

REVIEW OF THE MONTH



KHINGZ

FROM SLAVESHIPS TO SPACESHIPS (FRESH CHOPPED BEATS/MADK PRODUCTIONS)

★★★★★ 1/2

From Slaveships to Spaceships has been a long time coming for Khingz. It has been eight years since the Seattle emcee released his last album, *Mi Vida Negra*, under the name Khalil Crisis, but this delay is forgivable. This deeply revelatory, transformative album is the kind that can only come from years of crashing repeatedly into the toughest and best that life has to offer. “This is what my liberation sounds like,” the emcee says in the introduction to “Heaven Made This,” a song about what he describes as the “terrifying and beautiful” nature of emotional and psychological freedom. Khingz’ liberation, from the sound of this album, was fought for ounce-by-ounce; after a few listens, you’ll practically be able to feel the artist’s war-

tested heartbeat through the lyrics. It’s that good.

FSTS’s beats vary between giddily triumphant, contemplative and hot like the face of a man intimately close to the woman he loves. Production from Toast, Sabzi of the Blue Scholars and Dead Noise, among others, is strong enough to stand up to Khingz’ heartfelt rapping,

which slips in and out of double-time, defiant and wise. At times Khingz raps so fast it’s difficult to hear the lyrics, most notably in “Boi Caimen at Adwa,” an otherwise banging track referencing the ceremony that some say launched the Haitian revolution, as well as a late 19th century battle in which Ethiopian soldiers fended off invading Italian soldiers to secure their independence from European colonization. The song features a verse from Gabriel Teodros, Khingz’ erstwhile musical partner in a group called Abyssinian Creole; they’ve always fit well together, and this track is no different.

Don’t walk into this album expecting an easy listen. What makes this album challenging to listen to is the intensity of emotion pumping through

every song. “Electric Tantra” is taut with sexual electricity, given wings by what sounds like true love, yet grounded by Khingz’ honesty about who he is and where he comes from. “From Slaveships To Spaceships” is fiery and soul-salvaging, while “Escape Society” is a ferocious declaration of independence. The humorous moments, then, come as welcome foil to all the gravity. Khingz indulges his passion for Star Wars on the very sweet (but incorrigibly nerdy) “Blaq Han Solo,” and a funny skit involving Twitter follows.

The real challenge, though, might be in attempting to walk away from this album unaffected, and that’s a true testament to Khingz’ skill as a poet and lyricist. From Slaveships To Spaceships may not be a smashing commercial success. In fact, it’s hard to conceive of this kind of art making anyone very much money. But it will join the ranks of Northwest albums that accomplish something much more meaningful in the long run: engaging listeners’ hearts and minds in a positive expression of creativity and celebration of freedom. KATELYN HACKETT

STANDOUT TRACKS: “ELECTRIC TANTRA,” “FROM SLAVESHIPS TO SPACESHIPS”