

download Jeru the Damaja DEEP THOUGHTS



interview by Greg Tate

Conversing with the Damaja in the lower Broadway office of his record company, Payday, I realized Jeru works from even more intelligence than you hear represented on his supremely knowledgeable debut. Rather than break up his stream of consciousness with leading questions, we're gonna present it intact as the musings of a rawboned seer. Since he was sipping on carrot juice when I rolled in, we opened up with a conversation about his dietary habits.
— G.T.

"For about a year-and-a-half I been trying to cut out animal products and stick strictly to fruits, vegetables...keep my mind right so that I can write dope rhymes. All I do is smoke weed. 'Cause you do so much shit that can kill you, and I know I got bad habits, so I limit it. I used to drink everything, but drinking makes me sick to my stomach. We used to be on the road getting ripped and all that, but certain things I just don't do now. Fuck it, I don't need it to survive. What we try to do is not even keep too much food in our crib. It's mostly only a couple of carrots for some juice. We might go out and get a falafel or something, or sauté some vegetables. We might try to eat once a day and drink juice all day."

"My record is not a judgemental record because like the saying goes, 'Him that do can't judge him that don't.' And vice-versa. All I say is, this is what's going on. Because that's what my mother used to do to me. First she used to beat me and stuff. Then it was like, 'This is what the deal is: I'm not going to beat you, I'm just going to show you. So pick this one, or pick that one. It's up to you, and you're going to have to live with it.' That's what she always used to tell me. I'd get into trouble and she'd say, 'You know what you did, so live with it, be a man. You get arrested, I'm not coming to court for you or bailing you out.'"

"My record is all about trying to spread peace and love and harmony and unity, because that's what I'm all about. I'll do shit that people dub negative or whatever, but you can't really say what's negative or positive, because what's negative to somebody might be positive to somebody else. It could be one hundred degrees in this room and two hundred degress in the next room, and you come in here, you might be cold, but is that still not hot? So it's how you perceive things. And my perception of life is just beautiful."

"I grew up in East New York. East New York is like any ghetto anywhere. Ignorance, ignorance. Now I'm downtown in Clinton Hill. I like it there cause it got the pretty honeys and the brothers are not scared of each other."



"My father's a Rasta and shit. When we was little, he used to tell us different things like, how 'You the original man,' and how 'You Jah, and the master of your destiny. All you have to do is take command of the chariot and ride it.' My mother let me know that anything I wanted to do, I could do it. I'd say 'Mom, I want to be an astronaut,' and she'd say 'Go on, be the best astronaut.' Tomorrow, I'd say 'I want to drive a motorcycle,' she'd say, 'Drive the shit out of the motorcycle.' Whatever me or my sister wanted to do she encouraged it to the fullest. Her and my father are really my influences."



"I got into rhyming at the ripe age of 6. They used to bug out because I was a shorty and I'd rhyme and just bug out. As the years went by, it just became second nature. That's why I don't freestyle and stuff because that's all I been doing really, is freestyling. When you rise from private to general, you don't fight on the front lines anymore. You sit in the back. But I'm also trying to tell brothers that freestyle alone don't make it. You have to know how to make good records. Some of the dopest freestylers out, their records are garbage. Premier is the nicest producer because he actually puts himself into you and come up with a beat that's just right for you, for nobody else. He produced Gang Starr's record and mine too, and they don't sound nothing alike."

"There are rappers out there, and there are hip-hoppers. This is the year you'll know who's who because of the process of elimination."

"That song, 'De Bitches,' is a balanced record because I wasn't just talking about the bitches. I was trying to show other females, that this is what brothers see, and don't think its you if its not you. Like Bob Marley said, who the cap fit, let them wear it. We all messed up as people, mentally- and spiritually- impaired. I made 'The Devil's Happy' because the devil is a happy motherfucker man, and what are we doing? That's why I did my record the way I did, because nobody's saying anything, not even the brothers who are supposed to be saying something. Even brothers that claim to be god and all that are not doing things that god would do. They just cold savages. The truth is a lot of this shit makes me sad, but I don't let it get to me."

"It's so many groups I like that are staying true to hip-hop. You know there are rappers out there, and there are hip-hoppers. This is the year you'll know who's who because of the process of elimination. If you're not saying something and your lyrics aren't tangible, forget what you heard — you're just going out. Most lyrics aren't tangible. I can't touch or feel them. To me, they're like cellophane. I see right through 'em. They're floating in the sky. Just a whole lot of mouthing-off with nothing ever being said. And it's wild if you have a voice to say something, to leave even a hundred thousand people with something. That's why I'm doing what's right for me, which is doing this. I'm a hip-hopper. I came up in the era of that shit. Me and Premier only like shit that can make our head bop. Some records only make you do an artificial bop. But certain records just make you bop right off, that break-your-neck type. And that's what hip-hop is, that break-your-neck shit. I like MOP because theyre like a heavy-metal hip-hop group. They talk about some violent shit, but the way they talk about it isn't even like violence on the street, it's just lyrical violence. Violence with skills. Like he said, 'for the cause he'll drop a nigga like drawers.' So I guess for whatever cause, he'll go out. But its not just senseless acts of violence."

"Some lyrics take twenty minutes, some take a day. Like I came up with 'The Prophet' quicker than any of the other rhymes. I was listening to the beat in my crib and I said, this sound like some old superhero shit. Like I'm gonna write about myself. The Prophet is like whoever you are. All those enemies he faces are inside yourself. The whole thing about my lyrics is I want you to see 'em. A whole lot of brothers you can hear their lyrics but you cant see em. I want people to see what I'm talking about. If you can make people see it, words have power power power."

"You know, what's funny is I never thought I'd do a rhyme that was about a story because, back in the day, when I'd do a story rhyme, I thought it was kind of wack. I even thought 'The Prophet' was kind of wack. Then when everybody went 'aaah,' I said, 'What? It's like that?'"

"I try to make everything different man, because everything is so much the same nowadays. Your mind will get you everything you want. I tell brothers, I'm in this position, getting around the world and things, I'm going to say something. Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can just get up and shake his ass. I'm gonna say something that people need to hear even if they don't want to. And I'm going to say it in such a way that they're gonna like it. They're gonna be forced to hear it on the down-low and they ain't even gonna know. The most ignorant of brothers be seeing me on the street and be like, 'Peace, keep doing it.' Because I'm sneaking it in on 'em. I'm hardcore and I'm raw, but I'm still positive. I'm hardcore positive. I'm negative also, but it's a balance of the two. Positive brothers gonna take what's positive, negative brothers gonna take what's negative, but no one can ever say I didn't stand up for what's right in the sense of what's truthful."



Jeru the Damaja, *The Sun Rises In The East*, PayDay/FFRR, 697 124 011-2

While you can't call it a comeback, Jeru The Damaja's debut album *The Sun Rises in the East* represents a return to form for New York hip-hop. Of all the rhyme-soloists to emerge from this quadrant of the galaxy in the last year, Jeru is the one who most came out to deliver the goods. Alongside DJ Premier, he has produced an infectious flowing album—one consistently full of obesely fat tracks skimmed to minimalist perfection by Premier. Dig this: Jeru has topics g. Jeru has themes, my sisters. Jeru has things to say that slice your mind in deeper ways than your average rent-a-rapper will even be able to fathom. Jeru's album redefines hardcore as music with the intellect to challenge gangsta-ism to a duel of funky wits and win.
— G.T.