

Grounded in Reality

Wyclef Jean Talks Candidly About His Favorite City Hot Spots, His Ideas on a Possible Fugees Reunion, His Recent Hospitalization, and His Latest CD, *The Preacher's Son*

By Blair Boone
Special to New York Resident

Wyclef is one of those rare cutting-edge artists who define an era," RCA Music Group titan Clive Davis said, reflecting on the talents of hip-hop sensation Wyclef Jean.

Bursting onto the scene with fellow band members Lauryn Hill and Pras Michel to form the multiplatinum group the Fugees, Wyclef has gone on to have an equally impressive solo career, with three genre-defying multiplatinum albums: *The Carnival, Eclectic*, and *Masquerade*.

Considered by most in the industry as a quadruple threat (a rapper, world-class singer, songwriter, and producer), Wyclef has collaborated with such superstars as Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Destiny's Child, Missy Elliott, Sinéad O'Connor, Mya, Mick Jagger, and Gloria Estefan.

Now the ever-prolific and highly talented musician prepares for the release this week of *Preacher's Son*, his first album on the new Clef/J Records label.

A stunning collection from start to finish, *The Preacher's Son* showcases Wyclef's uptempo hip-hop and reggae beats, combined with Creole and Caribbean flavor.

A devoted husband, tireless activist, and utter workaholic, Wyclef took some time away from the studio to sit down and give *New York Resident* the inside scoop on the new album, Lauryn Hill and the Fugees, his recent hospitalization in Miami, and where the hot spots are in New York City.

New York Resident: Let's start off by talking about your most recent endeavor, *The Preacher's Son*. What was the inspiration behind this project?

Wyclef Jean: *Preacher's Son* pays homage to my father. After I lost him two years ago, I went through a mourning period with *Masquerade*. This new album is more of a celebration of life. Some of the themes are love, reality, and pain.

NYR: It's an eclectic collection on this album. What are some of your favorite tracks?

WJ: "Me and My Guitar (3 Nights in Rio)" with Santana is great. I love the Afro-Cuban rhythms. My favorite song is the one I did with Monica called "Class Reunion." It's about going back after high school or college to see what people have done with themselves. Sometimes it's pretty sad. I'll probably go on tour with these songs next year.

NYR: You've worked with so many other talented artists over the years, from Patti LaBelle to U2. Who were some of your favorites? Is there anyone else out there you'd like to work with, and is it more fulfilling collaborating with other artists or do you prefer your solo work?

WJ: Oh, I loved being able to do something with Patti LaBelle. I thought Whitney Houston was incredible. She's one of my favorites.

I also loved working with Mary J. Blige, Carlos Santana, and Destiny's Child, but one person I'd love to work with is Prince. I like doing everything — singing, songwriting, and producing. But I do look for the hottest singers for the songs I write.



PHOTO: KILIAN

NYR: Countless others in the industry have commented on your artistry, but can you describe in your own words about your vision behind the Clef zone?

WJ: The best way to explain this is by mentioning others who were in the zone, like Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Jimi Hendrix, just to name a few. Some music is hard to classify. Is it hip hop, R&B, or what? With this type of music and these types of artists, you find yourself in the zone. Yeah, the Clef zone is spiritual.

NYR: As an immigrant from Haiti, can you talk a bit about your work as an activist and your ideas on social responsibility?

WJ: Well, we are all a part of this world. Many of us are in positions that can really help people, and sometimes we forget that. The reality is that people struggle. If we didn't suffer, then our parents suffered, and if our parents didn't suffer, then their parents suf-

fered. That's the reality. So the gift that we give back should always be to aid society.

NYR: What are the happiest and unhappiest points of your career?

WJ: The happiest point was when I got my first contract with the Fugees. Coming from the ghetto, I was like, we're moving on up like *The Jeffersons*. [laughs] But, by far, the unhappiest time was when I was at the studio and got the call that my father was in the ambulance with no pulse.

NYR: I'm sorry. That must have been devastating.

WJ: Oh yes, it was, but thank you.

NYR: What's the best advice you've ever been given?

WJ: The best advice was to stay away from drugs, cocaine, crack, needles, and all of that.

NYR: Let's talk about some of your hangouts in New York, since this is our nightlife issue. What are some of your favorite places to party, eat, be with friends, and just to live?

WJ: I love the nightlife so much that I want to have my own spot one day. Right now my favorite place is the lounge P.M. I like the vibe in there. It doesn't matter if you are a star or not. You can chill and relax. It's pretty eclectic.

The best place to eat is definitely Mr. Chow on the East Side. I like the energy at Serafina's for just hanging out with friends.

For living, the development of Harlem is pretty incredible. It's looking really beautiful up there right now.

NYR: You are happily married. Tell us about your wife.

WJ: Ah, yes, my wife, Claudinette, is incredible. She's a designer, and she just had her second show over at Bryant Park for her line Fusha. She's a black sister ripping things apart. [laughs]

NYR: You were recently hospitalized in Miami. Can you explain what happened?

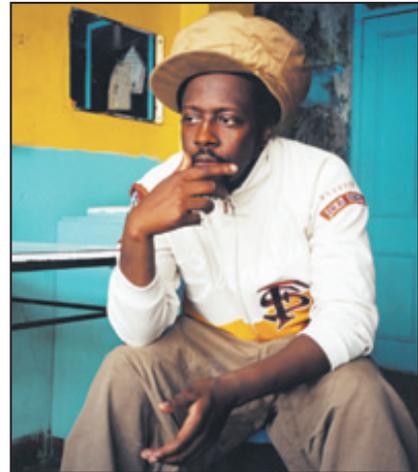
WJ: Yeah. A lot of times you hear about food poisoning, but you never take it seriously until it happens to you. I ate some bad fish and was knocked out for three days.

I was hooked up to an IV, and they gave me some drugs to take away the pain. The doctor advised me to take three weeks off, but you know how people from the Caribbean are. [laughs]

NYR: I'd like to finish up by talking briefly about the group you helped to

found, the Fugees. Can fans ever expect to see a reunion at some point?

WJ: There's always a lot of talk about the Fugees. I definitely hope so.



A reunion is something that I will always hope for.

NYR: Your former classmate and band member, Lauryn Hill, is reportedly working on a new solo album. Do you have any comments on that?

WJ: Oh yeah, I'm really looking forward to Lauryn's next album.

NYR: What were your reactions to the most recent *Rolling Stone* article about her and some of the comments Pras Michel made regarding the interpersonal dynamics within the group back then?

WJ: As far as the *Rolling Stone* interview, I think that it was very unfair. But I can understand why [ex-Fugees member] Pras is bitter, since he hasn't had a hit since the Temptations. That writer shouldn't have been so desperate to get a story out but instead should have been patient enough to wait and get Lauryn's point of view across.

He just went for the one Fugee who had nothing going on in his career right now. I know for a fact that Lauryn is not in a cult. Let's make that clear. She deserves to read something more inspirational.

[That] article makes it that much harder to come back after a big break. But the article didn't mean much to me because it is based on speculation, not on reality. ■

The *Preacher's Son* is in stores now. More information on Jean is available at wyclef.com. Blair Boone is a New York-based writer who can be reached at blair@blairboone.com.