

Mongrel Media

Presents

BEATS, RHYMES & LIFE: THE TRAVELS OF A TRIBE CALLED QUEST



A Film by Michael Rapaport
(93 min., USA, 2011)

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CREDITS

Cast	Q-Tip Phife Dawg Ali Shaheed Muhammad Jarobi White
Directed by	Michael Rapaport
Produced by	Edward Parks Michael Rapaport Frank Mele Eric Matthies Robert Benavides Debra Koffler ATCQ
Co-Producers	Justin Alvarado Brown Erika Williams
Associate Producers	Rachel Ward Qiana Wallace Monica Talavera
Director of Photography	Robert Benavides
Editors	Lenny Mesina AJ Schnack
Music Supervisor	Peanut Butter Wolf
Composer	Madlib
Animation	James Blagden & Phillip Niemeyer

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SYNOPSIS

BEATS, RHYMES & LIFE: THE TRAVELS OF A TRIBE CALLED QUEST is a documentary film directed by Michael Rapaport about one of the most influential and groundbreaking musical groups in hip-hop history. Having released five gold and platinum selling albums within eight years, A Tribe Called Quest has been one of the most commercially successful and artistically significant musical groups in recent history, and regarded as iconic pioneers of hip hop. The band's sudden break-up in 1998 shocked the industry and saddened the scores of fans, whose appetite for the group's innovative musical stylings never seems to diminish.

A hard-core fan himself, Rapaport sets out on tour with A Tribe Called Quest in 2008, when they reunited to perform sold-out concerts across the country, almost ten years after the release of their last album, *The Love Movement*. As he travels with the band members (Q-Tip, Phife Dawg, Ali Shaheed Muhammad and Jarobi White), Rapaport captures the story of how tenuous their relationship has become; how their personal differences and unresolved conflicts continue to be a threat to their creative cohesion. When mounting tensions erupt backstage during a show in San Francisco, we get a behind-the-scenes look at their journey and contributions as a band and what currently is at stake for these long-time friends and collaborators.

Rarely heard stories from New York's legendary DJ Red Alert, Native Tongues members like Monie Love, the Jungle Brothers, Busta Rhymes, and De La Soul bring an intimacy to the days when young artists discovered the freedom of artistic expression, while rejecting the confines of gangster rap and negative stereotypes. Chronicles of songs like "Scenario" and "Check the Rhime" paint a vivid picture of growing up in Queens, and how the band's unique approach to hip hop helped transform and influence the genre for years to come.

A New York native, Rapaport's lifelong love for hip hop helps achieve intimate, all-access interviews and cinéma vérité-style filmmaking, fostering a conversation for A Tribe Called Quest to determine if there is a possibility to mend the wounds from over the years.

In addition to chronicling the past, present and uncertain future of the band, the film includes interviews from the Beastie Boys, Kanye West, Pharrell, Mos Def, Santigold, Monie Love, Pete Rock, Large Professor, De La Soul, The Jungle Brothers and Common, all of whom attribute some combination of love, respect, and inspiration drawn from the legacy of A Tribe Called Quest.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For me A Tribe Called Quest meant the same thing as the Beatles, Led Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones, so my goal was to treat them the same way those groups have been documented over the years. Their unique talent, creativity and energy made them a force to be reckoned with in the hip-hop world when they broke out in the late 1980s. Their successes not only impacted the way people listened to hip-hop music but also how they subsequently created hip-hop music.

As far as I was concerned, there hadn't been a proper documentary about any rap group, so I was determined to create a film that didn't feel contrived or supplementary. I wanted to achieve the same raw and rare truth ATCQ captured in their music.

During the process of making this film, I experienced some of the most creative highs and lows of my life, coupled with personal anxiety and excitement. The exciting moments came during the shooting of the film. Capturing beautiful live concert performances was a thrill. I have to say the more vérité-style moments and scenes were what made me realize that directing was something I will continue to for the rest of my career. Having unplanned and unexpected moments of truth and honesty unfold while the camera was rolling gave me the same adrenaline rush I've experienced as an actor between the words "Action" and "Cut."

One of the biggest challenges in making this film was portraying all four members of ATCQ in a clear and concise manner. Communicating their 30-year relationship in 90 minutes wasn't easy. Articulating so many moments personally and professionally caused me many sleepless nights in and out of the editing room.

The edit process was where this film was made, shaped and came to form. I was scared to death at times looking at over 100 hours of footage and knowing that there was great material, but at the same time not knowing how the hell I'd pull the best stuff together. My editor Lenny Mesina, who also worked as my personal therapist at times, really helped bring my original ideas to completion.

I know that I made it for one reason and that's because A Tribe Called Quest is my favorite group and I love their spirit and music.

Always have and always will.

-- Michael Rapaport

ABOUT THE BAND

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST

Q-TIP, PHIFE DAWG, ALI SHAHEED MUHAMMAD & JAROBI WHITE

A Tribe Called Quest is widely recognized as one of the most innovative, influential, and revered hip-hop groups of all time. Known for their unique approach to rap music by employing jazz infused soundscapes to Afro-centric rhymes, their sound was a decisive and welcomed tangent of the genre. Discarding the jaded, aggressive posturing associated with hip-hop, A Tribe Called Quest was largely responsible for the popularity of a new style that dominated the East Coast sound of the early 1990s, and has been called the most intelligent, artistic rap group of that decade. *Rolling Stone* has called their records “near-flawless,” and that “few hip-hop acts have so sharply captured the surreal quality that defines what it means to be African-American, a quality in which poker-faced humor and giddy tragedy play tag team with reality.” These childhood friends from Queens engaged their unique talents with a refreshing lack of self-consciousness, embraced collaboration with their peers, and defied conventions to create their own unclassified brand of hip-hop. This combination of inspired sampling and relevant yet playful lyrics proved to be groundbreaking. Within eight years, they released five albums. With three LP’s going platinum and two reaching gold, A Tribe Called Quest has consistently combined artistic integrity and commercial success, an achievement so rarely seen in the industry.

New York natives Q-Tip, Phife Dawg, Jarobi and Ali formed A Tribe Called Quest in 1985. The original name of the group was QUEST, which was later modified by their high school buddies, The Jungle Brothers, while recording their album *Straight Out The Jungle*. Continuing their enthusiastic alliance with like-minded friends, A Tribe Called Quest formed a collective with The Jungle Brothers and De La Soul that they called “Native Tongues”. Establishing a new style of positive-minded collaboration and attracting the attention of artists like Queen Latifah and Monie Love, the success of Native Tongues paved the way for A Tribe Called Quest, who became known for their energetic live performances and landed a major recording contract with Jive Records in 1989.

Their first album, *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm*, was released in 1990. Marked by a playfully lyrical approach, light-hearted content, and to a lesser extent an idiosyncratic sense of humor, this debut was free and unique from both hardcore hip-hop and the more left-wing aspects of conscious hip hop. Although now critically acclaimed, at the time the record was met with mixed enthusiasm, gaining momentum after the group's later commercial success, eventually going gold six years after its release.

It was their sophomore effort, *The Low End Theory* that would break major ground in the industry. Released in late 1991, the album is considered one of the greatest follow-up albums in hip-hop history. While not considered commercially viable by the label at first, *The Low End Theory*’s bold artistic style nonetheless performed very well on the charts and was the first A Tribe Called Quest album to go platinum.

Remarkably, the group's next album, *Midnight Marauders*, released two years later, was also destined for greatness. It became A Tribe Called Quest's fastest-selling album and went certified platinum on January 11, 1995; less than two years after its release. The group became famous for their unique choices of sample material on their albums and *Midnight Marauders* was no exception. The creative freedom expressed in the record – along with its predecessor *The Low End Theory* – influenced many future artists and producers such as Common, The Roots, Jill Scott, Kanye West and The Neptunes. These artists are a part of A Tribe Called Quest's legacy and are evidence of their impact for years to come. Songs like “Award Tour,” “Electric Relaxation,” “Check The Rhime” and “Scenario” defined A Tribe Called Quest's sound during this period and are considered not just hip-hop classics but American music classics.

In 1996, A Tribe Called Quest released their fourth album, *Beats, Rhymes & Life*, which shot straight to #1 on the charts and went gold by the end of the year. In 1998 the album went platinum. It was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Rap Album, as was the lead single, “Ince Again”, which received a nomination for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group. The Ummah – a production team consisting of Q-Tip, Ali Shaheed and newcomer and stellar talent Jay Dee (later Jay Dilla of Slum Village) – was established the same year. In addition to tackling heavier subject matter in the music, The Ummah's production style was now a smoother (but darker) hybrid of the group's previous incarnations - where the snare possessed a much sharper crack on most tracks. Following *Beats, Rhymes & Life*, the group appeared on the *Men in Black Soundtrack*. Later that year reunited with the original Native Tongue groups, when the Jungle Brothers invited both Tribe and De La Soul to guest on “How Ya Want It We Got It”, a cut from their album *Raw Deluxe*. The Ummah continued producing for a diverse range of artists such as Janet Jackson, DAngelo, Faith Evans, and Whitney Houston.

A Tribe Called Quest continued to perfect and advance their sound, displaying their unique take on hip-hop. After the completion of their fifth studio album, *The Love Movement*, the group announced that it would be their last album together. Critical reception for *The Love Movement* was fairly positive, and the band received their second Grammy Nomination for Best Rap Album in 1999.

In recent years, the group has reunited and performed several sold-out concerts in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, but has yet to grace the studio for another record. Today, the power of their music is still evident in their dynamic stage shows and in the reception of their adoring fans.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

MICHAEL RAPAPORT (Director/Producer)

A native New Yorker, Michael Rapaport got his break at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival in the award winning film *Zebrahead*. Since then, Rapaport has appeared in over 40 notable films including, *True Romance*, *Higher Learning*, *Beautiful Girls*, *Copland* and Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* and *Small Time Crooks*. In 2006, he earned critical acclaim for his performance in the film *Special*, which premiered at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. Rapaport has also had many standout appearances on hit television shows such as "Friends", "Boston Public" and "My Name is Earl". A lifetime hip hop fan Rapaport is proud to make his directorial debut with **BEATS, RHYMES & LIFE: THE TRAVELS OF A TRIBE CALLED QUEST**.

EDWARD PARKS (Producer)

Originally from Boston, Edward Parks is an award-winning feature and commercial producer and co-founder of Rival Pictures, a Santa Monica-based production company. Rival has produced spots for clients such as State Farm, Toyota, and Nike, as well as the feature film *Special*, starring Michael Rapaport. The film was received to critical acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, and was theatrically released by Magnolia Pictures in 2008. Ed is currently developing several feature projects both narrative and non-fiction when he's not working on his Harleys.

FRANK MELE (Producer)

Frank Joseph Mele, a graduate of USC's school of Cinema-Television, has made a career that spans a variety of mediums, including film, television, commercials, branded content, design and visual effect supervision, and entertainment marketing. In 2004, Frank co-founded Rival Pictures with partner Ed Parks with a goal to produce low budget, high concept independent films. Aside from partnering in Rival, Frank owns and serves as executive producer for the commercial production label LFP, which specializes in multicultural and international marketing, consulting, representation, and content. Clients include Toyota, State Farm Insurance, and Nike.

ERIC MATTHIES (Producer)

Eric Matthies is an award winning producer and director specializing in documentaries, video installations and special features for DVD's.

Eric Matthies' current documentary film *Agile, Mobile, Hostile: A Year with Andre Williams* is his debut as a feature length filmmaker. He is also the film's cinematographer and the producer. His short form documentary film, *Ayamy** (*Goodness, Kindness, Generosity*), was nominated for the Social Justice Fund at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival in 2007. *Ayamy** is currently part of an ongoing, worldwide festival about sustainable transportation.

Matthies' company, EMP Inc. has produced promotional packages and ancillary content for dozens of films and games including all of *The Matrix* titles, *300*, *Watchmen* and *Sherlock Holmes*. Between 1986 and 1994, Eric worked with the seminal production company H-Gun, shooting notable music videos for artists such as Nine Inch Nails, De La Soul, Public Enemy and

Soundgarden. As a young director he received recognition from The Chicago International Film Festival for his work with the legendary band Suicidal Tendencies.

Matthies has also produced video installations seen at both the Venice and Whitney Biennial, as well as in galleries and museums around the world. With experience working in the Americas, Africa, Oceania, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, Eric has been responsible for an array of film and multi-media projects on diverse topics ranging from jazz theory to volcanoes.

ROBERT BENAVIDES (Producer/Director of Photography)

Robert Benavides is a Colombian-American Director of Photography working in commercials, music videos and films. Robert has photographed music videos for Kings of Leon, Cypress Hill, T.I., Snoop Dogg and many other international artists. Commercial clients include Adidas, Kodak, Burton Snowboards, Rockstar Games and many more. Robert has served as the DP on 5 Feature Films, *Krews* being his most recent. Robert lives in Los Angeles.

DEBRA KOFFLER (Producer)

Debra is a filmmaker and long-time community educator in the Bay Area. In 2001, she became the Founder and Executive Director of Conscious Youth Media Crew, a San Francisco based digital film production program training high risk youth specializing in direct cinema style storytelling. Debra has produced many short films, music videos and promotions with hundreds of Bay Area youth. CYMC's work has been recognized by the San Francisco International Film Festival, Cine Chicago Film Festival, Campecine Film Festival, San Francisco Black Film Festival and many others. Honored by the 2009 Los Angeles Film Festival for "Outstanding Youth Media", CYMC's latest feature length film *A Choice of Weapons* portrays life in San Francisco's roughest public housing projects facing redevelopment and toxic waste pollution.

Her current work is focused on a green youth media campaign in partnership with Grind for the Green to help bring the hip-hop generation from the margins to the epicenter of the environmental movement. Debra also does media consulting, and freelance work as a camera-woman, editor and producer, but her focus and commitment is to helping young people manifest their divine potential in life through film, music, and art.