

worth noting "Black on Both Sides" samples songs from the Beastie Boys, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and other white artists. Regardless, Mos's posture of detachment is indicative of an intellectual independence lacking in many of hip hop's current chart-toppers. It recalls the attitude taken by Harlem Renaissance poet and writer Langston Hughes in his 1926 essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain:"

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of that mountain, free within ourselves.

As "Rock and Roll" demonstrates, racial tensions makes up a significant portion of Mos's specific subjectivity. In "Mr. Nigga," he digs even deeper, pairing up with Q-Tip from the recently separated A Tribe Called Quest to extend the discussion of the term "nigger" begun on Tribe's 1993 release

"Midnight Marauders." But "Black on Both Sides" also takes up issues from a universal perspective. In "Ms. Fat Booty," which samples Aretha Franklin's "One Step," Mos offers laments over love that people of all races can relate to. "New World Water" talks about our collective abuse and misuse of the environment. "Brooklyn" is a tribute to the artist's home and an celebration of sights and people of "Bucktown."

But above all, it's the sound, the music, that gives "Black on Both Sides" its power. The record treats us to a wide range of samples, joint efforts with Q-Tip and Busta Rhymes, and explorations of various musical forms such as reggae (similar to the sound of "Black Star") free-form jazz and blues all paired with rapping, singing and talking. Despite the album's serious subjectivity, tracks flow with swiftness and lines drop with dexterity. It's heavy, yet buoyant — replete with Brooklyn shout-outs and a giggle or two from our erudite MC. And, unlike many other male rappers, Mos's singing voice is not a mere enabler for smooth transitions; it is actually one of the artist's best tricks.

Track for track, this album

offers both exemplary music AND profound poetry. And, at a time when songs like Warren G's "I want it all" top the Billboard Lists ("I want it all, money, fast cars, diamond rings, gold chains and champagne....I want every damn thing,"), Mos's messages add some much-needed depth to the game. "Black on Both Sides" reminds us that all hip hop is the latest string in a long line of black lyrical expression that dates back to the times of slavery and, before that, to Africa. "People ask me where hip hop is goin,'" Mos says on the record's intro, "Wherever we goin,' hip hop is goin' However we doin,' hip hop is doin.'" Judging from this release, hip hop - the real hip hop — is doin' alright.

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