

BROTHA CHAZ WALKER



Brotha Chaz Walker is deep by all accounts. A Princehall Freemason, a Rosicrucian and practitioner of traditional Yoruba culture, he is well known for his violence prevention and youth development work in the Bay Area. Since 1991 he has been creating innovative programs to support high risk youth in some of Oakland's most challenged neighbourhoods. He recently completed a workbook and documentary film about anger management in urban environments. As a father of three elementary aged sons, and a husband, Brotha Chaz is a new kind of role model for both young men and young fathers. I hooked up with my bredrin Brotha Chaz Walker to reason with him, about him, his family, and his works...

NSS: Greetings Brotha Chaz and thanks for taking time out to reason. Please tell the readers a little about yourself; where are you from?

BCW: Thank you Norman my bredrin for the opportunity to share my story.

I am an African by way of America. I was blessed to spend my formative years in Alabama and Florida and the influence growing up in the south had on my life has been profound. My family is from Benin. We are Yoruba. Man, no fronts and this informs how I work, how I live, my music and my spiritual life. I'm a family guy, a community dude, and an Egungun Priest (servant of enlightened ancestors). I value family over material things and focus on what's best for the community as opposed to what the individual wants. In my own small way, I want to make life better for everyone on earth with my music.

NSS: When did you first realize you wanted to be a poet/writer/performer? – What prompted you?

BCW: When I was young, like 7 or 8 years old, my mom, my aunties, women from my church, schools I attended...everyone gave me opportunities to speak publically. I was told that my speeches inspired people, and this coincidentally inspired me.

NSS: Which authors/poets/musicians/rappers have you felt inspired by in particular and why?

BCW: Nina Simone was a great influence and inspiration for me. I was honoured to have a chance to get to know her and to be mentored by her...she came to my early shows. I was also greatly influenced by Joe Higgs. He taught me to write from my spirit and that every person has a connection with the divine and that God wants to express himself through that person. He told me to make myself a channel that God's light could flow through. He affirmed for me that tapping into my spiritual self was OK, even right and necessary for me as an artist.

Lastly, Lady Vivian Baxter, Maya Angelou's mother, encouraged me to be a Freemason and taught me the finer points of being a businessman, a real businessman that knows how to get 'shit' done.

I was and am also inspired by rap icons, like Chuck D., BDP, Rakim and even Jay Z, and Kanye...these brothers use hip hop as a tool to empower our community economically and to display our culture on the world scene. I respect that.

NSS: What is your favourite music genre or are you versatile with your listening?

BCW: Basically, I really **like all** music. It inspires me, relaxes me, and enlightens me. Predominantly, for me I listen to old school roots reggae, jazz & blues from the 40's and 50's, and some alternative rock from the mid 90's. I also check out newer artists...I'm feeling Kanye and Jay Z and I also like and respect Mos Def's 'shit'. I like Katy Perry, India Arie, Jill Scott, Amy Winehouse, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison. I like music man, and I find myself often inspired by the artists as well as the music.

In addition, my kids are studying at a school of music here in Oakland so I'm now listening to Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Duke Ellington, Pharaoh Sanders, Betty Carter, Prof. Vulindlela Wobogo and others. I'm blest when it comes to music.

NSS: What inspires you to write?

BCW: I'm inspired by my family daily, by my children Ayo (9), Jessie (8) and Tyreke (11) they are wonderful boys. My wife, (Ife) and I are very proud of them.



Ife, Chaz, Jessie, Ayo and Tyreke; Hayward, CA 2010

My homie Freddy Fade inspires me. He is a great dude with a heart of gold. I am also encouraged to write by what's happening in my immediate environment, Oakland; the struggles of the brothers and sisters of all races to survive and put food on the table. Crime and violence are problems in some parts of the city and I have strong opinions/ feelings about what is going on. My music and films are my voice.

NSS: What subject/s do you like to write about?

BCW: I write songs about people in America and around the world, who respects their ancestors, love their families and their culture. A lot of my music comes from my experiences or from our history. I write about one man's dream that the world can be a better place and humans can work as one and live as a loving family.

I see all human being as members of one multicultural family. I am a dreamer and I believe that human beings are going through an evolutionary change of sorts right now.

Wisdom & Knowledge, the album, is about the changing of the age as the Mystics say, you know from The Piscean Age of religious faith, with its traditional hierarchies, to the Age the of Aquarius, a period when each individual is capable of spiritual awareness without the intercession of religious authority...a time when each human being can have a direct line to higher power, or God, if you like.

NSS: Has music been an important/major or natural part of your upbringing?

BCW: Yes absolutely. I never had the best singing voice, but I love to sing and dance. I am Yoruba so, singing, drumming and dancing is a big part of my religion. I was writing songs at 8 and rapping at age 12 after hearing the Sugar Hill Gang's hit song , Rapper's Delight" , "The Message" by Grand Master Flash and The Furious Five.

In 1988, I moved to Los Angeles, CA from Alabama to finish High School and heard Bob Marley singing Natural Mystic. Brother it blew my mind. I loved the one drop beat and uplifting lyrics. I went checking for my roots. Music is magical and pointed me toward my destiny in a way.

NSS: Your Album Wisdom and Knowledge is musically Reggae orientated; is there a reason for that?

BCW: Yes Brotha Norm. See reggae makes me want to dance; even the serious roots style reggae evokes a good vibe, nice and easy energy and good feelings. I was led to the truth by reggae music from Bob Marley, Jacob Miller, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, King Yellow Man, Augustus Pablo, Black Uhuru with Puma Jones, Judy Mowat, Queen Rita Marley, Culture, Aswad, old school giants, That is why I choose reggae.

I figure if the good vibes are flowing maybe, just maybe sisters and brothers will take a moment to listen to the lyrics. If they listen the ideas are spread. Reach enough people and you can change the world, right. LOL. I have to reach the youth. Let's make the world a little nicer.

My business partner, Brother Raoul Harley, aka Raedon of Inersha Entertainment, is from the Virgin Islands and he is reggae, calypso, Soka through & through. He brings that island flavour, no lie. We work well together, kind of a roots version of Rogers & Hammerstein. Both of us agree that we only want to make music that's uplifting.

Lastly, my wife Ife and I, on our first date, we danced all night to reggae at Club Dred in San Francisco. So reggae has a special place in my heart. She sings back up for some of my songs, and keeps the vibe cool and flowing. I love having her behind me, with me on this journey.

NSS: Do you write full-time/If not what else do you do: hobbies etc?

BCW: I write fulltime but I have lots of time for family and study which is my real hobby, my vocation. As I get older, I have to prioritize my health now, so I jog, cycle and hike in the mountains near my home with my wife and sons. In addition, I produce and report the news for the Cal Berkeley radio station, KALX radio, 90.7 fm. This gives me a chance to stay connected to what's going on around me, to make sense of it and to work with other young journalists and writers.

Lastly, I am working with the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California, to mentor 1000 African American boys between the ages of 9-17 for 10 years. The project is a state wide leadership development and mentoring program called the Pythagorean Knights. I am very excited.



Brotha Chaz Oct. 2010

NSS: Do you have or set a schedule when you are writing?

BCW: Yes I write everyday for 2 to 3 hours in the morning after I help my wife and children get on with their day. After a few hours I break for lunch and go for a bike ride or a walk. Oakland is a very interesting place filled with eclectic and very charismatic people from all over the world. I am always inspired by people I see on BART, (local Subway like train) or the bus. After lunch I sit down for about an hour brain-storming and writing down some the cool things I hear people say. Then I take some time before I go to bed to reflect and write in my journal.

NSS: What kind of research is involved with your work?

BCW: It varies from project to project. For this album, “Wisdom & Knowledge”, I studied the effects of slavery in North American and the Caribbean, read slave narratives and talked with elders. I also spoke with a psychologist and a sociologist. I wanted to understand how listening to the lyrics on the album would impact a young listeners behaviour and world view. I’m also a news junkie which works well for me since I have to stay abreast of current events for the radio news show. I get a lot of inspiration from what is happening now.

NSS: What is your creative process like; what happens when you first sit down to write?

BCW: I chill and relax clear my head for a bit. You know I live in Oakland/Oaksterdam. LOL. I usually have an idea that I want to flush out. I just need solitude... I may need to pace around, or I may get inspired with a new tune and want to repeat it over and over again until it feels right. The lyrics usually come first for me and the music is created to fit them.

Brother Raoul and I then work together to take the music to the next level. Lastly, I include my wife, my children, and again brother Raoul often to flesh out my message. I need to have various sounding boards to help me develop an abstract idea into a song.

NSS: Do you impose a discipline on yourself regarding schedules, goals etc?

BCW: Sort of...I take an artistic approach to being disciplined. I have discipline, but I allow myself to be open to the creative process. When inspiration hits, I go with it, and I try to balance this with my responsibilities as a father and husband. . No days off.

NSS: Are you working on a current project(s)?

BCW: Yes. My documentary is about a Brother whose son was killed at a transit station; “Damon Williams Sr. A father speaks From His Heart” is just about done. I am also working a book on anger management for urban folks aka city people.

NSS: **Finally: Is there anything you would like to express in regards of advice and encouragement for potential budding young writers, poets etc?**

BCW: Be yourself, love every day, smile, sing, dance, live, enjoy, evolve, travel, make mistakes, learn from them, reflect and above all else create your art. Lol.

I do this because I must, it gives me peace. Don't be afraid to let your light shine, to be different from everyone around you. That's the uniqueness that makes you stand out in the marketplace. Dream big, dream small, but dream always.

That's it for me man.

NSS: Brotha Chaz, thank you very much for taking time out and reasoning for this issue of ***PANTHER NEWSLETTER***. It has been a pleasure connecting with you again. May our Creator guide you and protect you in all your future ventures.

For more information about how to purchase Brotha Chaz Walker's brilliant album ***WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE***

Contact him: Chaz Walker via FaceBook

More information on Brotha Chaz Walker:

"We opened with music from Brother Chaz Walker's latest CD: Wisdom and Knowledge on Inersa Records. He talks about his work as a musician, poet, conscious rapper, producer and educator. He has been called the High Priest of Hip Hop."

Click on the link below to hear his live interview:

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/wandas-picks/2010/11/17/wandas-picks>

Log on next month and meet another *ARTIST OF THE MONTH* here on *PANTHER NEWSLETTER*.