

SLAYING SILENCES DRIVING FORCE OF DETROIT HIP - HOP - PROOF AND EMINEM GAVE STATURE TO CITY RAP

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, April 12, 2006

Author: KELLEY L. CARTER FREE PRESS MUSIC WRITER; Staff writer Brian McCollum contributed.

Detroit hip - hop was at a loss for words.

It was difficult for a community **of** word-slingers to talk about the shooting death **of** one **of** their own Tuesday, as news quickly traveled the streets **of Detroit** and around the world.

At age 32, **Detroit** rapper Proof was dead. The man many credit with helping push **Detroit** rap onto the national scene, and who was widely seen as Eminem's right-hand man, was gone.

"He was one **of** the forefathers **of Detroit hip - hop** ," said 34-year-old rapper Phat Kat, who recently hung out with Proof at **Detroit** 's Northern Lights Lounge, a bar that attracts **Detroit** 's **hip - hop** heavyweights every Tuesday night. "That's a real blow to the **hip - hop** community. ... He was one **of** the persons that was responsible for **Detroit hip - hop** as a whole."

Proof, who was born Deshaun Holton, was one **of** the most recognizable figures in D12, the supergroup that includes Eminem. He's considered one **of** the top hype men in the **hip - hop** game, always on stage - at the mic - next to Eminem. But he's probably best known to the world for being best buddies with Eminem, a friendship fictionalized in the movie "8 Mile" with Mekhi Phifer playing a role based on Proof. He even served as best man in January when Eminem remarried his ex-wife, Kim.

But here in **Detroit** , Holton is regarded as the man who was passionate about getting **Detroit hip - hop** on the map, and as a master battle-rapper.

In the mid-'90s, Proof's Saturday afternoons were spent hosting rap battles at the famed **Hip Hop** Shop on 7 Mile Road. This was the spawning ground for the scene that helped produce acts like D12 and Slum Village, and a time when **Detroit hip - hop** was not a national player.

It was his idea to assemble a collection **of Detroit** 's best **hip - hop** talent and call it D12, and he helped push Eminem to become one **of** the world's biggest pop stars. A source close to Eminem said Tuesday that Eminem was devastated, and that the pair had been particularly close over the past few weeks, as Eminem's second marriage unraveled.

A simple "RIP Big Proof" graced the Web site for Iron Fist Records, the downtown **Detroit** label he had founded with an eye toward promoting homegrown rock, soul and **hip - hop** . In August, the company released "Searching for Jerry Garcia," Proof's first solo album. With 20 tracks that incorporated bits **of** psychedelic funk, jazz and hard rock into its lively rap mix, the disc displayed Proof's eclectic mindset and his willingness to color outside the standard **hip - hop** lines.

Proof, who titled "Garcia" in homage to the late Grateful Dead guitarist, said the record reflected a quest for personal enlightenment, one he'd undertaken in response to "stress, a bad diet and drugs" as D12's star rose in the early '00s. "It's about coming back, finding the way," he told the Free Press last summer.

'A regular guy'

After the 2002 release of "8 Mile," when battle rap was gaining newfound commercial exposure, Proof was hired by Showtime Networks to host the national search for the best battle rapper. .

"He was the mayor of **Detroit** ," said rapper J-Hill, who was featured on the series. "He made it a point to try and be as much of a regular guy that he could. A lot of times that got him in trouble. A lot of people, they can get some kind of badge just trying to challenge a person. Regardless, he made it a point to stay in the local **hip - hop** clubs."

Proof wasn't necessarily an angel, though, and had several run-ins with the law in recent years. "You never knew which Proof you'd get when you'd meet him. You might get the guy that's real humble. You might get the comedian. You might get the MC. Or you just might get Deshaun. He was a man of all hats. There was a lot to him that made up his character. He was a really good person," said **Detroit** rapper Hush, who toured with Eminem and D12 in summer 2005.

On Tuesday night, **Detroit hip - hop** music makers and lovers crowded inside Northern Lights Lounge, paying homage to the fallen rapper. The event was helmed by DJ House Shoes, who wore a T-shirt memorializing Jay Dee, one of his best friends and a close friend of Proof, who died in February.

They memorialized Proof **hip - hop** style, listening to him spit gritty-voiced rap music and at times crying and hugging those around them.

Earlier, those who knew him were trying to make sense of what happened.

"It's a tremendous loss. What he had yet to accomplish is incomprehensible," said Danialle Karmanos, a video director and producer who filmed Proof promoting the city two months ago for a Super Bowl party she and husband Pete Karmanos held at Compuware in downtown **Detroit** . "Proof was really smart and charismatic and funny and silly and engaging and respectful. You just wanted to smile when you were around him."

Detroit 's urban music scene was just coming to terms with the loss of another pioneer. James (Jay Dee) Yancey died after complications from a rare blood disease in February.

Proof wasn't the first member of D12 to die tragically. In 1999, right before the group gained international prominence, member Bugz (Karnail Pitts) was shot to death on Belle Isle. D12 was scheduled to begin recording its third album this month.

"I just don't know how to feel right now," said D12 member Denaun Porter, better known as Kon Artis, barely getting the words out. "It's crazy because we're suffering all these losses. We lost Bugz. Now we lost Proof. I just don't know, you know what I mean? We're all so messed up. Whatever happened, whoever this dude is, is still around. This is just crazy."

Memorial service arrangements are still being made. "His family and friends would appreciate privacy during this difficult time," said a statement from Interscope Records, Eminem and D12's label.

(SIDEBARS)

PROOF ON JAY DEE

In the weeks following the February death of **Detroit hip - hop** producer and rapper James (Jay Dee) Yancey, who died from complications of a rare blood disease, rapper Proof talked with the Free Press about the impact his friend had on his life. Here are few excerpts from the interview. A full transcript can be read at www.freep.com.

On Jay Dee's impact on **Detroit** 's music scene: "Jay Dee made you believe that it was hope to really get in the game. It made it real. You knew that you could really do this. This guy is here producing Pharcyde. He produced A Tribe Called Quest. He produced Busta Rhymes and we were all in the **Hip Hop Shop** losing our minds. This dude is doing it. Whatever doing it is, I wanted to do what doing it was because this guy was doing it."

On losing his good friend so young: "I feel like I lost a friend, but I gained an angel."

On missing his friend: "I feel different every time I talk about it. I think of all the things we'll never get to accomplish. The things that we will never see."

Kelley L. Carter

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROOF'S CAREER

Solo releases

*"Promatic,"2002: Cosmic collaboration with **Detroit** underground rapper Dogmatic.

*"Electric Coolaid Acid Testing EP,"2002: A six-song set including guests MC Breed and J-Hill.

*"I Miss the **Hip Hop Shop**,"2004: Compilation of old and new material from Proof's decade-long **Detroit** career.

*"Searching for Jerry Garcia,"2005: Long-awaited, much-delayed disc considered by Proof to be his signature creative statement.

Notable album appearances

*Eminem, "The Slim Shady LP," 1999

*Eminem, "The Marshall Mathers LP," 2000

*D12, "Devil's Night," 2001

*Soundtrack, "8 Mile," 2002

*D12, "D12 World," 2004

Film and television

*"The Up in Smoke Tour," DVD, 2002: Onstage with Eminem, Dr. Dre and others.

*"Saturday Night Live," NBC-TV, 2002 and 2004: At Eminem's side for these live network performances.

*"8 Mile," film, 2002: As battle-rapper Lil Tic.

*"The Anger Management Tour," DVD, 2005: With D12 and Eminem on this top-selling concert video.

*"Hiphopbattle.com," Showtime television, 2005: Leading a crew **of Detroit** rappers, including Obie Trice, in head-to-head rhyme competition against MCs from New York and Cleveland.

*"Eminem: Live from New York City," HBO television, 2005: In his familiar place next to Eminem at Madison Square Garden - what would turn out to be one **of** the final performances featuring the two longtime friends.

Brian McCollum

Contact KELLEY L. CARTER at 313-222-8854 or carter@freepress.com Staff writer Brian McCollum contributed.

ILLUSTRATION: Drawing JOHN W. FLEMING **Detroit** Free Press; Photo; Photo 2003 photo MANDI WRIGHT **Detroit** Free Press

CAPTION: The friendship **of** Eminem and Proof, born Deshaun Holton, was depicted in the movie "8 Mile." It was Proof's idea to put **Detroit** 's best **hip - hop** talent together. He called the act D12, and it helped Eminem become one **of** the world's biggest pop stars. At top: A 21-year-old Proof performs.

James (Jay Dee) Yancey

CAPTIONWRITER: 2003 photo by MANDI WRIGHT/ **Detroit** Free Press

MEMO: SIDEBARS ATTACHED;DESHAUN HOLTON AKA PROOF 1973-2006;SEE RAPPERS AT THE TOP GRAPHIC IN MICROFILM PAGE 9A;SEE RELATED STORY, PAGE 9A

DISCLAIMER: THIS ELECTRONIC VERSION MAY DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE PRINTED ARTICLE

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS; NEWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: Deshaun Holton; aka; D12; biography; major story; 2006; Detroit ; musician; shooting; homicide; hip - hop ; Proof;Eminem; list; recording; television; movie

Record Number: dfp0000254286

Copyright (c) Detroit Free Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.