

THE PRAGUE POST

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NIGHT *and* DAY

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HOT THE RETURN OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT HIP-HOP B2



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Continuing developments

The progenitor of socially conscious hip-hop is back

By Vanessa Bulkacz
For *The Prague Post*
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When Arrested Development burst onto the music scene in 1992, it was as one of the first purveyors of hip-hop music with a positive, pro-black social message. The idea that hip-hop didn't have to carry what singer and band founder Todd "Speech" Thomas called a "pimp-whore" message put the band at the forefront of the budding "conscious hip-hop" movement.



COURTESY PHOTO

"Speech" Thomas brings his progressive brand of hip-hop to Prague on Arrested Development's latest tour.

The music was new, too -- a unique sound that the group describes as "cultural-southern-hip-hop-folk-ethnic-funk," or "Life Music." Arrested Development's immediate commercial success showed that audiences were hungering for a break from the norm, something different from the grunge music that was dominating popular music at the time, something a little deeper.

Arrested Development

When: Tuesday, March 9, at 8 p.m.

Where: Roxy

Tickets: 396 Kc, at the venue and through Ticketpro

The combination of catchy yet virtually unclassifiable music with self-described "pro-African self-determination" lyrical content also won the band massive critical acclaim. Arrested Development racked up an MTV award for Best Rap Single ("Tennessee") and two Grammys in 1993 for Best New Artist and Best Rap Performance. The group's politically outspoken lyrics also garnered the respect of the black community, earning the band an NAACP image award.



COURTESY PHOTO

Then in 1995, at the peak of its success, Arrested Development broke up. Although Thomas' reported controlling nature was often blamed for the breakup, other band members took equal responsibility for the split. "You never know how you're gonna react to fame until you actually experience it," Arrested Development dancer/stylist Montsho Eshe told MTV in a 2000 interview shortly after the band's reconciliation. "I blame each and every member of the group for the breakup because none of us was really trying to compromise the way we felt about things." During the hiatus, several members of the band went on to successful solo careers, including

Thomas, who achieved international success on a Japanese record label, and Dionne Farris, who provided vocals on the band's first album.

But Thomas claims that even after the breakup, the band always felt there was more it needed to say and do. "There was no one to really fill that spot of hip-hop with a more spiritual tinge to it -- hip-hop that can appeal to the dance floor but also to the heart," Thomas recently told the Boston newspaper *The Dig*.

This year, the band is making its first European tour in a decade and releasing its fourth studio LP, tentatively entitled *Among the Trees*. "This album addresses relationships, whether they be between you and God, you and your spouse, children or whatever," Thomas says of the new album. Eshe says that the new stuff "blows the old stuff out of the water," because now all the band members have a voice on the record.

As for what to expect on the current tour, Thomas says, "This tour is going to be an exciting mix of music with dance, percussion, turntables and of course, all the songs that have made Arrested Development known. We do celebrations of life."

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