



## HOUSTON RENAISSANCE

H-Town rappers HISD initiate a Lone Star rebirth

text **Jesse Serwer** photography **Jason Woods**

"Every big city has its balance," says Ldavoice of Hueston Independent Spit District, or HISD as the eight-man collective is better known. "In ATL, you have your OutKasts and people like that, then you have your Young Jeezys and T.I.s. Same with L.A., New York, Philly. We're just trying to do that same thing here: show another side of Houston hip-hop."

Don't get things twisted, though. While the soulful, intellectually minded music put forth by HISD—rappers Equality, Ldavoice, Savvi, and Scottie Spitten, producers E. Classic, King Midas, and Soul One, and photographer/documentarian/DJ Flash Gordon Parks—is not your standard City of Syrup hip-hop fare, H-Town is still a major ingredient in the stew.

"If you're from Houston, you know exactly what we're talking about, 'cause we still rep the city," Ldavoice explains. "Some of us grew up on the North Side, and screw tapes didn't really hit the North Side hard until about '95. I was already into Tribe, De La, Pharcyde, Dignable Planets by then. I liked and appreciated screw music, but I didn't gravitate to it like some other people."

On *The District*, their 2007 debut, HISD paints a fresh portrait of Houston that recalls Slum Village's treatment of Detroit on *Fantastic Vol. 1* or Little Brother's representation of North Carolina on *The Listening*. Playful interplay between MCs, distinctive in-house production, and uber-local references together provide a window into day-to-day life in the nation's fourth-largest city. On "Galleria Chix," the four MCs trade stories about the bougie

females who post up at the city's favorite upscale mall. On his "A District Story," poet-turned-MC Equality spins the names of the city's various high schools into a surrealist yarn: "Yates drank Jack in the Fifth Ward with Booker T. reading Phyllis Wheatley's poetry/James Madison got caught in Hiram Clark selling bootleg screw tapes of Big Mello." School is a recurring theme within the group's music. The name Hueston Independent Spit District is itself a play on their home city's public education system, the Houston Independent School District, and the eight members hold seven bachelor's degrees and two master's degrees between them.

"We don't like to wear it on our sleeves, but each person that gets our music can definitely see our appreciation [for education]," says Savvi. "I'm a product of HISD, the actual school district. There are multiple connections. The underlying premise is that we're students of music and hip-hop, and also teachers as well."

While a second HISD album is still in the early planning stages, the group recently offered a progress report on its *Summer Sessions* mixtape. Peace Uv Mine, the label run by Savvi, is also prepping a slew of HISD-related releases, including albums by Blak Embassy (Savvi and Equality), Spitten Kings (Scottie Spitten and King Midas), and solo projects by Savvi and Ldavoice.

"There's a renaissance going on in Houston," says Ldavoice. "If you look at HISD, what Nicolay and Kay are doing, this new Solange joint—we're getting into some real soul music here and taking it to another page." ●

