



FURIOUS FIVE

Hyphen gets elemental with hip-hop's new school.

JONAH DEOCAMPO and Jack DeJesus prefer to aim straight for your head. With their lyrics, that is.

"When we speak, we try to get in there," Deocampo, or MC Bambu, says, gesturing to his head with expressive hands.

The two Filipino Americans make up hip-hop group Native Guns—a play on '90s hip-hop collective Native Tongues—and are known for their conscious lyricism, occasional rapping in Tagalog and live shows that get even the most reluctant heads nodding.

They grew up in different parts of inner city Los Angeles but in similar situations—both were jumped into gangs at a young age; both say hip-hop saved their lives.

Deocampo, 29, grew up in Watts and was one of the only Asian kids on the block. At 12, he was jumped into a gang, but his way with words not only gave him an expressive outlet, but an easier out from gang life.

Fast forward to 2001, when Deocampo met DeJesus, a k a Kiwi, at an event in Los Angeles. Their first collaboration, "Peaceful Pistols," appeared on Deocampo's 2001 solo album.

Their first full-length album together, *Barrel Men*, was released this spring and includes cameos from DJ Rhettmatic, Sabzi of Blue Scholars and Denizen Kane of Typical Cats. The album opens up with "Initiation," about a young kid getting jumped into a gang, but both Deocampo and DeJesus are quick to point out that they're not advocating that lifestyle.

Though they may be misunderstood for the violent symbol of a gun, Deocampo says it's all metaphorical—the gun as a symbol of getting straight to the point and as a revolutionary symbol for self-defense.

These two self-described "bald-headed brown brothers with tattoos" are walking poster men of balance between art and activism: DeJesus works fulltime at a nonprofit, hosts a monthly radio show dedicated to Asian American hip-hop on an independent Berkeley radio station, and can be seen out on the streets as a chant-leader during demonstrations. Deocampo works at a media company by day and teaches hip-hop writing on the side. The newest addition to their group, Patrick Huang, or DJ Phatrick, 24, teaches music production to high school youth in West Oakland.

DeJesus, 31, who now lives in San Francisco, says he can't separate what he raps about from his background. "I'm going to want to talk about sweatshops and identity. I feel like my Filipino-ness has everything to do with the quality of my music. We don't want that to be removed from the art."

NATIVE GUNS
MCs that matter.

Writer Momo Chang
Photographer Seng Chen

TEN TO SPIN

Top 10 hip-hop joints by API artists (in no particular order) by Jack DeJesus/MC Kiwi

- 1 "Another Life" » Denizen Kane
- 2 "Authentic Vintage" » Jern Eye
- 3 "Chaos" » Skim
- 4 "Keep it Going Now" » Power Struggle
- 5 "Still Water" » ELEMNOP
- 6 "The Long March" » Blue Scholars
- 7 "Sureshot" » The Pacifics
- 8 "Slingshot" » RJ
- 9 "I Suppose" » Group Therapy
- 10 "Work It" » Native Guns