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January 24, 2007

Back being Blackalicious

By [Joel Stonington](#)
January 24, 2007

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The two members of Blackalicious - Bay Area native Chief Xcel (Xavier Mosley) and Gift of Gab (Tim Parker) of Los Angeles - are hard at work on their own projects.

Gab is working with rapper Lateef the Truth Speaker, a longtime friend, on something called "Underdogs," while Xcel is working on something so secret he wouldn't even talk about it.

So Blackalicious is branching out. But that's not news to anyone who has heard the duo since the day in 1988 when Gab asked Xcel to be his DJ back at Kennedy High School in Sacramento.

"When we first met, we weren't friends at all," Xcel said. "We knew each other strictly through music. I knew him because he was the best of a handful of rappers at our high school. The more we sat down and talked, we found we shared a common interest in hip-hop."

Blackalicious met Latyrx, the duo of Lateef and Lyrics Born, and DJ Shadow at the University of California, Davis. Under the name Solesides, they released some singles, moved to Oakland and formed the record label Quannum.

Gab has upheld his high school status as one of the best rappers around, and Xcel has made a name as one of the most confident and skilled producers in the business. His method of cutting songs, scratching and throwing down beats makes for albums that break boundaries and shows that surprise.

"I'm always trying out new things," Xcel said. "I try to stay with a basic foundation and build off that. It's that constant discovery and rediscovery that's the driving force for me."

Joel Stonington/The Aspen Times Hip-hop duo Blackalicious, with rapper Gift of Gab, performs an X Games launch party tonight at Belly Up.



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Part of that means listening to music, lots of music. His inspiration and influences range through rap, hip-hop, jazz and Afrobeat, among other genres.

Blackalicious has been prolific and varied since its 1992 debut and "Melodica," an EP single, in 1994.

Gift of Gab released his first solo recording in 2004, "4th Dimensional Rocketships Going Up," and later in the year Xcel released "The Underground Spiritual Game," a mix tape centered around the collected music of Afropop pioneer Fela Kuti. Less than a month later, Xcel released "Maroons: Ambush" with Lateef.

By the end of 2005, Blackalicious released its third full-length album, "The Craft." Last year saw the release of a Gab mix tape and a live DVD of a Seattle performance.

More material is due out soon, as the studio remains the focus for both Xcel and Gab. As Xcel tells it, the show is one of the best places to practice and come up with new material. A Blackalicious concert is always a combination of well-rehearsed material and improv.

That constant creativity and excitement is what continues to drive Xcel. He said he tries to keep the feeling he had when he first started listening to rap records.

"The improv is what keeps things always changing," Xcel said. "It's falling into place and filling in the blanks. There's never one thing, it's just what's appropriate at the time."

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