

# DIVINE STYLER THE POWER OF THE WORD

By Thomas Quinlan

It's been ten years since Divine Styler's debut release and in that time he has only released two new records. But make no mistakes, the importance of Divine Styler goes way beyond those three albums. Like Kool Keith, Divine's music has always been ahead of its time and will often be misunderstood. In fact, the flack he's been getting for his latest record is no different from what he has been experiencing throughout his career. "I get flack, period," admits Divine. "I get it for just being Divine Styler because people, mainly black people, don't like to be reminded of what they're not doing. Since we've [been] freed from slavery we've been partying and the party's over. It's time to work and build yourself into something." Divine Styler has something to say. With his new album, *Word Power 2: Directrix*, he's saying it.

## 1984

Brooklyn-born MC Divine Styler was into hip-hop since "before it was called hip-hop, when it was just a way of life." But, in 1984 Divine decides that it is time to get more serious with the beats and rhymes. "I didn't foresee myself being a famous MC. I just wanted to take it to another level." Divine Styler starts to make demo tapes and gives them out for friends to play.

## 1988

Through friend Bilal Bashir (who would produce Divine's debut album), Divine Styler is introduced to Ice T. Within a year, he is a new member of T's L.A.-based Rhyme Syndicate, which includes Everlast, W.C. (through Low Profile), and of course, Ice T. "It was a golden age for L.A.," according to Styler. However, it wasn't the fun-loving crew the outside world thought it was. "People think it was this big thing. It was nothing like that. We didn't



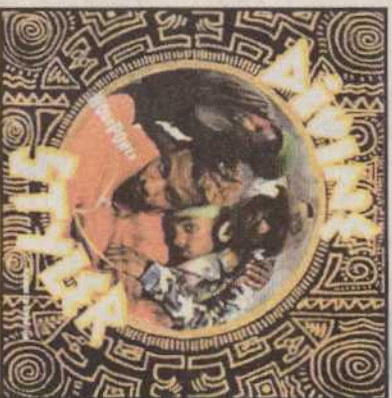
went in. "When I came out of jail I made a completely different record from what I got signed to make." The result: he scraps the thugged-out lyrics of his past to create *Word Power* (Epic), which hip-hop magazine *Source* named album of the year.

## 1990

Divine Styler makes an appearance alongside Rhyme Syndicate partner Ice T on the controversial *Iceberg/Freedom of Speech* album (Sire) for the track "What Ya Wanna Do?" Everyone is still waiting for more Divine product.

## 1992

Three years later, Divine Styler prepares to drop his sophomore release, but in the time since *Word Power* was released, relations have soured between Divine Styler and his label. *Spiral Walls Containing Animals of Light* (Epic) is a daringly creative record that is way ahead of its time. "I was the only fuckin' African-American — so-called — that had put an album together that had some fuckin' speed metal on it, that had some jazz on it, it had hip-hop on it, it had some folk on it. I had, like, five different areas of music I'm covering." Divine's experiments with speed metal long predated Ice T's *Body Count*. The album is released, but its experimental nature infuriates many. "That got me out of my contract with Rhyme Syndicate," he brags now. "It was more of a political move for me, and also me doing what the hell I wanted to do." *Spiral Walls* may not be his best-selling album but it is surely his most critically-acclaimed and timeless work. As well, Divine Styler takes some time to make a guest appearance on another groundbreaking group's



## 1989

In February, his connections with Rhyme Syndicate earn him a record deal. The very next day, the crimi-

sophomore release, *De La Soul's De La Soul is Dead* (Tommy Boy) for the track "The Doo-Doo Man."

## 1996

Prompted by the sudden disappearance of Divine Styler after *Spiral Walls*, London, ON's infamous Fritz the Cat starts work on his new fanzine, *In Search Of... The Divine Styler*, its debut issue hitting the stands in March. Explaining his dis-



appearance, Divine says, "I [started] in 1984 saying I wanted to make a record and I wake up in 1990 and I'm all confused. I'm like, 'What am I chasing? Why am I doing this?'" When the mother of Divine's daughter unearths a copy of *In Search Of* in an Atlanta store, Divine is inspired to get back into making music. "That's a sign from God," he says proudly. "I mean, come on, what MC would have a magazine named after them?" Later that same year, Divine Styler litters House Of Pain's *Truth Crushed To Earth Shall Rise Again* (Tommy Boy) with some of the best verses on this crew's third album. "The great part about it," Divine ex-