

Artist Spotlight: Tem Blessed



by
Eric
Bayli
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Tem Blessed is an iconic figure of Hip Hop in New Bedford and beyond. Recently, I had the good fortune of sitting down the with man to discuss his life and his music.

New Bedford Guide: How long have you been performing?

Tem Blessed: I've been performing since my freshman year at Umass Amherst. That would be spring of 1993.

What drew you into music?

I've always loved music. Music is a key element of the Cape Verdean culture. My older brother was a DJ and after listening to Slick Rick's "La-Di-Da-Di," I was inspired to write my first rhyme.



Besides the show you did in New Orleans with Dead Prez, have you done much traveling or touring?

Yes. I have had the opportunity to perform across the United States and overseas. I have performed in Lisbon, Portugal and Praia, Sao Vincente, and Sal in Cape Verde. In the U.S. I have performed in New York, New Jersey, D.C., Florida, Maine, Oakland, and of course, all throughout Massachusetts.

Will you be able to do any touring considering you have a

family and a steady job? Or can you get a leave of absence?

I work for PACE YouthBuild, which is a great organization that understands my need to take leaves of absence. My family also understands and encourages me to follow my passion and live my dream. Working for YouthBuild for the past 12 years has enabled me to grow with my audience and “move the crowd.”

What are some of your main influences, both lyrically and musically?

Life, Liberation, and Hip-Hop culture: this is why I make music. It's more than music to me; it's a movement. I make art to shine light and fulfill my purpose on this planet. As far as other artists go? Eric B. & Rakim, A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-1, Chuck D., Intelligent Hoodlum, Wu-Tang Clan, The Roots, Guru, Premier, Nas, Bob Marley, and Iron Maiden. Outside of music, some influences include Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Julius Ford, and my children, just to name a few.

Where do you record, and with who?

I record throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island. My most recent album, *Blessed Energy*, was mainly recorded at Brian Steele Studios in New Bedford. I work with many independent artists, such as Dje-Dje, Wal-Gee Ice Man, Empress, Grem, First B., Chachie, Outspoken, S-Live, and Random Thought.



What are some of the benefits of performing in the New Bedford area? How about some of the shortcomings?

The main benefit is that I am able to remain close to my family. I usually never leave for longer than one week. The shortcomings are the economy. It is hard to sell music and get people out to the area venues when most people that listen to my music are in the struggle themselves, most times living paycheck to paycheck. There is also a city ordinance that doesn't allow most venues to do all ages shows or 18-plus

events. This is a challenge because most of my target audience are the youth.

What's coming up in the next year for Tem Blessed?

I'm working on a cross-country tour to help promote the new project with my band Blessed Energy, which features Calvin Grace on drums, Corey Jones on bass, and Ian Hamel on keys. The new album is due out in spring of 2011.