

Black Eyed Peas

They've transcended their vigilant hip-hop roots and have become a global phenomenon, the likes of which the music world has rarely seen. Ever-curious and ever-confident, that group is The Black Eyed Peas, and after energizing crowds 'round the globe with the monster-stomp of Elephunk, it's time for the quartet – William, Fergie, apl.de.ap and Taboo to get down to business – Monkey Business, that is.

2003's Elephunk was a breakthrough album for The Black Eyed Peas, vaulting them to a level of success unparalleled by any other hip-hop group. The accolades are quick to recite: 7.5 million albums sold worldwide, 4 Grammy nominations, 1 Grammy award, and an unforgettable performance on the 2005 broadcast. But fitted with loose rhymes, buoyant anthemic funk and an ebullient live spirit, the album also heralded a new sound for the modern age – one that is inspired by hip-hop, eschews boundaries and inhibitions, and cuts across ages, races and backgrounds. It is a sound that can be described only as One Nation Under A Black Eyed Peas Groove.

But if Elephunk was the group being crowned prince of the castle, then Monkey Business, their fourth album, is The Black Eyed Peas conquering the throne to become King. It is an album that further intensifies their passion for making music together, for connecting with their audience through the most fundamental ways: making people have a good time. It is a credo that has inspired the group since they formed in the late 1990s, earning their keep in the nurturing environment of Los Angeles' vibrant hip-hop underground. Even then, the group possessed a magnetic spirit that helped them establish a worldwide following through their first two albums, 1998's Behind The Front and 2000's Bridging The Gap.

In many ways, Monkey Business is a direct descendant of its predecessor. The success of Elephunk kept the group touring around the globe for nearly 18 months. "In going on the road for so long, we got an idea of what kind of music we wanted to play and make," explains will.i.am. "Monkey Business is very much about the types of songs we play live. It's about a party. It's layered differently and has energy to it that reflects how we tour – from the beats to the types of instruments we used to how we interact with the audience. It's very much about us and the crowd on this record."

Monkey Business was literally produced and recorded during The Black Eyed Peas everlasting road trip. "I was in Brazil doing some CD shopping," will.i.am recalls. "I came across this compilation and I thought it was one thing but it turned out to be something else. The Dick Dale song 'Miserlou,' was on it. At first I was angry – this isn't what I wanted to buy," he laughs. "But then, really, that song is hot. I said, 'we should do a song like this.' I jump-started the computer and made some beats on the train. Then we had to fly to Tokyo and I tightened up the beat on the plane. Then I recorded vocals in this park in Tokyo. And that's how we recorded the song, 'Pump It.'"

The song, a jump-up party anthem, is one of the featured tracks on Monkey Business – and made its debut in a commercial for Best Buy electronics. "It's the beauty of technology now – you can record anywhere, anytime, any which way. And I love that song because it feels like our live shows, it has that energy."

Monkey Business also furthers the bond the group forged as friends during the making of Elephunk. Before recording that album, the three original members of The Black Eyed Peas – will.i.am, apl.de.ap and Taboo – had been ensnared by personal demons. "I

remember that we were each talking about the things that were haunting us and seemed to be crippling us," recalls will.i.am. Adding the vocal talents of singer, Fergie, the group used music as a therapeutic vehicle. Making music with that near-desperate fervor also is maintained on *Monkey Business*, says will.i.am. "You're always challenged not to go back to those bad habits in life," he says. "When you're comfortable living, you sometimes think that, well, I beat it once so I can do it again. But you never really escape the things that haunt you."

Thus, making *Monkey Business* became an effort put forth by all the members of the group – the first the foursome co-wrote together – and the more sophisticated songwriting; the layered grooves of the record and its fulfilled spirit reflect that. "This was really about all of us building a house together," says will.i.am.

"Don't Phunk With My Heart" is a gripping soulful serenade that will.i.am describes as a sequel to The Black Eyed Peas song, "Shut Up." "Not sonically but in subject matter," he clarifies. "When you're on bad terms with a significant other, you don't want to break up. You tell her things and at the time you really mean them. But she's saying, stop f****ing with me."

If it sounds like the personal lives of the members infiltrated their songwriting, it is mostly because it did. "Don't Lie," is a song will.i.am says was born of true experience of deceptively bending the truth to an ex-girlfriend. "It's a song about owning up and apologizing and realizing your faults. It's about being a man or a woman – an adult – and confronting situations honestly."

Singer Justin Timberlake joins the group again for the song, "My Style." He first sang on the song, "Where Is The Love?," the breakout single from *Elephunk*. "We get along real well," says will.i.am, "and he sees music in a very similar way. Plus, he's just a good dude." The song was produced by famed beat-maker Timbaland. "I like experiencing things I've never experienced before," will.i.am says. "It brings you out of your comfort zone and that can be creatively inspiring. And Timbaland is an incredible talent."

Other collaborators join The Black Eyed Peas on this album, too, like Sting on "Union." Neo-folk singer, Jack Johnson is sampled on the song, "Gone Going." The Peas also got to live something of a dream when they hooked up with the Godfather of Soul, James Brown, for the song, "They Don't Want Music."

"That was just stupid, man," will.i.am says. "Being a fan of hip-hop and knowing that the music's backbone is based entirely on James Brown – the concept of hitting the beat on the "one," it's an otherworldly experience." The Black Eyed Peas remain one of only a handful of select groups that have been able to collaborate with Funk's inventor. "We met in the UK, at the Mojo Awards, and we talked about working together. I remember when we recorded; I played him the beat all nervous and everything. We all sat in the room and he nodded his head and grunted in approval."

That song is reflective of the Peas' fluid funk that can run from generation to generation – and is one of the reasons why the group is beloved and respected worldwide. "I think the fact that we just have fun with music is the reason why it works for us," says will.i.am.

"We love music and melodies and don't try to distinguish ourselves from regular music fans. It's really that simple."