



INTERVIEWED BY CARY GRABER

PROFESSOR X

SCRATCHING THE SURFACE WITH THE X-ECUTIONERS'
ROB SWIFT AND BERKLEE'S STEPHEN WEBBER

Fresh off the success of *Built From Scratch*, New York-based turntablists the X-ecutioners return with *Scratchology*, their new mix-CD through Sequence Records chronicling the evolution of the art of the scratch. Recording all 18 tracks, which range from Grand Wizard Theodore's pioneering "Military Cut" to DJ Premier's "Deep Concentration," straight from the vinyl to preserve the original compositions' sound and quality, Rob Swift, Roc Raida and Total Eclipse have cut a mix

that is as educational as it is entertaining. But don't take our word for it. Stephen Webber, Professor of Music Production and Engineering at the revered Berklee College of Music and author of *Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ* and the multi-volume *Vital Vinyl*, may be one of the only professors teaching turntablism at the collegiate level. When Professor Webber took a minute to talk shop with Rob Swift, *Emixshow* listened in.

Stephen Webber: Man, [*Scratchology*] is perfect for me; this is an educational resource that makes your butt move. What were you guys thinking of when you came up with this concept?

Rob Swift: When Sequence approached us about making a mix CD for them, it was my idea to try to come at the whole project from a unique angle. Up until now, most DJs make mix CDs with the intention of exposing unreleased music from popular artists or showing their skills. But we felt so many people view us as the DJs that have followed in the lineage of Grand Wizard Theodore and Kool Herc, I thought, Why don't we make a mix CD that keeps that up and not only exposes what we do as DJs, but lets you view this historically, so that when people hear our next album, those who are new fans of ours can have a better understanding of where we come from and why we make the music that we do?

SW: How hard was it to license some of this stuff?

RS: I would say the toughest song to license was "Rockit" by Herbie Hancock. It's dear to me because I'm heavily influenced by jazz, and that was the first fusion of jazz and DJing. The kind of scratching that Grand Mixer DXT did on that song was so revolutionary, and they really redefined scratching. Fortunately, we cleared the song.

SW: This record really brings up this question: If we are looking at the turntable as a musical instrument, then you have to deal with the idea of a repertoire. Some people at Berklee are saying, "The turntable isn't an instrument because there isn't a repertoire for it." To me, in a way, *Scratchology* is some of the important repertoire for the turntable.

RS: Exactly.

SW: Something that befuddles me is the idea of a turntable repertoire vs. the concept of biting, which is a no-no in hip-hop. How do you think that will evolve?

RS: Personally, I think that there is a distinct difference between biting, which is copying another person's style, and learning.

SW: There's a difference between being influenced and just copying blatantly.

RS: Exactly. So I think with hip-hop, it's basically the same thing as it is in other art forms. If I invent a stymie, I want you to learn from it and make it sound better so that what I did has evolved. I don't want to see someone do something I did and get credit for something I invented. With Scratchology, we were able to show people that what people like X ecutioners, Q-Bert and Mixmaster Mike do is an extension of what the fathers of this all did. It all comes back to a circle, because what we are showing people is these are our influences, but we don't sound like them.

SW: How did you come up with which tracks you were gonna use on Scratchology?

RS: When I was thinking about the concept of the CD, I wanted to keep a specific outline going, so I came up with three different eras of the DJing movement up until today. The first: the discovery of the scratch. That era included DJs Grand Wizard Theodore, who invented the scratch, Grandmaster Flash and Grand Mixer DXT—they're responsible for defining the art of scratching. Then, you had the next generation, who were basically the offspring of the first guys, people like Davey DMX and Cash Money. And the third generation is us, Q-Bert and D-Styles. Scratchology showcases those three important periods. I took on the first movement, then Total Eclipse was the middle generation, and Roc Raida rounded it off at the end.

Emixshow: Rob, your art form is now being taught in an academic environment. How does that contribute to your view of your music?

RS: Being that we have people writing books, you're starting to see the art more frequently in magazines, and on TV. I think that now, it's become a more respectable form of musical expression, and the time is approaching where you are gonna see it being taught as a natural art form of music. So I think with anything, there are gonna be people that want to fight against new ideas, and new things. But with Scratchology, it's another way of expressing and proving that it is an art form, and just because it's not an instrument that you would find in the definition of the word, we are turning it into an instrument.