

Believing in Baduizm

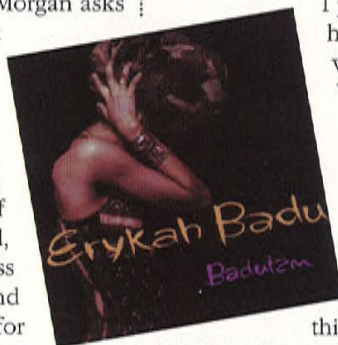
by Elio Iannacci

When people start talking about women in R&B they ask who will be the next young, black, hoochie mama to pimp her album gold? The tough skeezer opportunistic image that top-10 artists like DaBrat, Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown have fronted have recently put hip-hop in a cultural slump. In the March issue of *Essence* Joan Morgan asks who is going to be the next viable female voice of hip-hop to lead us? One need only look to the Dallas-born songstress Erykah Badu. With her new album *Baduizm* rising to the top of R&B charts she's been hailed, hyped and honoured as a cross between Billie Holiday and Nina Simone. Her first video for the single "On and On" shows Mz. Badu posing as the two retrograde characters, Miss Celie and Sugar Avery, from the film *The Color Purple*. The video captures Erykah's *Baduizm*: mixing jazz plus R&B with culture and self-pride. Badu's ingredients produce the potion missing in the blasé over-sexed and bad-ass diva complex taking over the scene.

Elio Iannacci: It seems that many new R&B artists lack the cultural con-

ing day to day to survive and some people are living for fame and fortune. It's according to your mission, your job is to be effective. You're talking about people that are different than me. That's their reality, I'm just bringing a different reality.

Nina Simone said in *Interview* magazine: "Rappers have ruined music as far as I'm concerned." What are your feelings?



I just feel that she's set in her ways. Hip hop is where be-bop ends. We're just a continuation of what she's been doin'. Syncopated hip hop is so rhythmic that it's part of our colour, it's part of our culture. Maybe she's confused [and] thinks hip hop is what she hears on the radio everyday. Maybe she thinks rap is the gansta's shootin' and all of that. It's not her fault that she don't have the right information. Rap is poetry, it's syncopated poetry to rhythmic beats. If she would really feel it and understand it, I think she would change her mind.

Syncopation is the standard in gay clubs because house music is the main airplay. Do you feel that hip hop has as much a place in the gay community?

Yes I do. The gay community as a whole is very much like the hip hop community. In [both] communities [there are] so many individuals.

Whom do you write your music for?

I'll tell you the truth. I'm writing for my culture. I'm writing for young black children because they're the ones who need it the most. All my life I was told when I was a younger child that being darker was not pretty and having my texture of hair was not pretty. We were urged to straighten it and perm it. Mary J. Blige is beautiful, but this is another example of what beautiful is. It has to do with you and your culture. That doesn't mean I'm putting down anybody else's culture, lovin' mine's fine. That's who I'm speaking for. When you, [Elio, are] speaking, you're speaking on behalf of your culture, the gay community and [that's] okay. You're not saying fuck the straight people! You're speaking because the people who are involved in your culture [and] in your circle need it.

So in a sense you see yourself as a teacher?

I teach ages 3-17. It's for the young. It's for them to say, "Okay, when I'm growing up, it's okay to be who I am." Because if you know who you are, then you don't have a problem with anybody else. If you love yourself, you don't have a problem. That's why people have a problem with us as blacks or [you] as gays...they have a problem with their damn self. They think their space is gonna be taken up if they are surrounded by others who aren't like them. ♦

