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The WHOevers

Manipulating Track
Ideas in Cubase Before
Hitting the Studio

by Jacquinn Williams / photos by Stefan Klapko

Chicago hip-hop has never been this smooth. Sorry Kanye, the WHOevers have found that feeling that A Tribe Called Quest imbued and put their own kiss on it. They're confident, "far from the regular" and are focused on making feel-good music to which listeners can bob their heads, as evidenced on the group's debut album *Renovations* and their upcoming mixtape, due out this month.

Like Eminem, the WHOevers, comprised of Jesse Arthur Manaois (J. Arthur) and Lloyd Dotdot (DotKom), defy the stereotype for hip-hop heads. They're not black urban teens spouting off about beating poverty with crack-slinging and back alley beat downs. They're two Filipinos with soul and they've got just enough grit for street cred.

The two met at Northern Illinois University, where J. Arthur used to hang out, and formed a fast friendship rooted in their love for music. "DotKom was always looking for beats, so we exchanged numbers and started working together," he says.

They had instant musical chemistry.

"We grew up on the same sound and we knew what we wanted," shares DotKom.

J. Arthur used to listen to whatever was on the radio, from R&B to hip-hop from the '90s. His parents got him into funk and soul records. He has too many favorite artists to name them all, but makes sure to put it out there that he definitely rocks with James Brown.

Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five are a few of DotKom's top influences, but they both agree that they're big Tribe fans. The two show respect to the superstar group

that most successfully fused jazz and hip-hop in their "Fantastic (Reno)" video. They both wore the bulging eyes Tribe used in their "Bugging Out" video.

Their album starts off sweet with a poetic intro from Jean Greezy and jumps right into "Take a Ride," a fun Spanish-influenced uptempo track that brings to mind the feverish pace of fast cars on lonely highways. All in all, it's a positive project that covers everything from their lyrical prowess, to having a good day to dealing with girls. Some standouts are the horn-laced and drum-punctuated "Spectacular Vernacular" and the chill "Turn it Up."

Working with and supporting the careers of other artist friends - reminiscent of the Boot Camp Click and State Property - are two things that J. Arthur and DotKom are committed to. The WHOevers are connected to a hip-hop collective called the SpeakEasy Rum Runners which include such acts as The Highest Low, The Kitchen, Slimbo Bombay, and the Poynt Blank Crew. They've only performed together once with about 15 of them jamming on stage.

Though you won't find either of them playing the keys or wielding any other instruments, DotKom - who works as a substitute teacher - comes from a family filled with musicians. "All my uncles are musicians in the Philippines. They all skipped school to pursue music. One uncle tried to teach me keyboards and drums," he explains.

Fallen to the same fate, J. Arthur took piano and guitar lessons in high school, but didn't stick with it. But they do write. To get in writing mode, DotKom, the self-dubbed lyrical assassin and J.

Arthur, who is always "cool, calm and collected" start off by drinking iced coffee and setting up a hookah. "We used to write verses separately, but now we meet up and write together," says DotKom. "Sometimes, J will start making a beat from scratch and we see where it takes us."

J. Arthur, who works as a prep cook in a hospital by day, says they play everything by ear nowadays. Making sure that they're on the same page creatively is important to them. "We've been pre-recording our songs now. We used to go to the studio and waste time and money. Now, we think it out and sing it on a program on the computer. It's like doing a rough draft," says DotKom. Currently they use Cubase software for their dry runs. They have a decent mic, but the equipment and the space they record in aren't as high quality as they'd like.

But they're grinding. They're on Facebook connecting with fans, shooting videos for their singles to post on YouTube, uploading to SoundCloud and tweeting. To get more of a following, they - like most artists - lean on free social media tools. "We learned to reach out to a lot of blogs. The Internet is a powerful tool. It's the new streets now. [There is] no plastering posters. There's social networks, SoundCloud, it's easy access," says DotKom. J. Arthur agrees. "We read a lot of local blogs. They put you on different stuff."

Their hard work is paying off. Lately, the tables have started to turn when it comes to getting gigs. People have started to ask them if they'll perform at different venues. But they're still working to book more shows. If there's an artist coming to town that they like, they still try to put a bid in so they can be the opening act.

"Having a management team helps, and a street team. They are taking care of our emails, which are starting to get too crazy. Too many deadlines and asking for shows. It's too much for an artist who wants to focus on music to handle," explains J. Arthur. "We were doing everything ourselves."

In addition to their work as a group, J. Arthur - who sings the chorus on "Silly Girl" - has an EP out with Jack Flash called *Out of the Blue*. Not to be outdone, DotKom has a solo project called *Words of Wisdom* that dropped at the end of June. Even though they both have 9-5 jobs, they're working hard to pursue their dreams.

But how do they find time to balance the demands of the group and their own solo careers? DotKom boils it down to their work ethic and respect for each other.

"We don't interfere with each other. We love to work on music. But, if one person is away, the other person keeps on working."

thewhoevers.tumblr.com



The WHOevers

Renovations

Out Now

Standout Track:
"Spectacular Vernacular"

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