

The Block Is Still Hot

VIBE's founding father muses on the genius of African-American music and the cultural explosion that created hip hop—and this magazine—a decade ago.

I was first drawn to the notion of hip hop back in the '70s with the Last Poets and Watts Prophets, who were seminal figures in our culture, just as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were in the bebop revolution of the 1940s. Though my musical roots are in jazz, I've always believed you need to open your mind and not be closed off to new expressions—let yourself be attracted to something that turns you on, and trust your instincts. As Duke Ellington said, "If it sounds good, it is good."

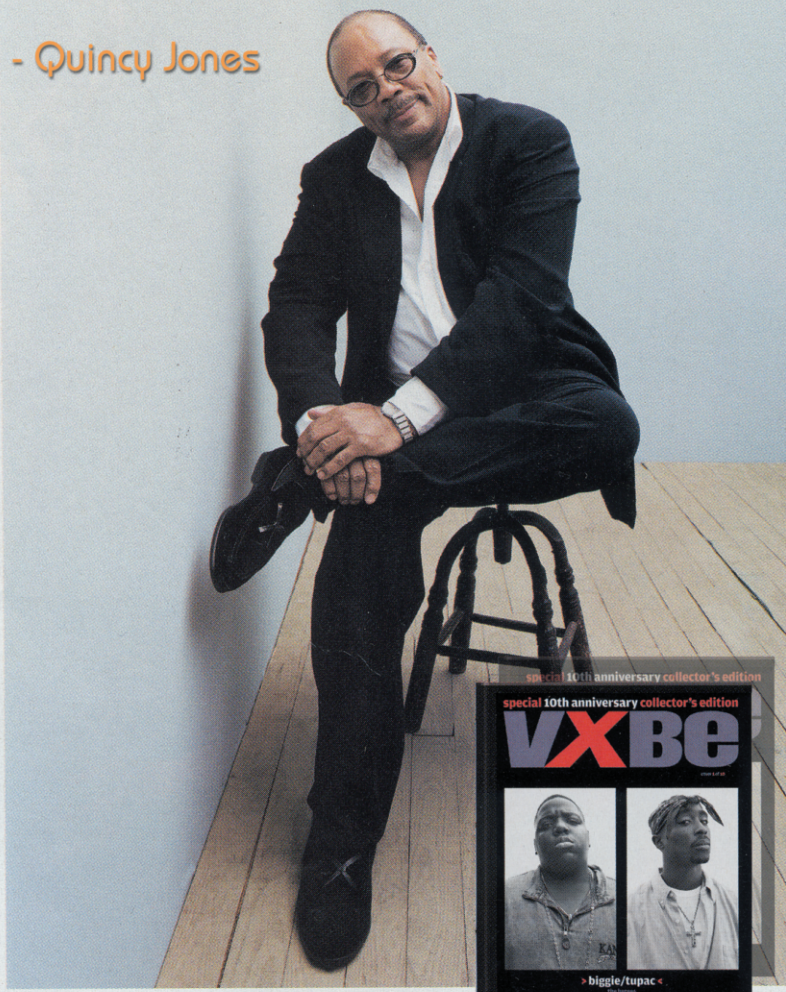
So early on, I was feeling that new convergence of urban music, thought, fashion, and style. It had been percolating and gaining strength for years. I remember going with my son QD3 on his 17th birthday in 1986 to the little *Sanford and Son*-looking office of Def Jam to visit Russell Simmons, and everybody was there—the Fat Boys, Beastie Boys, everyone. Russell played Run-DMC's "My Adidas," and you could just feel that that shit was *on*. Black music always comes from the soul, and it never misses. It wasn't just a sound, but a walk, a look, a slang. After I put together an album called *Back on the Block* in 1989, the wheels started turning that culminated in VIBE's launch in '93, thanks to the talents of a lot of good people. Others tried to discourage us; they even said rap was over. But we believed that this movement was still growing and that this magazine would find its audience.

Just as I preached cultural openness back then, I find myself urging hip hop heads nowadays not to be too set in their likes and dislikes, not to act like theirs is the only thing out there that ever mattered. If you go back, in one form or another, there has always been some kind of rap in black music. It's there in the blues, in the church, in our poetry. But people mustn't be allowed to forget the genius of an artist like Louis Armstrong. He invented a whole musical language, and there's barely a major American singer who hasn't been marked by him, from Billie Holiday to Nelly. All the great ones, like Sinatra—who sang like a jazz horn player—give Louis props for starting all that. And with someone like Nat "King" Cole, the quality is so high you can't ignore it. Do you know a singer today that can mess Nat up?

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- Quincy Jones

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You want it funky? How about Ray Charles? It's time we set about rediscovering the richness of our own culture.

African-American music is like a great river. Powerful currents have always driven it forward, but we also need to respect its deep wellsprings and the certainty that it's not stopping here. The past is really the foundation for the future. And when it all connects—as it did for me with Louis and Dizzy and Aretha and Stevie and Michael and the best hip hop—you know it right away. And you trust it.

QUINCY JONES
Founder