



By Roosevelt Franklin  
Photos: Michael Schreiber

# BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

"When the bomb drops, the check's cleared." That's how my man Premier describes the state of affairs these days, with rap radio and the industrialization of Hip-Hop in general. These two cats – DJ Premier and Bobbito Garcia – are generals. Their real work is done behind the scenes, but they remain frontline, in order to best view the battlefield. They command worldwide die-hard fervent followers whose mission in life is to remain true to this Hip-Hop thing of ours, where corruption runs rampant and the matrix straight runs shit. But as the old saying goes, vampires can't enter your home unless they're invited in.

Neither should need an intro, but for the Martians, DJ Premier is the epitome of the DJ/ Producer. Dre may be the rap hit-maker, but when heads want that official Hip-Hop sound, Premier is #1. Jeru, Afu, Nas, Biggie, Busta, M.O.P. – even Miss Jackson comes through when she wants to get nasty. Too few remember that he's the cat who put the jazz in rap and whose earliest work in many ways laid the foundation for today's turntablist craze. Oh yeah, he's in this little rap group called

GangStarr, whose new album *The Owners* drops this summer, ya heard!

Bobbito has a regular column in *Vibe Magazine* and appears in commercials for Nike. That's paper. In reality, he exists at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of the game. His a.k.a., DJ Cucumber Slice, is a poster child for the underground. He's the face put on that movement trying to take this thing of ours back from the bling bling pirates. For years, his weekly radio show, now called the CM Famalam Show (broadcast from Columbia University) has championed artists making dope music that the major labels wouldn't fuck with. Artists like Mos Def, Dilated Peoples, Madlib, Organized Konfusion, Kool Keith, etc. His seal of approval to an artist or label on the come up is like that Midas touch (just ask Rawkus Records).

You might not think these two have much in common, but au contraire. In this *Mugshot* exclusive, we take it to the crossroads for an open discussion on culture, the enemy, and what you can do to stop terrorism.



**Mugshot:** You two have a good rapport, to say the least. How did ya'll meet? How is it that y'all get along so well aside from the mutual respect that you have for each other?

**Bobbito:** The first time we ever met, we were at 115th and Broadway [in NYC]. Me and Stretch [Armstrong] were doing a show together and you fuckin' walked up the stairs and you were like "Yo Bob, good lookin' out for biggin' up 'Cop Hell'" [A joint Premier had produced for Mobb Deep that was only released as a white label].

**Premier:** After the "Cop Killer" fiasco with Ice-T, all cop records got pulled. It was supposed to be on their [Mobb Deep's] first album *Juvenile Hell*.

**Bobbito:** I wrote about ["Cop Hell"] in my *Rap Pages* column. When he mentioned that, I thought that was like a show of humbleness on his part, but also biggin' me up. I didn't think he read my columns or that he listened to our radio show. I already had admiration for his work, so it was mutual... Going a couple years further, me and Stretch did the radio show on WKCR for 8 years [1990 - 1998]. In '96, we started rockin' on Hot 97 together. A lot of times Stretch would get overseas gigs. First person he would call would be Primo [DJ Premier]. So me and Primo did a whole bunch of radio shows together. He would bring out indie records that even me, a Stretch, didn't know about! Indie records from like Connecticut and shit! Fuckin' New Jersey and Boston! And it wasn't shit that he produced either.

**Premier:** A lot of those records that I would play, people would give them to me because they heard me spin on their show as a fill-in. So a lot of times they were hittin' me off because they were hoping that next time I'd fill in they'd get played.

**Bobbito:** Also, I had a second hand record store called Bobbito's Footwork from 1996 - 2000. I absolutely have to say that Premier was, if not the most, definitely one of the most consistent, loyal and supportive customers of the store. There was a couple GangStarr/DJ Premier productions that used samples bought from our store... That was a big source of pride.

**Mugshot:** To the average fan, it may seem like you're at different ends of the spectrum. A lotta cats would see you, Premier, as more of the mainstream success and then Bobbito is at the tiptop of the whole indie scene. How much do you know about each other's worlds?

**Premier:** I know his records, and not just because he put them on me.

I buy those records because I like to keep up. Any stuff that came through Fondle' em, I would cop for two reasons. One, to support his movement and what's he's tryin' to do and two, he's givin' those types a chance to shine.

**Bobbito:** I don't see any difference between his world and mine. Whatever Premier has done, he has not compromised his artistry or persona. My radio show, when I'm spinning the club, my *Vibe* column, my movie appearances - everything I've done, it's no compromising of my artistry or who I am as a person. To me, there's no difference between Wu Tang's "Protect Ya Neck," "The Jump Off" [36 Chambers Loud, 1993] and Cardinal Official's "You're Ghetto." One may sell a lot more than the other, but I don't determine what record I like, play or buy off of how much they sell. It's just music and that's the basis by which I live my life. I don't watch TV. When I'm home its music, music, music, music. When I'm taking a shit, brushing my teeth, I have a stack of demo CD's in my bathroom that I listen to. There's so much music to listen to. I gotta grasp it and suck it in.

**"When I'm taking a shit, brushing my teeth, I have a stack of demo CD's in my bathroom that I listen to."**  
—Bobbito

**Premier:** For my independent label, Year Round Records, they [major labels] can give me the money to blow it up, but the thing is, my type of rawness is stuff that the labels can't even fuck with. My manager just told me that *Step In The Arena* [Chrysalis] is almost gold, and that's been

out since 1990. Or like "Now You're Mine," which was for the *White Man Can't Jump* soundtrack. I love that record cause there was a big story behind how that record went about. Me and Guru were fightin' at the time and the whole rhyme was written about me [laughter]. You know how he's talkin' basketball terms sayin' "I'll fake you left and go right!" and all that? He looked at me in the booth and watched me without even reading the paper and did that rhyme in one take. We've broken up and gotten back together so much, but he and I are such an ill formula as GangStarr. Our new album's comin' out crazy, as usual. The name of the album is *The Owners*. Cause we're one of the owners of the game. Same thing with this man, he's conceptual. I think Fondle' em is one of the best things that happened just for the shirts alone! [Laughs]

**Bobbito:** I got a new label. I deaded Fondle' em.

**Premier:** But I need some more shirts! (cont. on pg 38)



“...my type of rawness is stuff that the labels can't even fuck with.”

—DJ Premier



**Bobbito:** [Laughs] My new label's called Fruitmeat. [See sidebar.]

**Premier:** [Laughs] O-kay... Now Fruitmeat you got to explain...

**Bobbito:** It's a metaphor for pulp, like the pulp of a fruit. A very organic label. My first record is an Afro jazz record.

**Premier:** I'm all about that pure part. And it's not pure anymore as far as how the industry has pimped Hip-Hop. Like me and Bobbito, we play stuff that we feel you need to hear. All that shit on the radio, it's never nothing hot, it's always some bullshit. When the bomb blasts, the check has cleared. That's all that means, bottom line.

**Mugshot:** When you had Fondle' em; it was considered one of the best indies out there in terms of rap. Why'd you dead it?



**Bobbito:** I didn't feel right to put out a jazz record on Fondle' em. Also, the other thing about Fondle' em is that it really reflected my headspace in '95 when I started it. There was a lot of sexual innuendoes with Fondle' em and on the radio show doing porno surveys with Stretch. Truthfully, I just felt like my persona, publicly, didn't really need to involve that anymore. So Fruitmeat is more organic and being true to myself.

**Mugshot:** Bobbito is moving in to some jazz and Latin shit with Fruitmeat. Are you ever going to branch outside of Hip-Hop and commercial music?

**Premier:** I think I've done that working with Branford [Marsalis] when I did the Buckshot Le Fonque [Columbia] project. "Breakfast at Denny's."

**Bobbito:** [Sings and hums the melody.]

**Bobbito:** You played the keys on it? That duh-nuh-nuh... duh-nuh-nuh? That's you!

**Premier:** Yeah, I took piano lessons when I was a kid... I've always wanted to start a band. Musicianship is first really, but still, your band has to have a certain aura, I'm



really into looks. That's what makes a good band. I'm a big concert fanatic. I go to everything. Year before last I went to go see AC/DC in Houston because I missed the show in New York at the Garden. So I flew to Texas to see AC/DC, saw my parents for like maybe three hours, and then I went straight back to New York.

**Bobbito:** I interviewed Premier for my *Vibe* column back in '97/'98. One of my favorite parts of that column was I played The Cure or The Smiths or some shit. When I played it for him, he knew the record. He was like "I seen them in concert."

**Mugshot:** When did you first start DJing? How'd you get your turntables? I heard funny stories...

**Premier:** I stole them from outta the dorms when I was in college. When the "Friends" [Escape; Jive, 1984] twelve-inch came out by Whodini, this dude R.P. Cola was playin' it. I knew the formula of scratching then, but I didn't know how to do it. So I see this guy with a shag, a Caesar on top with a jeri curl shag in the back. He had big silver Gemini's with a cross fader and he had the felt pads... All my records had the rubber mat that comes with the turntable... But this dude was cuttin' it up and choppin' and repeating shit and I'm like, "He ain't taken me out!" So I asked him to teach me how to cut and went to his dorm room every day and practiced. There were these other cats that had their turntables in their dorms and I got my hands on a set. Then it was on! Back at that time, I was on some other shit.

**Bobbito:** [Laughs] I'm laughing because I've never, ever, seen you so talkative.



**Mugshot:** I was tellin' heads, "Get him talking and Premier's not gonna shut up!"

**Premier:** It depends on who I'm with. I haven't seen him in a while. There's certain people that can bring it out in me. But, you could see me and like five minutes later I'll be cold as shit. This is just one of those days you're blessed.

**Mugshot:** Bobbito, did you grow up in a musical family?

**Bobbito:** I grew up in a musical family, similar to Premier's. Moms and Pops listened to a lotta shit ranging from Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, Eddie Palmieri... My father played vibes for 30 years – a lot of Latin jazz stuff. We would have massive gigs in our crib till 6 am. He had a partner named Teddy Greaves who was socially inept. But, when he was on the piano, he would play for like twelve hours straight. As a kid, it was kinda incredible to witness but also kind of annoying to be in an environment where I couldn't watch my Saturday morning cartoons... My pops, he never really liked commercial Latin music. It's bugged out that my career, years later, reflects his interests. It's like a continuum of his legacy.

**Mugshot:** How did you get into DJing? I would consider you more of a selector than a turntablist...

**Bobbito:** I started working at Def Jam in '89. Through that I met Stretch Armstrong in '90, and we started doing a radio show together. I would have to say that Stretch was, at that point, the best DJ on the radio. His blends was bananas, his selection was incredible. He combined all the different things that a DJ should possess. I really looked up to him as a DJ and it put the idea in my head. But, really, I started spinnin' out of necessity more than desire. He was getting' booked overseas and as a result I started spinning on air to keep the show goin'. I had my vinyl from my contacts in the industry and I had a bunch of demos. DJing on the radio is the best 'manager' you could ever have. I never had to send out tapes to clubs and beg them to book me. People loved the radio show and admired what we were doin' and through that, I started getting a bunch of gigs. When I started getting booked for gigs in '96, I only had one turntable in my crib. The only time I ever practiced was live on air.

**Mugshot:** The industry right now is goin' a major change with everybody being shut down. A lot of people say it has a lot to do with Internet piracy. What are your feelings on that, and how you see things going in the near future?

**Bobbito:** Let me give you the perfect example. From what I heard, Curtis Blow's "AJ Scratch" [Mercury; 1984] sold over 200,000 twelve-inch singles. Ultra Magnetic [MCs] "Ego Trippin'" [The Four Horsemen] sold over 100,000 twelve-inch singles. Today, the most successful indie twelve-inch now is like maybe 12,000, 15,000 tops. If an indie twelve-inch sells 20,000, that's like the equivalent of going platinum.

I've been on the air for eleven and a half years now and I know that the Internet has decreased the listenership of our radio show. From '90 to '93, me and Stretch, we're on Thursday night from one to five, and were sill on, but there was no Hot 97 in '93. There was only like mix shows – [DJ] Red Alert, [DJ] Chuck Chillout, [DJ] Kid Capri was out for a hot second. When were you on BLS?

**Premier:** '92/'93.

**Bobbito:** At that point, everybody was listening to our shit and that raised the mystique of what we were doin'. In '93, Hot 97 came along and it increased the access. So it drew a lotta listeners who liked Hip-Hop but who didn't wanna work that hard to hear the best Hip-Hop. Now they could hear Hip-Hop during that day, which was potentially a good thing, if it was handled right. Then, going further to '96/'97, you see the advent of the age of the Internet. Again, potentially a good thing if it was handled right. The Internet created even more access. Hip-Hop music is more accessible then it's ever been, but still people always ask me what's changed. To me, Hip-Hop has not changed. In 1981, you had to search for the best music, search for the best jams, stay up late night for the radio. It's the same way now in 2002. You wanna go to a good

**FRUITMEAT**  
FRESHLY  
HANDPICKED  
RECORDS

Fondle'em Records is dead. Bobbito's well-respected indie rap label, known for its *avant garde*, heavy lyrical masterpieces from artists such as MF DOOM, Kool Keith, Juggaknots and the Arsonists, has seen its time. Bobbito's released one last joint, *Farewell Fondle'em*, collecting freestyles, demos and rare cuts from the label's all-star roster, but as seasons change, the world turns. He's begun a new label, Fruitmeat Records, which will be more reflective of his vast musical interests.

**Bobbito:** Fruitmeat is a metaphor for pulp, being more organic and being true to myself. You'll see a jazz record, you'll see Hip-Hop record, cause those are all my interests. My first release was a band called Butter with a song called "O'Kwawa 'Se," an Afro jazz tune. I got another single comin' out from them that's gonna be more like a space jazz/dance song. My next two releases are Hip-Hop records – Subconscious, which is produced by DJ Ellie, and then a group called Binkus from Atlanta. I've never really sought to make a lot of money off of putting out records, I've just sought to share good music with people who think similar to the way I do in terms of internalizing progressive music.

Hip-Hop party? You're not gonna read about it in *Time Out* [NY] or the *Village Voice*, you gotta fuckin' search and be up on your shit. You wanna find a good twelve-inch? You gotta be up on your shit.

**Premier:** Not albums, just joints. We gotta go back to that. The majors have fucked it up. Now it's all about the album, the album, the album cause they know that's the big check. A lotta people still don't know what Fat Beats [NYC] is or about Rock 'n Soul [NYC].

**Bobbito:** Technology has not only changed the accessibility of the music that is generated and available, it's also changed the amount of people who can participate in terms of making music, which is not a good thing. A lotta kids are puttin' out their music on the Internet. I'm not saying that there are not any good MCs on the Internet, but overall, kids are making shit in their crib. They're not paying for the studio time, they're not getting that shit engineered right.

**Premiere:** The people behind these desks that do the programming [at record labels and radio stations] are not really down for the cause. I don't like Hip-Hop the way I used to, as far as what I hear nowadays. I love the way it was. Like Chuck D said in a recent article, "We got a lotta color-by-numbers rappers." It's so easy to connect the dots. You can be complicated and simple. To me, Guru is complicated and simple; Rakim is complicated and simple, G Rap and Kane. In their prime of course. A lot of their newer material can't live up to what they did during that era. From Jay Z to Biggie [R.I.P.] and Nas, every time they'd call me they'd be like "Yo, I need that gutta joint." They don't call me for that club record or one for the radio cause that's not what I make. They come to me for the street record.

**Bobbito:** That's relative man, 'cause I think you make incredible club records.

**Mugshot:** Yeah, when you was talkin about your street records earlier, all the records you were mentioning were very popular songs in rap.

**Premier:** I didn't do it with that intention [to make it a club record], I just did what I do.

**Mugshot:** "Mass Appeal" [*Hard To Earn*, Chrysalis/EMI; 1994] is a perfect example.

**Premier:** We did "Mass Appeal" to make fun of the radio! I heard it on [Power] 105, the other day. I'm glad 105 is out cause they playing classics and they playin' new stuff, mixing it all up. What they doin' to go

against Hot [97], I love it because Hot has been holding' it down for so long with the number one spot. They pretty much feel like, "Nobody could touch us so we can change the music the way we want to and you can't do anything about it." And Steve Smith came outta nowhere, and now he's drivin' Tracy crazy, she's freakin' out and I love it.

**Bobbito:** Radio stations should never underestimate their listeners. When they're programming records for the day and they think like "Oh, we can only play this old record in a certain part of the day."

**Premier:** And the type of listeners that "count" to them aren't even listening at noon, that's why they put it there. Their main listeners are either in school or at work and they're not gonna hear it.

**Bobbito:** I would say that people need to shut the fuck up and stop complaining. Just go out and own. We all lead lives of self-determina-

tion. There are resources out there to enjoy Hip-Hop in the means that you want. People always sit back and be like "This sucks, this sucks." Meanwhile, there's a lot of positive things that you can get involved with... like *Mugshot Magazine*.

**Mugshot:** Do you think you guys will work together on a musical project in the future?

**Bobbito:** Yo! I'm gonna rhyme B! I'm gonna put out eight albums and Premier is gonna

produce my shit!

**Premier:** Yeah, I'm doin' this space intergalactic soul album! [Laughs.] It's called *Stars*.

**Bobbito:** We gonna start our band, we gonna both play the piano [laughs]... But first, the kid you stole turntables from, you gotta buy him two turntables, a mixer and a microphone.

**Premier:** If I ever find that dude, I'll do that.

**Be on the lookout for the newest GangStarr release, *The Owners*, in the summer of 2002. You can also check DJ Premier on the *Training Day* soundtrack.**

**Bobbito can be heard on the *CM Famalam Show* every Thursday night from 1am-5am on 89.9 in NYC with DJ Lord Sear. You can also listen in at [www.WKCR.org](http://www.WKCR.org). Fruitmeat Records releases are available through Fat Beats.**

