

Husslin' From T-Dot to the World Kardi Brings the Heat With Firestarter Vol. 1

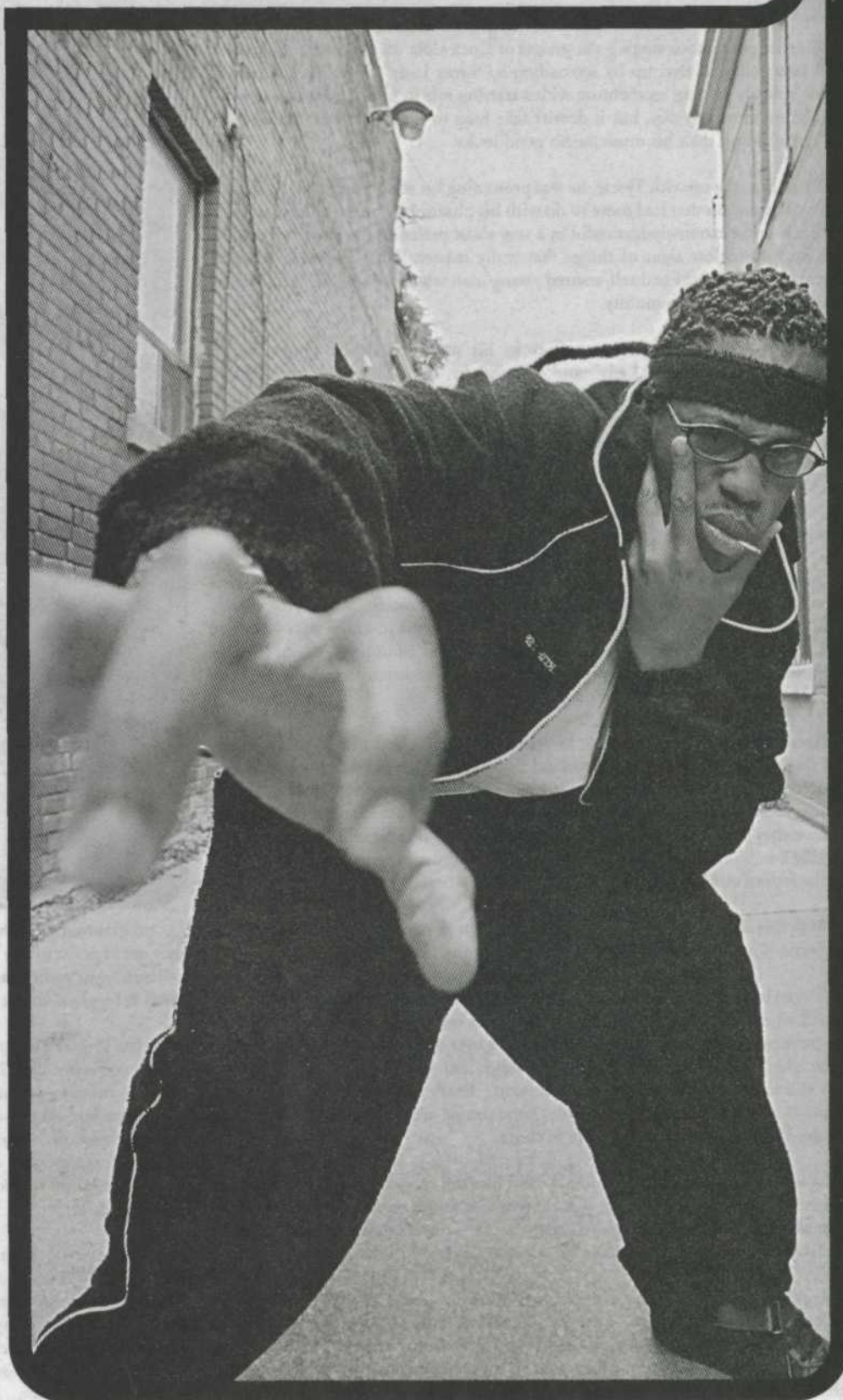
By Raoul Juneja

After releasing *Eye & I*, a now-classic album that tore up the clubs with "On Wit Da Show" back in 1997, this MC-Producer laced the Vancouver-based Rascalz with "Northern Touch," an anthem-styled track that helped break independent Canadian hip-hop past International borders (such as BET's *RapCity* in the States) that same year. Now, after four more years of hard work, Kardinal Offishal stands to make history once again, only this time with the help of MCA/Universal Records on his side.

"MCA, I look at them as sort of a progressive label," Kardinal explains about his signing. "The type of stuff that they're trying to get into right now, and the kind of artists they're dealing with, like Common, The Roots, Black Star - I think it's just somewhere where I can fit in, and a place where they will allow me to grow as an artist and really try some new and creative stuff, ya know?" So does this mean that the American and Canadian record companies are finally waking up to Canada's hip-hop potential?

"I think the American industry is just open to new music, and they're just really desperate to sign good artists like me, Jelleestone, Saukrates, and K-OS right now, but as for the Canadian industry, we're just ramming it down their throat, so they don't have any other choice in the matter," Kardi points out.

This protest from urban artists and fans against the lack of TV and radio support for Canadian hip-hop reached a peak with Rascalz refusing a 1998 Juno Award. Recently, Michie Mee added her voice with the "Ripped Mee Off" track where she proclaimed "400,000 Black folks and still no radio station!" Yet although Master T has been increasing MuchMusic's urban content and Michie's concerns seem to have been met through the addition of FLOW 93.5 FM, Canada's first urban radio station, Kardi does admit that it's



Kardinal Offishal

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still hard to get the type of attention a Canadian MC truly deserves.

"The funny thing is, cats in the States are sometimes more supportive than people in Canada," he argues. "Because up here, sometimes they kinda get used to you, but when you go down there and you're able to rock it [with peeps like Gangstarr or Outkast], and generate the same crowd response as these cats that have been doing it for a long time in the spotlight, sometimes they give you more love down there, nah mean?" And what about the Canadian DJs still frontin' on homegrown talent?

"I love when they do that," Kardinal explains, "because they're just gonna feel worse later on when they're swamped with requests for all kinds of Canadian music, and they're gonna be forced to play it if they wanna keep their jobs. So to them, I say keep up the ignorance, because it's just gonna be a sweeter victory for us in the end."

But regardless the obstacles, Kardinal's mindset is still aggressively focused on representing Toronto and Canada to the rest of the world first, and that's clearly seen from his blazing new Solitair-produced single off *Firestarter Vol. 1*, which can almost be described as shot of 'T-Dot ebonics' with a Caribbean twist.

"BaKardi Slang' is burnin' down the place everywhere it's played and doing big things all across North America," Kardinal says proudly. "It's something that I made for my city to be proud of first, and a track that Toronto can actually reach out and say this is what we're about and what we represent." This feeling of pride will also be strengthened once Canada gets a complete taste of *Firestarter Vol. 1*, whose highlights include a head-bopping "Ol Time Killin" featuring IRS of Monolith, the politically-charged "Man By Choice," a spiritually-focused "G-Walkin" featuring Glenn Lewis, and the reggae-infused "Maxine." And although some Canadian hip-hop heads may wonder why remixes of "Money Jane" and "U R Ghetto" made the cut, along with Kardi classics like "Mic Thugs," "Husslin," and "On Wit Da Show," Kardinal makes a good point when explaining the struggles of a former independent artist.

"It's old to cats like us, but it's very new to a lot of other people who didn't get to check out some of my independent work," he describes, when talking about *Eye and I* or his 1999 EP, *Husslin'*. "One of the problems with my first album was we hooked up with the wrong distribution company, so the stupid distributors would put like four records in the stores, and when those sold out, they had no more ready to replace them. You can only hit so many people in the independent game, so now [with a major label], I'm focusing on worldwide domination, nah mean?"

So what's next in the Offishal plan for hip-hop success? "I'm just trying to get started on the next album—I might do a battlecat track with Kurupt this weekend, and I'm trying to get something done with Primo too," Kardi says excitedly. "But also look for my production company to be doing some stuff with other labels, and putting out different people who wouldn't get an opportunity to come out otherwise—I'm gonna start investing in them, and allow other peeps to shine."

Kardinal's new album, *Firestarter Vol. 1*, hits stores on April 10th, courtesy of MCA/Universal Records.

