

THE BLACK EYED PEAS THE E.N.D.

They are the best selling hip-hop group in music today, having sold over 26 million albums worldwide. In fact, they are one of the planet's most popular artists, and have toured more countries than any other artist. will.i.am is not only the group's lead MC and its creative engine, but also a fashion designer, actor, social activist and an incredibly sought-after producer who has worked with everyone from U2 to Nas to Flo Rida. The group's singing sensation, Fergie, has, in just a few short years, evolved into an actress, spokeswoman and fashion icon. Taboo and apl.de.ap, who started the group with will.i.am in the early '90s, have served as cultural ambassadors and have extended their hands into the worlds of acting and philanthropy. And together, the four parts of The Black Eyed Peas have grown the group into an unparalleled story of accomplishment.

But now, the moment has come for **The E.N.D.**

No, it is not time for The Black Eyed Peas to call it quits. **The E.N.D.** is The Energy Never Dies, the fifth studio album from the Los Angeles-based quartet, and the group's most adventurous-sounding effort to date. It is an album that has the unmistakable club bounce and playful lyrical fervor fans have come to expect from The Black Eyed Peas. But it is also an album inspired by the underground world of electro and rock-infused house music, artists like Boyz Noize and DJ David Guetta (who both appear on **The E.N.D.**), Justice and A-Trak, and a world populated by raucous, all-night dance parties that are bubbling right now in every major city around the globe.

The E.N.D. is more than just a new sound for BEP, says will.i.am. He describes the album's title as not about anything ending at all, but about the transformation of energy at a time of change. "We are in the middle of a really defining time right now," he says. "It's the end of the traditional era of how we experience and consume music and media. It's the end of the stereotype that we could never have a black President. It's the end of the usual ways of receiving information. But it's also the beginning of a whole new cultural birth. So the title, **The E.N.D.** is not just about a new Black Eyed Peas sound but a celebration that change is happening."

The energy that pulses through **The E.N.D.** was born from will.i.am's fascination with the sound of underground dance clubs in his native Los Angeles - parties like LAX and weekly jams at places like Cinespace that host DJs like Crookers, Steve Aoki and others. When he went to Australia in 2008 to shoot a role in the box office hit, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, he discovered that the sound he enjoyed in Los Angeles was actually a shared worldwide experience, and that the culture revealed in the vitality of good music, not on any the pretenses of who was cool or not. "It kinda turned my sh** inside out, to be honest," will says.

Taboo, one of the group's lead MCs, immediately responded to the energy pulsing through the sound. "It really reminded me of the days when we were just b-boys growing up in Los Angeles, and the people of that scene were so welcoming to having us be a part

of it," Taboo says.

"It's really no different from where hip-hop started, if you think about it - it's just party music," will says. "Sugarhill Gang was four-on-the-floor dance music, rapping over disco. Bambaataa used Kraftwerk for the foundations of hip-hop as we know it."

The group became genuinely immersed in the scene, "going out five or six nights a week to the different clubs and DJing the parties and dancing with the people and becoming a part of it," Taboo describes. They knew inherently, too, that despite being one of the biggest artists in the world (and perhaps because of it), they needed to earn the respect of the people who populated this world. "It feels good to fight for people to respect your artistry, and appreciate what you do," says will. "It's not supposed to be handed to you on a silver platter; you're supposed to fight for it."

If the sound of **The E.N.D.** was inspired by the underground dance scene, then the album itself unfurls like one extended DJ set. There is a pulsating energy and playfulness that transcends throughout, from the old-school electro-hip-hop sound of "Rock That Body" (co-produced by French DJ, David Guetta) to the back-and-forth energy between will.i.am, aple.de.ap and Fergie on the song "Alive." On "Electric City," a deep undercurrent of Jamaican dub and dancehall permeates. "I begged will not to write it without me when I heard the track," Fergie says. "I was still shooting (*Nine*) and I begged him. I instantly clicked with that track. Fergie is most excited about performing "I Gotta Feeling," which will be the group's second single. The song captures the pinnacle moments of a party, when nights kick into high gear. "It's a party anthem and all we want to do is wile out," she laughs.

Continually crafting new takes on The Black Eyed Peas sound is a part of the band's DNA and is evident throughout their entire discography. It's helped them become one of the rare hip-hop acts that can straddle the worlds of hip-hop and pop. The first single from **The E.N.D.**, "Boom Boom Pow," a refined, high-energy club-rap track, became the group's first single to ever top the Billboard 100 singles chart, and its remixes featuring 50 Cent, Gucci Mane and Kid Cudi electrified the hip-hop blog world. Most recently, their album, Monkey Business, birthed two Grammy awards (Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group, Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group), and five Grammy nominations. It brought the group's total number of Grammys to three.

Since those days after the release of Monkey Business, each of the members have taken the time to have their own adventures, which has helped them grow as individuals. will.i.am., not only ventured out into acting (*X-Men Origins: Wolverine*) but also released a solo album (Songs About Girls), produced for Michael Jackson, U2 and helped make Flo Rida a rap star. Then there was his inspired creation of "Yes We Can," the viral video and song that helped focus the cultural momentum of youth voters behind then-candidate Barack Obama. The track won an Emmy in 2008 and many observers cite the viral video (one of the most watched clips in YouTube history) as a sea change in the election.

Fergie rode the momentum of her multi-platinum solo album, The Dutchess and

blossomed into a fashion and style icon. She also recently shot a role in the movie, *Nine* (the character Saraghina), with Daniel Day-Lewis, Nicole Kidman and Penelope Cruz. "Singing in character and not as myself was so freeing," she says of the experience. "It took all the pressure off that I usually put on myself."

During his time away from BEP, apl.de.ap dedicated himself to both the creative and cultural. He played a role in an independent movie (*Subject: I Love You*) to whet his appetite for the film world. He also spent a lot of time in the Philippines, his homeland, and embraced a role as an Ambassador of Tourism for the island nation. apl also started the apl Foundation, which helps children in need throughout communities in the Philippines. "The kind of experiences I had helped me really grow as a person as much as it did an artist," he says.

Taboo, meanwhile, followed a path that was rewarding to him as an artist and as a family man. He acted in two movies (*Cosmic Radio*, *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*) drawing on his extraordinary physical gifts as a dancer and martial arts practitioner for each role. More importantly, he felt he needed to re-dedicate himself to his family life after spending many years traveling around the world with BEP. He got more involved with his 15-year old son, Joshua, and married his longtime girlfriend last July. The couple are also expecting a child. "To find that part of you that allows you to be a proud parent and to embrace a life of having love all around you, it's been a dream," he says.

The Black Eyed Peas have been so creatively consistent precisely because they recognize the importance of being able to step away and gain new life experiences. And something special happens when the four members come back together. When it came time to making **The E.N.D.**, they found themselves inspired to make music together again. "There was this feeling of excitement and a joy the guys and I had in getting back together in the studio again," Fergie says. "I think **The E.N.D.** sounds like a party record because all we wanted to do when we saw each other was to have fun. We were inspired by the moment and the 'now' without having to look back."

The ground beneath all is changing, in every facet of our lives, and The Black Eyed Peas have a grasp on it, musically, creatively and socially. And it shows that **The E.N.D.** isn't really the end at all.

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