother's.

A couple weeks before the show, Illogic's cousin Mischon, said that he could get us an appearance on Power 107.5 FM. He said there was a new segment that focused on local hip-hop. Columbus emcee Copywrite was already a guest on the show and Mischon was also friends with one of the hosts. It sounded like a great idea, but I was hesitant about doing it, mostly because I knew that my music wasn't the kind of thing they would ever play on commercial radio. Despite my initial apprehension, I decided to roll with it. Mischon asked for some music to give the station, so I gave him a copy of my "Boombox" 12-inch that had just come out. After a week had passed, I assumed that nothing would come of it but, lo and behold, Mischon called back and said everything was set. Illogic and I were confirmed to appear on the station the night before my release party to get interviewed, play some of our music, and help promote the show.

Unfortunately, when we got to the radio station it was nothing like what we expected. The main DJ could've cared less about us being there and didn't even greet us. I decided to hang back and wait so we could just get it over with. I got the impression that they felt like they were doing us some sort of favor. I didn't see it that way because it wasn't something that I asked to be a part of to begin with. I didn't consider myself a commercial artist at all. Furthermore, I had no faith in radio and hadn't listened to it almost ten years before we appeared on the show.

Even though the initial greeting was pretty cold, things warmed up when Illogic let them hear his new music. The hosts were crazy about all the new songs he gave from a side project he had with producer Walter Rocktight called "8076" that was more commercial than his usual material. As for my music, I was under the assumption that they had already listened to the "Boombox" single that Mischon had given them and knew what I was about. Unfortunately, I was very wrong. I quickly found out that my invitation to the station was based strictly on the buzz I had built and not because they heard my music or understood what kind of artists I was. This caused a big problem. The DJ who co-hosted the show was a fan and supporter of ours, but the main DJ didn't know who the hell we were. When he finally listened to "Boombox" in his headphones he flat out refused to play it, saying that it, "didn't fit the format." I told him that I knew it didn't fit the format, but that I didn't care, and that he should still play my song. This changed the situation from confusion into a standoff, that went on behind-the-scenes during the station's commercial break, until he finally relented and agreed to play the B-side of the single, "Dead Presidents." He claimed that he was trying to protect me from the callers who would surely diss my song because 'people can be mean' as he described it. I didn't believe any of it.

Thank God he was wrong. After he played "Dead Presidents," listeners started calling the station, giving the song praise and asking him for the artist and track information. It was the complete opposite of what he said would happen, but he never apologized or admitted that he did

me wrong. I played it cool while I was at the radio station, my consolation was the fact that the listeners proved him wrong, but when I got home I was pretty upset. In fact, I was so upset that I sat down and wrote the lyrics for “Radio-Inactive” in one sitting. It was the longest rhyme I had ever written. Despite the radio station’s attempt to slight my music, my release party that weekend drew almost 500 people, which at that point was a record turnout for a Columbus hip-hop show at Little Brother’s. The show featured Spitball, Illogic, and myself as the headliner.

For many artists, getting on the radio is the highest level of achievement and validation, even if they have to compromise their integrity to get there. But having real fans who support me is far more important than being on the radio or television. Those media outlets are cool if they hop aboard what I’m already doing and I don’t have to change, but that shouldn’t be my artistic goal. Doing great music should be the goal. My people don’t care about radio play and commercial success anyway. They just want honest art, and my goal is to give them that, without compromise.

*“They tried to hit me with the same thing that you fell for /
‘make it more commercial Print you probably would sell more’ / But I’m
eating now, so I’m like ‘what the hell for?’ / Telling me to change only
makes me rebel more”*