

University of Washington  
Women Who Rock Digital Oral History Project

Transcript

**Medusa**

**Narrator:** Medusa

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Mako Fitts (MF): So can you introduce yourself?

Medusa (M): I am Monae Smith AKA Medusa, the lyrical seducer out of LA. And, hopefully, we'll be seen all over this universe, you know, before it's said and done.

MF: What is the specific way that you, as an artist, define your music, your creativity, your art?

M: That's interesting. I haven't actually had to define it. When you're an artist, you try to be as open as you possibly can to all channels. It almost makes it definition---less. But if I had to define it, I would say it's empowering for women, for couples, for children that might lack a defining direction. Also, it empowers the mind to ask, to question. And not others but question yourself. It's also a defining outlet describing all the different facets of myself. I get to be the many women in me on every song I do.

MF: Talk about your family background. Where were you born? Where are you from?

M: I am from LA originally. I'm actually a native, which is strange in LA because you meet so many people from so many different areas. I was raised in LA. Brenda Rochelle Calvin and Ronald Robert Smith created me. My father named me. I grew up with my great grandmother, fortunately, and grandmother, great aunties—I have several of them. My aunt, my mother's sister, Billie Calvin was a writer back in the day. I remember being 5 years old and going into her lab and her playing the piano and coming up with new songs and she was a part of a group called The Undisputed Truth. I don't know if you guys are familiar with them, but [begins singing] "smiling faces, smiling." That was the group she was in. That group toured with the Jackson 5 back in '70. She came to pick me up for their west coast run. I was able to meet Michael Jackson and Randy Jackson, all the Jacksons. She was actually dating Jackie Jackson at the time. At 7 years old I was actually blessed to see them perform on stage and the crowd's reaction and them come off all sweaty and excited. It was a phenomenal experience for me. It affected my world, my life and I knew in that moment that that's what I

wanted to do. So, my family is what inspired me to do what I'm doing now. My mother also played piano and she was a dancer. To have me at [age] 16, it kind of put a halt to some of those dreams, so I feel somewhat obligated in my heart to be the person that she didn't get to be. I have to dedicate my style of Hip Hop dance to, probably, my mother, genetically speaking anyway. [Laughs] Ronnie Robert Smith I didn't grow up with him so much. He spent time in Chino prison and when he got out, it was a part---time father thing. But he was very influential as far as just art in general. He's an architectural engineer and he started sketching and oils. So he would take me to work with him a lot and I got to see him do blue prints. The look on his face when he was being very detailed oriented—that was inspiring in itself. I feel like I apply the way he builds in architecture to the way that I build when I write songs. Or when I put verbiage together. You know, I'm a Pisces. I pay attention to particulars. When you kind of have to go back in time, and you know, it does make you realize what is inspiring. It could be the very small things. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother Odessa. She took me to Disney Land every summer. That was a regular. And that was inspiring in itself. Just the different characters and to see them change over the years and the rides change. As you grow, it grows. It made me realize that there are different places for music, also, besides television, radio. These wonderful rides, these children, "It's a Small World"—it's still stuck in my head. It made me realize that music is very vast and very worldly. So yeah, all of the experiences throughout life and through different individuals have been the inspiration.

MF: So you come from a very musical and creative family. Talk a little bit about the community you grew up in and the influence of music in the broader community.

M: Being in LA and having a large family like that, you get introduced to things through church. I went to a Baptist church and the preacher is musical on his own. He's a height man and a vocalist. But what you look forward to most, as a child, is the moment that the choir sings. Being in a Baptist church, Baptists churches are usually very small. You're very family oriented. You know everyone by first name and to see them sing and get the holy ghost and the spirit and pass out in the aisle and have to be taken outside and fanned revived. That's an amazing outlet and introspective of how God can affect you through a sound. Besides the church, I've been introduced to many different styles of church. Christian science, Christian churches period, and I realize there were different types of music in each church setting. Some of it was a little creepy, a little unnerving, you know, because...[begins humming]. Being young, you're introduced that that first in horror flicks or what have you. So, it was interesting. It kind of made me a chameleon of sorts when it comes to sound. So, that is your first community. When you're a kid. You go visit your grandmother and you're going to church. It's a blessing and it can be a curse because everyone knows whose child you are and they're keeping an eye on you and telling on you, if necessary. And then it expands to school. You know, school is your first introduction to having your own social life. I lived in Pomona for the majority of my life. Pomona, Pasadena. And in school, I got introduced to Hip Hop. You hear "Rapper's Delight" was the first rap song I had ever heard. But, before that even came, we were pop locking. There were the popping dominoes. Sometimes, we would ditch school to go to West Hollywood or Venice beach to battle the other pop lockers. I think that was my first dance or Hip Hop community pop locking and battling Bugaloo Shrimp's crew or Poppin' Taco. People like that. My social life started in high school because of Hip Hop. Then, you move into your adulthood and I don't know a lot of people from high school in my adult life because we moved around so much. I did realize that everyone has a desire and a love for the same things, no matter where I moved. And being [introduced] to other cultures, it made me open. Sometimes, when you stay in an area and you're only introduced to your culture and their way of living, you kind of miss out on how other people get down, you know? I consider

that a blessing because it makes me more open when it comes to my dance and music. I dig Afro-Cuban rhythms and I can see how they're meshed with RnB rhythms. I can see Jamaican rhythms. All of it is one and the same. Jazz, all of it is the same. Having grandparents and godparents that were in jazz more than anything, you know, I got that when I would go and visit. That's all they would play. That's a community in itself when you're dealing with going from the youth perspective to hanging with the elders. And then you grow into your adulthood and you choose your friends wisely. Typically, you choose your friends based on what you're doing. Being in music and open to different facets of culture, I have a lot of incredible friends. That is now my community. Every chance that I get, I pool a little bit more into my community by dealing with youth and letting them know that there's so much more than what they have in their mind right now, just to be open. So that allows me to walk through life and run into these people that I met when they were 15 [years old], 14, and now they're in their mid---20's or late---20's and they're like "I remember you! You came to my school or you came to the detention center. And you used to come and counsel us and I want you to meet my mom." And they end up coming to shows your community gets that much larger. When you say your community, there's just so many different pockets of that and I felt I had to address a little of all of them.

MF: Well, speaking of community, talk a little about what the LA Hip Hop scene looked like when you were first introduced to it.

M: Wow. That's still my heyday. I really have to own that. Especially, ditching to go all the way to, I mean, you know—from Pomona to LA. You have to ditch your last two periods to get there as their school was letting out just to battle these kids. But you realize that pretty much every one did it. That's when pop locking was at its height. Pop locking and break dancing. And you had movies like "Breakin'" and "Breakin' 2" coming out, so you had auditions. And that's when you would run into the same emcees or the same pop lockers or break---dancers. Back then when you were a crew, you were a solid crew. And everyone could tell which crew you were from because you dressed the part. Everyone had the same colors, everyone had the name of [their] crew on their shirt on the front, on the back, the sleeve, something. Back then, it was cohesive. People bonded in a different way over this dance, in comparison to now. When I see crews, I can't tell who's a crew right now. Folks come out and they're dressed in any kind of way. And they get down on an individual basis, but they don't have any teamwork going on. And I'm like 'can you guys show me a routine? Can you show me more than two routines?' When I was young, you had to have 5-6, sometimes 8 different routines because when that crew came out to battle, they're coming with all of it. And you can't do the same routine over and over again. Back then, it was our life. It was 'it.' It was that you weren't doing anything if you weren't doing that. And I think that's what LA was about during that time frame in the 80's. You would have to come out with your own piece of cardboard or linoleum and it was nothing to battle, pop locking for a full hour. Some kids now can barely pop lock for 15 minutes. It was major back then and affected me deeply.

MF: So, you're really known for your freestyle. And being just this really fierce battle emcee. How difficult was it throughout the course of your musical career? How difficult has it been being a woman, just individually battling in these very male---dominated spaces? And how did you manage that?

M: I really don't know how I managed it. It would just happen and I guess I wanted it that bad just to prove that we're not just pretty things. That we're powerful. And M is many things but a siren. She was one of many that would hit certain notes to hit throw the gauges of battle ships that were coming in to fight. She could hit a note and throw their gauges off. And, you

know, I took that and I owned it. So my battle technique was 'I'm going to hit some notes to throw you off, your battle.' So it wasn't just about the words I spit, it was the style that I spit it in. It was the aggressive notes that I would use that most males couldn't, which is empowering in itself. To be a woman, to be able to hit these graceful notes and make them very strong and impactful, yet light and tender. So, when I go in to battle, I always felt like I had an upper hand anyway. Then, I'm a wordsmith at the same time, so it's about being clever. If you can't pull the cleverness out of your moment, or out of your surroundings, then you're going to fall apart anyway. And I used to go into Hip Hop clubs and spit facing the wall. People could walk up to me and I wouldn't even feel them or see them. I'm busy. I'm in the corner and I'm spittin' and I'm listening to myself with the beat and certain things around me--- I might turn around and add that to what I'm freestyling about. That was necessary. A lot of heads think you could just come off the top of the head and it's like no, it takes some practice and it takes putting yourself in environments where it's going to be difficult. You know, for you to focus, so that you can find a focus in any given circumstance. And I found that and honed in on that. That way, when you're battling and cats are trying to pick you apart, you don't even hear it. It doesn't affect you because your focus is so many more steps ahead of them and then you have the gift of being able to impact with the different sounds. I never thought I could be beat. There was no one that was going to do it exactly the way that I am. And you may get a couple of lines on me, but that's just going to inspire me to eat you up a little bit more. So when it got to the point where guys started to realize that 'yeah, these girls may be soft, but that one, don't mess with that one right there.' And that's when I realized that like 'oh, they're giving me respect now.' But sometimes it was an over---the---top respect. Like, 'if she's going to be in it, I'm not gonna be in it. Or if she's gonna be in the show, I don't want to go on after her.' There's the good and the bad. There are a lot of tours and a lot of things that I would like to do and I feel like there might be a little splash of fear in there to have M on the line up. And I'm not speaking from an egotistical space, I'm really stepping outside of myself and looking at it and realizing that sometimes it can be a problem if you're striving to be the best.

MF: It's interesting. I think there's this way that women, because of your talent, you get put on this pedestal and on the one hand, people can see that as respectful to you, but on the other hand, there are also other women out there who are emcees so I'm wondering, can you talk about...you talk about practice and honing your craft. What were the spaces for women artists to hone their craft. And why is it that we know M. We may know Bahamadia. They know Bahamadia but there are all these other women, we don't even know who they are. So, were there space for women to really hone their craft? Like places where women could really practice with their crews and that kind of thing?

M: I believe there were, but sometimes the women didn't take full advantage of it. Back in The Good Life days, and Project Blowed days, I could still name those few that I would see. From Urban Props to Giant and Eve coming together as figures of speech, even the 5 Footers when they were a part of G---Unit. If there is a unit that is predominately male that's running what you're doing and they are your power to put you on front street. Sometimes if you're not feeding into the design of the fantasy in what a woman should be in any music, in any facet of entertainment, then they put you on a backburner or the side burner until you are. It's interesting how they'll choose to put out male groups that couldn't even possibly shine to the degree that these women do. I think because of that, it causes a bit of fear, and maybe disenchantment with women. Like 'wow. She didn't make it and she didn't make it? What am I gonna...why am I going to go there.' You know? Or maybe females have gotten up there and not with their best material but they want to just try. And because of who we are, sometimes we can't just try. We do have to step up there and it has to be our best and it has to be

polished. Because men can get away with being so-so and that being ok because they at least tried. And we don't get that measure of comfort, which is something I realize and I said 'you know what? If you're going to do it as a woman, you have to go all the way.' It has to look the part, sound the part, and you have to be confident, courageous, and you have to turn from a kitten to a lion in a heartbeat's space. There are some women that don't have that gumption. So that's why we didn't see them as much. But the ones that you don't hear about are the ones that got put on the side burner or back burner and allowed the powers that be to tell them that's where they belong. And I don't think they realize that just because they were in the industry didn't mean that they had to be conformed to dealing with just the industry. If that deal isn't working for you, or if you got a budget and they're not working for you then you have to make it work for yourself. If you're doing it because you love it, then them putting you on a back burner or a side burner, shouldn't stop you from doing what you love. I think a lot of times, you just get disenchanted or discouraged a little bit and they step out and become mothers do other things, which is incredible in itself, also. But, I think that's why you don't hear a lot of the women. And then some of the women just aren't as talented as they would like to think that they are. You do have to stand in a realm of men so you have to allow that energy out of yourself, too. It can't always be soft. It can't always be daisies and stardust, sugar, spice, everything nice. Because we do have that growl in us too. And you have to allow that to have its space when you hit the stage.

Michelle Habell-Pallan (MHP): So, three quick questions. As an incredibly powerful woman, I think you're really humble in many ways talking about what you're doing. But there's this large context, I mean that's been a catalyst for a lot of the huge projects going on in LA. Somebody had said to me "didn't you know that M is really somebody who mentored Zach de la Rocha? [She] brought him up, brought him though." And I thought, 'maybe you could talk about that project or that context' in which you mentored him, and then how it came up. And then also, your connection to, Olzomatli. That reminds me of when you said that you had traveled around to different communities and different cultures, so could you talk about how that connection happened with Olzomatli. But I would like you to address Project Blowed and Zack de la Rocha and how that all came about.

MF: And I would add to it the PC injustice center and how sort of the space in LA across musical genres really converged at that time.

M: I think a lot of it came from Project Blowed. And you don't realize when you're doing what you love that you're mentoring someone. You really don't. And it's not necessarily humility that makes me this way. It's me doing and moving on to the next. Women, in general, have an interesting way of doing that. I think it's more men that hold on to what they've done and want to be recognized and want someone to talk about it. Women are ok with being about it. Throughout my LA life, and Project Blowed, if I've touched someone's heart or I've inspired them, I don't know that until later. And it becomes a blessing and one of those Karma points. But you really just move based on where your energy is needed. Being a part of what I call "the justice league" is me showing faith for women, in general. To let them know we're here and we will take this stance also. And when you're young, you want to be attached to what is important in the whole picture. Some people just want to be attached to the smallest things and they're ok with that. In life, I see a bigger picture for this world, and if I don't attach myself to enough of it, then I'm not going to make the necessary marks to inspire you or to make you a different person. That leads into the Olzomatli thing. I knew a few of the members. I always love their music. And I said 'if I could touch some of these Latin kids, that would help my heart space in how I grew up.' Because in the midst of being in Pomona, I was in Buena Park. I was one of four Black kids at this school. It was predominantly Latina/o and

the rest were Caucasian. I had to make a choice. Who am I going to kick it with, who am I going to hang with? And it was the Chicanas. And I hung with them. I think because they thought I was rough and tough, they didn't jump me into whatever gang. But I would hang out with them. When I came out of it that was still a part of me. So, whenever I saw a movement that the Chicanos were going through, I was like 'yeah, I can relate to that.' I can feel that, being a woman of color, but also being a woman that has been allowed to explore different cultures and see that we all end up in the same fight, in the same struggle. Yeah, I'm going to do that. And if I could touch them again through Ozomatli, allowing me to do this song with them, then that's a blessing. That's a godsend. I'm going to do that. It just happened to give me a Grammy and what have you, that's beside the point, you know? The main point is still being in touch with what I grew up with.

MHP: So did you know those guys musically? How did it happen?

M: Well, Will---dog [Will.I.am] was my boy and we used to meet at an artist space where a lot of graph artists would hit up the walls. He had a studio in this warehouse and I used to go visit him all the time and he had this acoustic guitar and sometimes he would sit there and play and I would freestyle to whatever he was playing and people would hear us from the other rooms and they'd come in. We were just some regular kick it, 'hey---let's smoke some herb. Lets play some music and see what we come up with.' Or 'I'm right around the corner, I know the warehouse is right there.' You know nothing was very intentional. It never is when it comes to art. Art is abstract. It's the connection with the people. So, Will being down with Ozomatli and them starting to work on a new album, he would always suggest me. And I have to give him props for that. When I came in to do that song, I knew it was because of him.

MHP: Yeah, how do you know Quetzal, too?

M: I would go to their shows as soon as I heard about them. I was like 'Quetzal. This is such an interesting name. And they're at the Temple Bar. I'm going to go check them out.' And when I saw her dancing on the box and becoming part of the rhythm that they were playing, I thought that had to have been the most phenomenal thing I had ever seen. So I made it a point to constantly come to their shows just for the reason of appreciating their music. Sometimes, when you're who you are, you don't think about that. I don't think when I step in a place 'hey, I'm M in here.' It's whatever. I'm coming to see this show just like anyone else. And then I come and they'll say, "hey, M's in the house." And I'm like 'wow. Yeah, that is me.' "Will you come up and do something?" "Sure!" I look at things as continuous blessings. I get up there and I do something and the crowd gets to know me. We get to know each other and see that we can vibe and blend. That's how I actually became attached to them. And they showed me something that I had never seen before and I wanted to keep seeing it. Their crowd knew me from Hip Hop, from Project Blowed, The Good Life, Ozomatli, and I don't think about those things. I just live it and move on to the next. That's how that connection happened.

MHP: Well, yeah, when you said you grew up in Pomona, I instantly thought 'there's a lot of Chicanos in Pomona.'

M: Yeah!

MHP: So, you had to be interacting. Or growing up with. Or part of the larger Southern California culture. It's such a mix in the way that other places aren't.

M: Always. All the time.

MHP: I think, like you said, there's a way when suddenly you realize, 'wait a second, we're kind of fighting the same battle' and there's, sometimes, an unspoken camaraderie. And I felt like when I left LA, to a place like here, that isn't necessarily the case. But yeah, I think that's amazing.

MF: I'm wondering if you could talk about the importance of spaces, like performance spaces. If there were much more performance spaces than you would have in a place like Seattle. And also, I wonder if that's the case now? So is there a difference between the number of performance spaces where you saw artists from different genres coming together and really building community as a result?

M: There's actually probably more performance spaces now than there were before, but you have to understand--- that's Hollywood and we're plagued by the Hollywood stigma. People come out there constantly looking to open new performance spaces to perform in them, to just be a part of any movement they can attach themselves to, to be in Hollywood. And it's been like that throughout time in regards to all entertainment—acting, singing, what have you. It's not really about the performance spaces. It's about your reason for performing. And I think back in the 80's and 90's, there was more love and more of that camaraderie for the reasons why we did it. And I think now, it's a lot more of a hustle to open a new space and get it filled with bands and for you to pay to play instead of performing because you're just the shit. It's different dynamics now. And the reason can go off and make you create a space all your own just to escape that Hollywood stigma. I would have to say there are many, many more, but just for a completely different reason.

MF: Well going back to the discussion about the history with Ozomatli and sort of the impact of the live performance, you were one of the first emcees to have a live band. Talk a bit about that, especially during a time where the turntable was the medium. And also, just the history of Feline Science. How did they come together?

M: I was getting down with Massmen, which is Abstract Rude, Fat Jack, Zulu, and within that, Ab came to me one day and said "why don't you start your own crew of females?" And I was a little bothered by that. I thought I already was in a crew and this was Massmen, it was a man thing, now. 'Oh, ok, I get it.' And I said, "I don't want to separate it. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be like the women over here and, you know, we have our crew. And you guys got your crew. No." It is about coming together and it is about the bigger picture. And I'm like 'if we can come together and have children, then why can't we come together and have a space where we can be creative together? And so I said, "you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to start a band because I grew up with live music." I listened to the Isley Brothers and Carole King and Phoebe Snow and the Emotions and so that was my life, my world. And we moved around so much that my mom's album collection became my best friend. I really didn't have any friends for a few summers. So I said, "why don't I take that sound that I grew up with and mix it with my Hip Hop and see what happens?" The Feline part came about because I was a Patti LaBelle fan back in the day when she was The LaBelles and I always love that trio of females. And I said "I want my background singers to sound like the LaBelles." I pulled these three females together and a couple of them had desired to sing but it wasn't their thing. I made it their thing. And I showed them the notes to the best of my ability. It was amazing how they grew as vocalists, even though that wasn't what they wanted to do to begin with. That's how Feline Science started. Me desiring The LaBelles to be my background and finding some women that could see their vision within the vision. The band, it started with just a bass player and a percussionist and it grew from there. Musicians were looking for a reason to exist in that time because turntableists were taking over everything. You still have musicians

that desire to do sessions and get paid the way musicians did. That wasn't happening during that time. So I think I brought a new excitement to the musicians again in LA. Like, "oh there's this girl that's got this band!" And then it got to a point where I was getting calls from Macy Gray back in the day before she became who she is and the Black Eyed Peas, before they became big. Everyone would call me and ask, like "you got a drummer for us? We need a guitar player." And then I started to realize, oh wait a minute, everybody is putting bands together and started doing shows and now they got two-pieces or three- pieces and even Ahmad Jones, he was like "can I get some musicians?" I was the go-to girl for this. So it's just interesting to see how people have grown and developed and gone out of that scene and I used to wonder, and I still do, I'm like "hey, if I introduce you to these musicians and the blend of this sound, come holler at me. Come involve me with what you're doing." I used to do free shows all the time for your events and what have you. You need to fall back in and pull some of the same musicians that you used to use and talk to M and see if M would like to be on a song. If the tables were turned, I definitely would. It is about that camaraderie, it's about us showing the world that this can happen on a larger scale. We used to have 13-, 15-, 16-piece bands back in the day. Even when I go to places like Malibu Canyon, I can still see a Hispanic band get up there and have 15 pieces, you know, a horn section. And I desire to see that in Hip Hop. And because I started in LA, I want to see it come to fruition.

MF: So, it sounds like there was some politic behind, too, what you were doing. You were putting artists on, you were getting gigs, you were maintaining the sense of community among the artists.

M: Yes, definitely. That's what made me start Nappy At The Roots. We had The Good Life where you honed your craft and you didn't curse and it made you a better wordsmith. And then you had Project Blowed where everybody got a little older from The Good Life and they wanted to curse and they wanted to be their own person. And then I created Nappy At The Roots so that we could show case, so that we could step up our game to the next level and not just kick it in a Good Life or Project Blowed or in your living room and cypher, but actually, hone the craft of stage performance, of stage presence. And that's why I started Nappy At The Roots. And just bring the collective of people together that were going to the colleges that didn't get to see what we were doing. Or the grown folks that were musicians to come and see what these college kids had to offer. I was excited that I had started to see different age groups and different cultures show up to this event. And then it became the place to perform when you came into town. I always performed at every Nappy At The Roots, whether it be the same songs, or interchangeable songs and people started showing up like Teena Marie. I got up there, I got this song called "This pussy's a gangsta" and Teena Marie got up on stage we did this song together and it was like one of the highlights of my life. Just to see the emcees grow on that stage, it means everything to me. And they can come to me to this day and say, "hey, you gave me my first show." And I'm like, "you know, I gave you your 5th one, too. And by that 5th one, you were phenomenal!"

MF: How long did that project last?

M: Actually I'm starting Nappy At The Roots back up for my birthday and my video release party. Let me see if I have a flyer in here. I think I do. But it went on for 12 years. It was something that I started with SK 44 and my partner, Coco. It went for about 12 years and then my home girl, Lady Copper got involved. She was the host. She became the host with the most up in there. You know, we had dj's like dusk, DJ Dusk, God rest his soul. Brother Jamile, Keilu. It was that place to fall though and I only did it once a month because I wanted the anticipation to build. I didn't want it to be a every week thing. I wanted it to be something you



really looked forward to. When other people fell off doing it, I just kept pushing it. I realize in the last couple years that people miss it. And they miss it at that location. I've tried it at different locations, other little spots, and it wasn't the same turnout. So, now it's back.

MF: So just to switch gears a little bit, I know you played the character Leisha in "Stranger Inside," and I just, I love that movie, so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you got involved with that project, what the experience was like and just how that project and film is just an extension of your art

M: I mean, Cherryl used to come to my shows, and I had no idea who she was or what she did. And she came to me one night and she said, "I have been working on this film. I'm finished. HBO wants it and I would love for you to read for the lead character." I'm like, "ok, this is strange but I'll do it." So I went and I read, then I saw the character Leisha and as much as people would want the lead, I wanted the Leisha character because it resonated with me more. And I really related it was something that I had been through. So, I told her I wanted to be Leisha. She was like, "really? You don't want the lead character?" And, I'm like, "no." And so she had me read for Leisha and I got the part. It was strange, because where we were doing part of the movie, "Stranger Inside", was where I was incarcerated. I didn't say anything at first, until I got inside and I realized one of the sales we were shooting in was the cell that I was held in. I just couldn't hold it in, anymore. I had to let it out. You know what, I was incarcerated in this facility. And these cells that you're using right now, I was locked up in these cells right here. It was just amazing to see my life come full circle, and I'm doing a film now in this place I was locked up in. It made me think back like how I used to hustle in comparison to my craft hustling me now. It was an amazing opportunity. And a life's realization.

MHP: I just have one quick question, and it's kind of moving away, but it could be connected. You know last night, we had the panel with Alice Bag from the 70's and I thought there was a lot of amazing wisdom being shared amongst powerful women. Part of the Women Who Rock project is creating spaces for dialogue, because we usually don't have a chance to come together. Knowing that you kind of grew up in the context of southern California with Chicano kids and culture, I don't know if you have had a chance to read Alice's book. Or just based on the conversation last night what your feeling was just about how she is in this genre of punk. A punk pioneer and you guys were connecting at this really high level. So I thought maybe you could talk about that. I mean, even if you just talk about last night. Very different women from very different musical contexts but connecting at this very spiritual or higher level.

M: I think Alice is just amazing. You never know how connected you are with people until you actually sit and you hear their story. I was thinking after last night's panel that I bet we've been in some of the same clubs. I bet we even know a lot of the same people and have never just sat down. For that to be the first time we've sat and had a conversation amongst other powerful women. That's amazing to me. You have to realize that California is very large. And there are so many different scenes. You do have to hair salon scene and the gay scene, low rider scene. So to find someone like yourself who has probably experienced all of them and you haven't met them? Really? That's a phenomenal thing. And I think that you do have to be an open person and I find that women are more open than men. We'll have more experiences and encounters in different cultures and in different settings than what men do. So, me being in a Chicana world and knowing some of the dialogue from back then and kicking it. I even had a little bit of an accent back then. Because that's who I was. I couldn't help it. So not to be older and put that in a perspective of, ok this was my journey that god gave me so that I could

see the dynamics of our lives being very similar. It was just a confirmation last night in that panel to be sitting alongside those women and hearing similar stories and me knowing that punk scene. Me knowing I used to roll down Sunset [Blvd.] and see the punk kids with the extreme mohawks and the colors and scooters and the whole bit. And I'm like, 'wow, she was really a part of that. That was a wild scene.' I know gang bangers, brothers that used to go to that scene just to punk out or get in the mosh pit and sock somebody. That's their story. And they were Bloods and Crips. And they would go to these punk [shows]. So I was like, 'I wonder if she knows Rusty. I wonder if she knows...' So it's amazing how large many scenes are but how small the world is and the thought process very similar in every culture.

MHP: Well, you know, last night you explained having a gift. And the gift flows through you and when you're on stage, you're feeling this, it's you, but it's also this larger force that's coming through. Alice writes about that in the book, too. In *Violence Girl*, [she talks about] being on stage, even in the punk realm, connected her to this thing way beyond herself, this larger power that wasn't about Alice, but her just hooking in. I thought even though you're in different genres, it didn't necessarily matter. It was this larger creative force.

M: To plug into that energy for the creator, the almighty creator, the awe sources, all of us want to feel that. Everyone experiences it in their different way. For you to receive that energy and be able to brighten a room or an arena with it is something that's rare. It's not something that everyone can do or everyone can give. You have to be an open channel, an open crystal in order to shine that kind of light amongst thousands of people. It's very empowering. You're being embraced in the angelic wings of the awe.

MF: if you were to look forward 20 years from now, thinking about your career, your contributions, the work that you've done, the scenes you've been a part of, the communities, how do you predict, as the goddess of Hip Hop...what are your predictions about Hip Hop 20 years from now?

M: I think 20 years from now, it can do one or two things: it can either be completely watered down like a Mrs. Butterworth breakdancing on the counter, or the hamburger helper hand busting a rhyme. Or, it could become the all---empowering. It could be something that the future presidents will have to use to communicate with the youth just to get their point across. It could be something that women and teachers, teachers in general have to use as a part of their academia. It could be the new language if we allow it to be. Right now, it's teetering. It's overly commercialized. I think the powers that be, just like they do RnB, like they did RnB: they'll take it from the masters and they'll instill it in these youngsters that are like 11 or 12 years old that really have no idea what RnB really is in their soul, in their spirit. They know the sound, they know the quality of sound, they know who they should sound like, but they don't know that. And when RnB soul music was given to us, it was given to us in that way. We buy the Aretha Franklins, the Isley Brothers, things like that. Right now, Hip Hop is being treated in the same way. If you had told me 20 years ago that Justin Bieber would be and RnB singer, I would have called you a lie. Right now, is that what's going to happen with Hip Hop later? Are we going to have a 12, 13, or 14 year old White kid setting the precedence of what Hip Hop is supposed to be, when the elders are the ones that presented it to us and did it from a street perspective and gave us a voice that we didn't have. What type of voice is that going to be? We either have to take it and control it and allow it to grow up into the adult version that it's supposed to be, or it's going to get watered down. And it's going to regress. I feel like as long as I'm around, I'm going to be a part of it growing into the adult that it should be.

MF: Do you think there are other OGs in Hip Hop who see themselves in that role?

M: Yes. And I've seen them. But it's very easy to get disenchanted when you have a television telling you what's acceptable and what's not. You kind of have to plug in to the higher source and unplug from the average source in order to be the awe that you're supposed to.

MF: Thank you.

M: It was my pleasure.

MF: Do you have any other things that you have to say on tape?

M: Yes. We need to listen to our children more in regards to their first purest and honest thoughts. Not what we teach them or what we show them to think because they are closely connected to the source, because they just came from it. And when they're being the purest and most honest, when they're just talking and chattering, playing, we need to pay attention to the messages that they're giving us because that will help us to grow into the adults that we should be and stay more connected to that higher source. I grew up during a time where you were seen and not heard as a child. When the adults were speaking, you go to the room. And there is a time and a place for that. But sometimes adults need to just sit with children and allow them to just speak their minds, heart. I bet we would remain closer to the source and have a better understanding and a better form of communication with them. So if you guys could do that for me, I'd appreciate it.