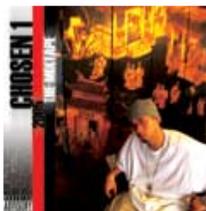




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YOU GOT BEEF? Interview with the director, Paul Nguyen

January 24th, 2005

By: **FD**

(page 1 of 2)

1. What's good! Tell us how you and Chuckie hooked up to do the videos you been doing?

I've been directing for many years now, from short films to documentaries and some award-winning commercials but none were ever related to rap or music. For my last year in school, I did my own thesis project so I wanted to try something new, which was a music video. When I was in university, there were a lot of snobby film students making retarded art films, experimental and incomprehensible garbage, so I wanted to do something mainstream. Since I was from a rough neighborhood, I wanted to make an authentic and gritty rap music video, something original and commercial. I was pretty known in my area for making fighting movies, so eventually an acquaintance introduced me to a local Vietnamese rapper by the name of Chuckie Akenz. My first video was the SOLDIER video. Believe it or not, I cooked up the whole video in 2 hours flat. For what it's worth, I got good feedback from my professor, but more unexpectedly I got really good praise from the local youth in my area after I released it online.

2. What kind of budget are you running on each video? Is there a production staff? What kind of equipment?

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I run my own video production company, doing mostly corporate videos and even weddings. To keep things cheap, we shoot on high-end digital video equipment. For example we use the Canon XL1, but my favourite is the smaller GL1 because it's light and easy to hold. You can't really see the quality of the videos online because they are really compressed, but when you see the videos projected on TV from a DVD source, you can really see the production quality. I'm looking at shooting future videos on

Super16 stock, but whenever you deal with film, the budget skyrockets into the thousands. For example, a cheapo Super16 video would cost me at least 10K. Whereas most videos shot on digital come in under 5K. I have a production team that helps me when they can, but mostly it's a one-man show because I can't afford to pay them all. I basically borrow people from my movie crew to help me out on the music videos sometimes. I get lots of freebies, too.

3. Where are the video locations shot?

Most of the videos are shot on location in the notorious Jane-Finch area. It's a predominately working-class community with a large minority population comprised of Blacks, Indians, Vietnamese, etc. Basically, it's known for being the preeminent "ghetto" in Canada because of the violence and poverty. Jane-Finch is like Compton or the Bronx- just a colder version.

4. Who creates the ideas behind the videos?

It's a collaborative process most of the time. Sometimes Chuckie and I hang out at the local pho joint for a few hours to brainstorm ideas, plus the tea is unlimited and free. It's good to have more than one knucklehead banging out concepts. Since Chuckie wrote the lyrics, he has a relatively good understanding of what images will go with his message. Whereas I represent the mainstream viewing audience and I offer my ideas from an external perspective. For example, SOLDIER was more of a straight-forward video and I dealt primarily with the visual aspect of the

production. I wanted the video to look "grimey", so I shot in mostly cold colors and I wanted to show Jane-Finch's urban density with the buildings panning across the horizon as the camera was circling Chuckie's group. In "You Got Beef", I wanted to take advantage of the presenting a well-known Asian trademark, which was the gangland "rush". You know when someone punks an Asian kid, you will see lots of backup coming after school. Although I'm not involved with gangs myself, I've seen this situation happen all the time back when I was in high school. Everyone is scared when that one person makes that phone call for backup.

5. There is criticism in your latest video in the part where Chuckie steals from an elderly lady. What point were you trying to come across?



Independent director , Paul Nguyen



On-set photo of Chucky Akenz during a video shoot.



The MY HEART video was completely Chuckie's idea, so you'd have to ask him. I have to admit that even during the shoot I was a bit confused about the concept but in the end it turned out really well. The video was so heavily downloaded when it came out the first day it crashed my website. But, I think Chuckie was just trying to show that when he has his "girl" (in actuality a gun if you listen to the lyrics carefully) he's feared by everyone. By robbing her I think he was just showing a small element of criminal life. A lot of people read into the video so much when they break down the sequences, they try to make meaning of it. People should realize that most rap videos out there on MTV today are just mass-produced entertainment designed for quick consumption by the viewers. It's like Mcdonald's fast food, you eat it fast and shit it out even faster. Some videos have an important message, while others are just designed for fun, like MY HEART. Some videos leave an unmistakable impression, for better or worse, and YOU GOT BEEF is one of those videos with a message.

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6. From internet message board responses, a lot of negative things are said about the videos. What do you say to them?

After the overwhelming impact of YOU GOT BEEF, I decided to do some research to see what all the fuss was about. I combed through dozens of websites and forums dedicated to YOU GOT BEEF, and I was very surprised by all the feedback people were giving. In regards to the

“negative” feedback, it’s been very useful to me as an educational tool. I read all the comments to see what pissed people off, and how I can potentially make better videos. Chuckie has received a lot of heat for this video, but he taught me a valuable lesson- don’t let it get to you. We have lots of critics, but we also have lots of fans. It’s like Britney Spears and Backstreet Boys, people will always complain about provocative artwork that hits the mainstream and eventually becoming pop-cultural icons. I’m glad that we’ve become part of the Asian pop-culture with our YOU GOT BEEF video.

7. On the other side, there are a lot of positive messages. What do you have to say to the supporters?

I received many messages of praise from all around the world. I get letters and emails as far away as Australia, Denmark, and even Vietnam. It’s awesome to see your own low-budget video explode online becoming a world-wide phenomenon. I’ve been also contacted by a few industry people, both from music and television, which is always encouraging for my own career. I’m at the point where I’m doing TV and newspaper interviews. But aside from the modest fame, I would definitely like to thank our supporters. Because of them, I am able to make more videos and hopefully help elevate Asian culture and raise awareness in the media and entertainment. No more Romeo Must Die or Harold and Kumar crap!

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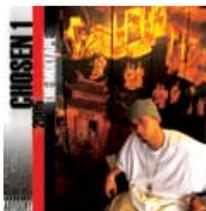
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Paul doing some film editing.

8. What other Asian American rappers are you feeling?

I like Jin. He's the first one to break through, although I think his videos could've been better. I think it's important for him to stick to his roots and represent Asian culture to the fullest. He's leading the way for all of us now, so I hope he doesn't fuck up, or else we're all pretty much fucked. Look at Jackie Chan. He flopped with THE PROTECTOR in 1985. He couldn't come back to America until more than 10 years later, much less any other Asian star. He finally broke through with 1996's RUMBLE IN THE BRONX. Even despite being the world's most famous movie star, he still has to play second fiddle to flavor-of-the-month Chris Tucker. Even Tucker got paid more than Jackie Chan in Rush Hour 2. WTF??

In Canada, we have a fantastic artist named Masia One. She's a fantastic Asian female rapper, with skills like Missy Elliot. And of course I also like Chuckie, not because I direct his videos or anything. But I really think he is on top of the Vietnamese rap movement right now, and plus he combines a good mixture of commercially viable songs with deep lyrics. His legions of fans are a testament to his popularity and importance to the Asian rap scene.

9. Are you looking to expand your directing to any of these artists, or are you focusing mainly on Chuckys career at the moment.

It's strange, but understandable, that people associate me as being Chuckie's producer or manager. The fact is that I am not. Aside from

being good friends now, we just make videos together. I believe Chuckie has the potential to blow up commercially in the near future. And I wish him all the best luck and success. However, I have other goals myself which is to continue doing a variety of things, like my social work and pursuing my filmmaker career. Doing rap videos is just something that has helped me along the way

10. Where do you see yourself and Chucky in the next 5 years.

Hmmm, hopefully I'll be a famous actor by then! But seriously now, being Vietnamese it's important for us to have some Viets in the industry. I'd like to make my way into Hollywood, so I can have the power to direct films for the Viet/Asian audience. There's too many old-school Hollywood directors and execs making stereotypical films about us and selling it back to us. For example again, Romeo Must Die was directed by an aging Polish guy named Andrzej Bartkowiak. Now what the hell does he know about Black culture, Asian culture, hip-hop or even martial arts? It's a travesty to have the wrong people making films about us. Many famous directors even turned down making Schlinder's List because they believed it should be directed by Jew.

As for Chuckie, you'd have to ask him yourself. I'm not his manager or dad, lol. But I guess you'll be



A shot of Chucky from the video, "You Got Beef?"



seeing him dominating the Asian rap scene in the years to come.

11. Any last words?

I'd like to thank you and everyone else at Aznraps for their hard work and for taking the time to interview me. Keep up the tremendous work, and everyone else out there be on the lookout for my Asian gangster movie soon! And if you wanna check all my other videos, visit my website Jane-Finch.com. Peace.

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