



by Amanda Macchia

Devastating Masterpiece is a body of “lost tracks” that Brooklyn-based MC Hired Gun gathered after the creation of his 2008 debut release *The People’s Verses*. Put out through the artist’s own Fresh Roots Music Group, *Devastating Masterpiece* is the second installment in the MC’s collaborative MC/producer EP series *The Hits and Pieces*. Working with producer Mista Mayday, the new record takes the MC’s energy to the next level, giving us a taste of what we can expect in the run-up to the anticipated release of his second full-length album, *#NiceGuysFinish*.

Devastating Masterpiece powerfully exercises the method of flow, painting a “canvas of hectic city streets” in which the MC exposes the various moods and realities of urban life throughout the course of the record.

Periods of tightly-packed lyricism and politically tense subject matter glide back and forth between sonic backdrops, lighthearted interludes, and easy-to-swallow, upbeat tracks. “The System,” a song about “hierarchy and the kingdom” in a capitalistic United States, transitions to an interlude

featuring a bright-voiced young children shouting out the project and innocently posing the question, "What happened to peace? Peace!" The album then drops you back on the streets of Brooklyn for a classically hip hop, anthemic tribute to being the best of the best in New York on "Ghost of Ocean Ave."

The collection of 8 tracks integrates myriad styles, emotions, and imagery, hanging on essential hooks, while bartering between the push and pull of the MC's classic and contemporary influences. Flying between phases of boom-bap, politics, claves, and Braggadoccio, *Devastating Masterpiece* finds its balance. Beatsmith Mista Mayday kills it on this one, providing a sonic backdrop as dense and diverse as HG's lyrics.

The album opens aged. On "Future Sound," an old recording of a jazz drum beat rat-taps in the back, a steady rhythm knocking behind the sound of the drums. An announcer introduces the entertainer. A drum solo cuts in mid-sentence and Hired Gun's verse drops, amidst vibrating organs and sampled-in audience hoots and hollers. "It's clear we live it, here's the future sound," the MC spits, slowing his verse, "Europe, Brazil yea man we've been around."

It's true. Hired Gun has been around. The influence of his work and travels to Zimbabwe, Paris, and Brazil make their presence known on *Devastating Masterpiece*. "Agent 109" starts with syncopated Afro-Cuban rhythms. In this track we get to see what makes Hired Gun the beast of an MC that he is. HG writes lyrics that read like poetry and sound like hip hop music.

Connecting to the traditions of spoken word griots, Hired Gun's 20+ years of cipherying, writing, slamming, and spitting have lent him the skills of a true poet and MC. In "Ghost of Ocean Ave." he spits:

*Nice guy on sabbatical. Radical.
Ridiculed by addle brain masses, Think I care here's a tissue
Ghost of Ocean Avenue, walk through on the humble
Jersey Scarred hard with a little Brooklyn attitude
Yea, you haven't heard of the black nerd general*

*Power fist minded white collar criminal
Meaning I can bend a few rules like them light folk,
Yellow-bellied spines with the color of an egg yolk*

Hired Gun makes surprising leaps with the rhyme structures in every song off of *Devastating Masterpiece*. Some are frenetically packed with differing rhyme patterns, rhythmic flows, and lyrical density. Others are simple, structured on the weight of sound. In the all-star mashup that is "Krew Kut ft. Stats, Luck D, Unpaid Bill, Mista Mayday, Topix, and Dazz the StarChild" Hired Gun waxes poetic, slowing his flow to articulate each word:

*Speak from the spark been deep from the start
Seek dreams without being asleep in the dark
Means and ends between me and some friends
Who convene on a weekend before a season's end*

HG ends his bars on "Krew Kut" using alliteration to embellish upon the existing rhyme structure:

*Open minds to closed doors Coded words co-Orsed till it goes
No more
Folklore fabled of faded friends and turntables able to
create from the core*

Hip hop today is all about the slowed-down bass, sped-up synths, and spacey, swag-style lyricism. On *Devastating Masterpiece*, the poetic, thoughtful, mastering of rhymes and rhythms, flow and subject matter, is eye opening. Even though it makes you think about the way the world works, or the way that words can be used, it still manages to be fully fly.

Hired Gun is not just an rapper - he is, as he claims in "Future Sound," the "8th Samurai" - wordsmith and warrior whose "amplified antagonist rap lyrics ... submit a thesis to the people at large about the sleazy in charge", facing head-on the realities of rap, urban life, and U.S. politics, with the loving energy of a hip hop state of mind.

Todd did the production on Devastating Masterpiece. He is a member of the Socialist Party of Connecticut.