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“GV11 DON’T BELIEVE DA NOIZE!”

Directed by Bob Bryan

Review Written by Nika Cavat

“I didn’t know what a Nig** was until you called me one. As I got older, I decided to own it. Now it’s a self-described term of endearment.”

And so begins the battle cry of “GV11 DON’T BELIEVE DA NOIZE!,” part one of this new documentary entitled “Voices from the Hip-Hop Underground,” directed by Bob Bryan about Hip-Hop culture, that quintessentially urban American movement encompassing music, art, poetry, fashion, and politics.

Like Jazz, Hip-Hop’s roots go deep into the streets, housing projects, and backyards of urban Black America. Bryan, a veteran documentary filmmaker, has in the past explored the subject of language in many forms, with Hip-Hop often at the center of his inquiry.

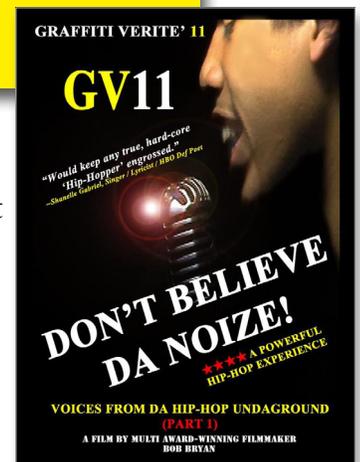
If you’re expecting a lot of Angry Black Men rapping about the Thug Life and glorifying the “Bling-Bling Factor”, as one male Beat Boxer (*Joshua Silverstein*) calls it, fugetaboutit! While “Don’t Believe Da Noize” dances around this much criticized aspect of Hip-Hop, it doesn’t dwell on it as the sole attraction.

In his latest doc, Bryan’s subjects have a marvelous range of ethnicities, genders, and ages: Artist Justin Bua, who “grew up next to a welfare hotel with junkies, pimps, hustlers”, *Kutmasta Kurt*, a DJ who sports a Nacho Libre-type mask, *Adisa Banjoko*, “The Bishop of Hip-Hop” and co-founder of Hip-Hop Chess Federation, and *Shin-B*, an electric female Korean-American rapper, just to name a few.

Rapper *Affion Crockett* acknowledges that Hip-Hop “started in the streets, with children who didn’t have

much...it started out of the gang life in NYC, with Bam (*Afrika Bambatta*) and Herc (*Kool Herc*), break dancers and graffiti artists. It’s about preserving it and literally loving one another, not tearing one another down, not stabbing or shooting. It’s art (*MC Affion Crockett*).”

Adisa, an articulate, ardent young rapper insists that Hip-Hop “got all kinds of people jumpin’ in...they don’t care about the African man’s agenda, the Puerto Rican’s, the Mexican’s.” He claims further that “they” (presumably White people) are just wannabe Hip-



Hoppers who wear the gear and dance, but lack the authenticity of those who live the Hip-Hop life from the beginning. Fair enough. Black historians have long alleged that Elvis Presley shamelessly stole the songs of unknown Black musicians and songwriters without proper acknowledgement or financial compensation.

What makes Hip-Hop culture decidedly different from that of the '50s and '60s is that urban America is no longer the strictly segregated black and white landscape of five decades ago. Yes, there are stratified neighborhoods and turf wars aplenty, but with the explosion of the internet and the ability of young consumers to make music and videos on their own, it allows for a much greater mixing of races, ethnicities, and the like to get out their messages of unity, equality, and positive vibes. Racists, beware!

The film unfolds rather loosely; Bryan isn't concerned with following a strict historical guideline and doesn't particularly feel compelled to put the whole phenomena of Hip-Hop culture into a complex political context, except to emphasize that what began as a Black urban reaction against poverty, drugs, and injustice has since blossomed into one that embraces every race equally. In fact, if you look around at haute couture, popular film, and beyond, Hip-Hop has been admired, poached upon, and otherwise adopted across the cultural board.

While Bryan's entourage of high energy DJs, artists, and rappers do owe a debt of gratitude to the early founders of Hip-Hop (Dolemite, The Lost Poets, Rudy Ray Moore, and KRS One), the sheer force of multiculturalism all but erases the notion of one pure influence.

Take Korean-American rapper, ShinB, for example. She talks about the mystique of the whole "Asian fetish...Madame Butterfly, the Oriental Princess," and

with her tough, confident performance, I'm sure that **ShinB** will be a guiding force in changing that tired old stereotype of the submissive Asian woman.

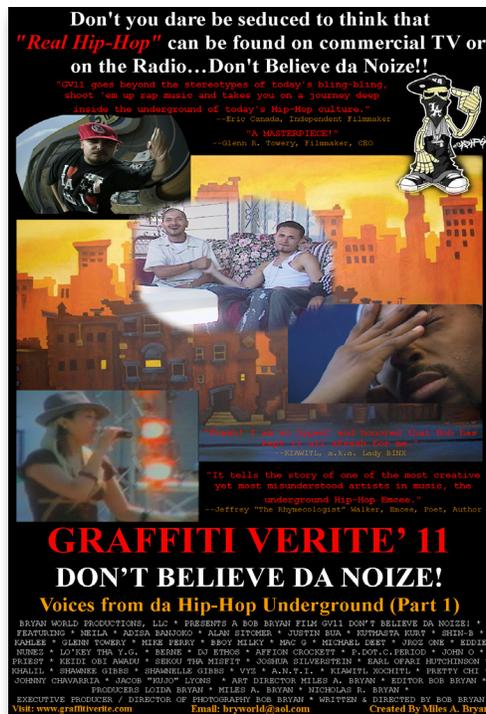
Threaded throughout Bryan's upbeat documentary are interviews with African American cartoonists / filmmakers and sisters, **Shawnee and Shawnelle Gibbs**, who have created a charming cartoon, "Adopted By Aliens". The central character, a young black girl named Whitney, struggles to find her way in a, well, alien world. Mixing real facial features like lips, eyes, and noses, with computer-generated faces and bodies, the Gibbs sisters explore what it means to be a young African-American woman in modern America.

One of the **Gibbs Sisters** comments, "Because I create media, I know that someone wants me to feel a certain way to buy into something and I'm just not buying it. I've got my own ideas. We analyze things, creating our own stories. You can't tell us who we want to be because we already know."

With her big glasses and nose buried in a book, Whitney isn't your typical Hip-Hop sex goddess. She is nevertheless impacted by the ever-tempting "Big Booty and Bling-Bling", for which Hip-Hop continues to receive both intense notoriety and respect, depending on what side of the fence one stands.

"Music," proclaims rapper and **LIB Radio DJ Keidi Obi Awandu**, "is the most indelible form of art because it sticks with us. We can hear it once and know the words. Music is power, the most powerful art form."

If this is true, and I tend to agree, then the potential of Hip-Hop to alter how people treat one another is immeasurable. The music of a generation ago, at its best, changed the hearts and minds of conservative politicians, just as this generation's Hip-Hop and rap continues to call out those who would prefer to ignore the mess that is inner city America. Bryan skillfully allows his subjects to speak – rap – spray paint – and dance for themselves. There is no "Voice



of God” telling the audience what to think or how to interpret comments, no one definitive authority with unquestionable gravitas.

Well, ok, there is writer and educator **Alan Sitomer** (Hip-Hop Poetry & The Classics, Teaching Teens and Reaping Results, Hip-Hop High School), who states that he *“believes things can change for the better... I don’t think that anybody needs to be born in the ghetto to empathize and sympathize with the plight of America today.”* This is true; one can find unhappiness, substance abuse, police brutality, injustice, and a need for righteous indignation just about anywhere in the country. It is not exclusively the domain of one ethnic group.

Listen to what these guys have to say about Hip-Hop and its effect on their lives: Composer/Director/Producer **Glenn Towery**: *“When an art is real, it can go over ethnic lines, it becomes a way of looking at an occasion that is more than a language, more than a cultural thing that people do. It creates its own culture within all cultures – that’s what hip-hop is.”*

Mac G: *“It’s a modern communication device used by urban Americans to get their message across.”* In his rap song, “My Rhyme”, he says, *“My rhyme is dreams and hopes...It’s my rhyme/all that I have –”*

Lo-Key Tha Y.G (MC): *“It’s story telling about what goes on– you can be the viewer, telling a basic story...I wake up in the morning thinking about rap and go to sleep thinking about rap.”*

Jroz One-MC / Lyricist: *“I am so in love with the art, in the beauty, the rawness, I can’t stop learning.”*

Justin Bua: *“The spirit of hip-hop is an abstract energy, it’s the pure untainted rhythms of the universe. If the concept of hip-hop was distilled to its essence, maybe it would just be ether, you wouldn’t see it. It’s that powerful.”*

It would be too easy to dismiss such rapturous engagement with Hip-Hop as youthful enthusiasm. “Pure, untainted rhythms of the universe” (Artist Justin Bua) may sound like hyperbole, but that is why this youth culture is so damned compelling. These young ones – and those older rappers still bitten by the Hip-Hop bug – have such a steadfast belief in the power of music to bring about sweeping reform.

The hard-driving, edgy art, music, and fashion of Hip-Hop culture packs a resounding punch. No matter the color of your skin. Listen to **ShinB**. Listen to

Berne, a very seriously physically cut Belize man who, as he prowls about the Venice boardwalk and pumps weights at Muscle Beach, describes his collection of rap songs, “After Deportation.” Or MC/producer **Khalil** as he discusses the allure of Hip-Hop as fashioned by the media machine that promises to make you *“sexy, rich...because that’s what sells.”* These are extremely savvy, urbane artists and it behooves anyone still with one foot in this world to shut up and listen – and dance.

When you have such a groundswell of performers, artists, graphic designers, DJs, and so on who love what they do, who understand that the “unexamined life is not worth living” (thank you, Socrates), who have the courage and foresight to stand up for what is right, you have a generation of Americans of all colors whom the rest of us can feel confident will do a beautiful job of getting along with one another.

Filmmaker Bob Bryan certainly recognizes the value of Hip-Hop as going beyond mere entertainment, though that’s pretty ok too. Even if you’re not a huge fan of the genre, it’s well worth checking out for the sheer positive energy, tongue-in-cheek urbane graphics, and good-looking bunch of young rappers and artists.

- **Nika Cavat** is a freelance essayist, poet, short fiction writer, and veteran educator. She is Chair of the English department at Crossroads School in Santa Monica, CA where she has taught English and film for twenty years. An occasional spoken-word artist herself, Nika has written on Pakistani art, Armenian bookbinding, South American literature, and films of all genres. She resides in Venice Beach with her daughter, Aurora.

For more info on Director Bob Bryan and **GRAFFITI VERITE’** please visit <http://www.graffitiverite.com>

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