

Welcome to Kool Keith's Siamese Sex Show

The unspeakable confessions of a mysterious rap legend

Kool Keith is one of rap's most enigmatic personalities. He's old school, but time travels in a futuristic galaxy. He's insane, yet crazy like a fox. He disappears without a trace—yet hides in plain sight. He's been outcast and vilified by the music industry, but retains a legion of fans from around the world.

Keith is the Mickey Rourke of hip hop.

The dramatic contrasts that define Kool Keith's style are evident in his newest project titled "Siamese Sex Show," which chronicles the story of five Bay Area rap outlaws united to fight evil. The album, titled *Apocalypso*, combines the urban comic book charm of Gorillaz with the hip hop/pop appeal of The Fugees. *Apocalypso*'s ironic party anthems, which belie dark apocalyptic undertones, showcase Kool Keith's signature rap style and cadences more clearly than any project he's been associated with in over a decade.

He's at turns poetic and pornographic, abstract and vulgar, naughty and nice—often in the same breath. *Siamese Sex Show* is both new yet vintage Keith.



San Francisco writer John Papageorge sat down with Kool Keith to conduct a rare one-on-one interview with the elusive artist.

Question: Why do you think your fans are so diehard?

Kool Keith: People like my realness as an artist. I did it all—the party nights, the lights, the action, the cameras, the rooms; but despite the glamour, I'm unpredictable and most rappers are predictable, and people don't want to see the same products.

Question: You have a reputation for missing shows and disappearing into thin air. Is this reputation warranted?

Kool Keith: I have a stigma that I wouldn't show up for shows, like the Warped Tour, but I just don't like to show up for sound checks or hang out at the venue for five hours before the show. I'm a rock star basically. To me doing shows is a vacation. People go to Paris, London, or the Mediterranean for vacation, but when I go to these places to do shows, I make it a vacation. People think I'm going to disappear, but I know when the show is. People are bugged out because I'm so worldly.



Question: How did the rumor start about you being crazy?

Kool Keith: It's a funny story. I had a press day at Mercury and from 9 am to 11 am and there were a ton of journalists who kept asking the same questions and I was getting tired, so I started making things up just to keep me awake. I said that I was sent to Bellevue because I tried to eat the arms off my body or that I was put into a straight jacket because I tried to cut my arms off with a butter knife.

The journalist thought it was a real story and ran with it, and the story traveled for a longtime. And

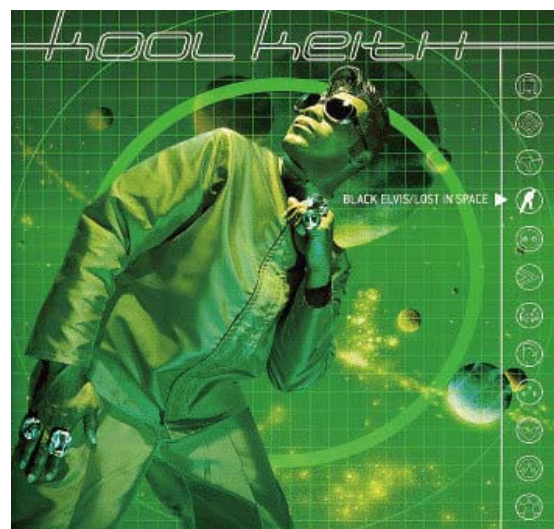
I played the part, so people thought I was crazy. People would ask if I were high when I write and I say, "No, I'm just a normal person." I watch movies and have a vivid imagination. I write things that people want to say, but they can't.

Question: You've created a never-ending collection of exotic comic book rap characters. Coincidentally, the Siamese Sex Show is based on a fictional group of characters that—ironically—happen to be real. What's the story behind all your personas?

Kool Keith: I like to have fun. My personas have expanded my career of recording. I can be in six or seven groups at the same time because I played a role in each group. I became the energy for each of my groups. These personas gave me lanes to make Dr. Octagon, Dr. Doom, and Black Elvis. These personas also allow me to do outside projects like the Siamese Sex Show and Prodigy and rock bands. People shouldn't be confused by these personas. I'm a professional rapper and can adapt to different things. It's a great opportunity and a lot of other rappers are finally starting to see that.

Question: Tell us about the Siamese Sex Show, it's a fascinating project that's like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory—sweet on the outside with a dark apocalyptic message on the inside. The album's tongue in cheek comic book packaging seems to be a perfect fit for you.

Kool Keith: I thought this Siamese Sex Show project was totally new and interesting and different. The melodies are great with a major sound and style all of its own. I lend my vocals to these projects as an instrument. But people are always shocked and amazed that I can adjust to be on something that they never thought I'd ever do.





Bay area rapper Mistah FAB

Question: Was it hard to transition your style to this Siamese Sex Show project?

Kool Keith: The Siamese Sex Show project was a good pill and my mind adjusted. The sound had no boundaries and I have no boundaries. I have no tag on my back but certain fans are stuck in a certain time like things that I've done with Octagon but people need to cross their minds over and acknowledge that this is an amazing project and it's incredible that I could adjust to so many things. But people can't let go and say things like, "I like when you did the dark stuff and you were a monster but now you're doing Jacques Cousteau and scuba diving." We don't want to see Michael Myers return home, come back from school, and we don't want to see Michael Myers return home again.

Question: Siamese Sex Show features a cast of the Bay Area's top rappers, such as Mistah Fab, J Diggs, Malika, and Hadji Springer. Many of your fans don't realize that you have a lot of respect for the Bay Area rap scene.

Kool Keith: I'm good friends with E40 and B-Legit. I have a lot of rappers in the Bay Area that I look up to that are doing their own thing. I was following E40 way before he went broad and national. I love the collaboration between Mistah Fab and myself on the Siamese Sex Show song "Playboy."

Question: "Love Light" is a song off of the Siamese Sex Show album that's both poetic and naughty at the same time. What was your approach to that song?

Kool Keith: I like writing about girls and freaky stuff. I take a song like "Love Light" and make it what I want and add an extra dimension to it. I'm spoken word with rhythm. I took a day and listen to the themes of all the songs and I don't have a pre-written verse for songs like a lot of rappers do. Like a movie, I'm looking for the feeling and emotion of the song. I write songs that are crafty, original, and distinctive—and that's what I did with that song. I don't like to do what every one else does. Most rappers do the same thing on every album. They'll say, "I'm a killer and a murder and I'm going to strangle you" and they say that on every record. Or you have the 'lover' and he says, "I'm going to give you surprises, and I'm going to marry you and put you on the hill. I'm going to give you the world" and he says that on every record.

Question: The song "When We Ride" is open for interpretation. Your verse was both naughty and abstract.

Kool Keith: I'm the king of the abstract. You don't always have to be direct and say "Well, I'm going to hit you in the head with the hammer." That's childish. That's not really clever. I like a door of open poetry. I'm the creator of the whole genre of abstract from Tribe Called Quest to Da La Soul. I know the game. The Ultramagnetic MCs started that whole thing. It all grew from that time.



Question: The release of the Siamese Sex Show CD had been held up longer than Guns and Roses' Chinese Democracy. A few demos were released to the market in 2006 but the CD is finally ready for commercial release. Do you remember your first impression?

Kool Keith: Of course, I remember it. It was like Prince but with a twist that made it unrecognizable from anyone else. It's different and unique. It's pop but it's also underground. The sound can change on a dime. When stuff like the Siamese Sex Show finally popped up and I went back and listened to it, it shocked me. I couldn't believe that I made that. I said, "Holy shit, I made that!" I want all my projects to be that way.

Question: Do most producers approach you with songs in mind or do they have you rap to a click track that they can use later?

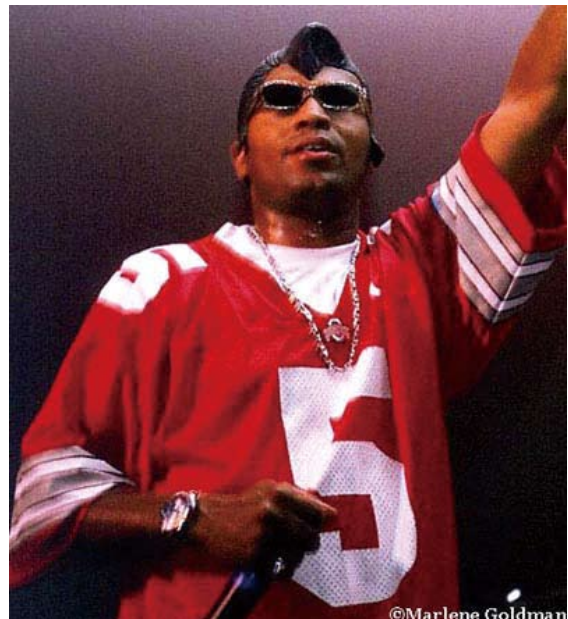
Kool Keith: With this project, I took a day and listened to the themes of all the songs. The songs were already mixed and arranged as opposed to some people who want to take my vocals and put it on shit that I have no idea of what I'm rapping on and I didn't want to be on it. And it doesn't sound good. With the SSS project, I had the physical beat in my face.

Question: El Greco, the producer of the Siamese Sex Show, tells this hilarious story about how he didn't have the budget to completely meet your financial terms to appear on the CD. But in the end you allowed him to pay you—in part—with a giant box of porn videos—that he gathered together through generous donations from his friends in San Francisco—which he then had to check in at the airport to fly down and give to you in person in LA. What's up with that?

Kool Keith: I'm not weird in any way. I'm just different. I love children and I take them out to get their candy and toys. I'm not a molester or a rapist or anything like that— that's for sure. I like to write things that are emotional. I like to feel good about things. I'm sensitive to people being disrespectful. A lot of the artists now are disrespectful.

Question: El Greco and Kutmaster Kurt, the producer of your new Dr. Doom album, say that you're professional but that you're also a diva. Is that true?

Kool Keith: I'm a secret star. People know who I am but they don't want to tell me, because they're jealous of me and mad because I look young. That old school thing is a joke to me. A lot of people who rap now look old.



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Question: There was a rumor about the making of Octagon II and that just fell through. What happened?

Kool Keith: I was going to do Octagon II with Automator. I met him in New York and we sat down and we were cool. But the second part of the conversation fell through. I told them I need a bunch of Booty Talk DVDs, a DVD player, some money to buy a donut and go shopping. But they said that when the record comes out, I'll need to pay a minimum fee for staying in the hotel. They didn't want to play the right baseball, so I left because I'm too smart.



Question: What do you hate about rap?

Kool Keith: Rap came from the streets from the lights and lampposts and graffiti. Rap was urban culture. Rap was never herbal. Rap was never farm. Rap was never porch monkey-ish. I don't want to go to a rap club and have 50 incense burners. That's not rap at all.

Question: The Siamese Sex Show CD has gotten interest from labels around the world from Japan to Europe. There were even producers from New York who wanted to turn it into a hip hop musical. What happens if the project blows up commercially and fans start calling you a sellout?

Kool Keith: Oh they can kiss my black ass. My vocals are what they are regardless of what I'm doing. I can do whatever I want to do because it's me. My thing is to flood the universe because I am the celestial.

John Papageorge is a San Francisco-based freelance writer who reports on technology and culture for Rolling Stone, The San Jose Mercury News, and Wired Magazine.