

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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## Maestro sticks to his hip-hop vision

By RAOUL JUNEJA  
Gazette Staff

As the first Canadian urban artist to receive a Juno Award, a MuchMusic Rap Video Award and a Gold Plaque for his 1989 single "Let Your Backbone Slide," Maestro has earned his title as "Canada's Wayne Gretzky of rap."

But instead of letting this attention get to his head, the founder of Canadian hip hop is reserving praise for Ghetto Concept, who are currently touring with him to help promote his fifth album, *Ever Since*.

"To me, Ghetto Concept is like Canada's Run-DMC or EPMD, in terms of unadulterated and raw hip hop," he says. "They bring a next level altogether and I'm real proud of these cats and how they're doing it."

So what has it been like travelling with the group responsible for such blazing tracks as "Krazy Mixed Up World" and "Too Much?"

"Amazing," Maestro describes. "I knew it was going to be good, 'cause we've known each other since back in the day, but I didn't think it was gonna be like this."

But does Ghetto Concept have the same respect for their hip hop mentor, whose career highlights include his "Stick To Your Vision" track, used during Grey Cup closing ceremonies and in a Pierre Trudeau documentary?

"Most definitely — Maestro's the father of this," explains Quattro Cinco, who handles production for Ghetto Concept. "He opened a lot of doors, and he made it possible for all of us coming up to be doing

what we're doing today."

Although Ghetto Concept normally injects lyrical flavour when collaborating with Maestro, they stepped aside this time to allow their producer, Cinco, to focus on making the perfect beat for *Ever Since*'s "Perseverance," a track initially intended for the film, *The Hurricane*.

"He put his whole heart onto paper, and I think that song was incredible," Quattro reveals. "The director, the people that wrote the book, even Rubin Carter — they all loved that track. But when it comes down to it, in America, if they have friends or peers they want to have there, sometimes we get weeded out."

Fortunately, a number of other Canadian producers and MCs new to the industry have also been inspired by Maestro's hip-hop achievements, which is why *Ever Since* boasts a variety of tight beats thanks to Saukrates, Franki Ano and Solitair, as well as impressive vocal collaborations from the likes of Kardinal Offishall and Infinite.

"There's so much hip hop talent in Toronto and Canada as a whole," Maestro points out. "I'm proud of our talent and potential, but I wanna see it expand, and I wanna see the whole world acknowledge us on a bigger level."

When asked if the Canadian hip hop industry can ever reach the same level as America's, Maestro offers a unique perspective. "Canada is two per cent of the world's music sales altogether, so demographically, it's not gonna happen," he explains.

"But I feel that when you see artists like Nelly, coming out of St.

Louis and doing his thing, you gotta almost consider Canada like a state, instead of trying to be like Canada versus America."

So what's next for Maestro? "I'm in a small role in this movie called *Paid in Full*, and I co-directed my last video ["U Got Da Best"], so I'm getting into more of that behind-the-scenes type thing," he explains.

And what can hip hop heads in

London expect from him and Ghetto Concept? "Show's gonna be hot," Maestro guarantees. "You're gonna hear old school stuff, new school stuff — we just gonna represent."

*Maestro performs tonight with Ghetto Concept at 9 p.m. at Fanshawe College's Forwell Hall. Tickets are \$5 for Fanshawe students and \$8 for guests (19+ show).*



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