



Talkhouse Music Podcast - 3.2.17

Jarobi White (A Tribe Called Quest) with Starita (engineer, A Tribe Called Quest + Michael Franti & Spearhead + more)

Dek and quotes:

Jarobi White (A Tribe Called Quest) and Starita, who worked on Tribe's recent chart-topping album We got it from Here... Thank You 4 Your service, remember Phife Dawg in this edition of the Talkhouse Music Podcast. Jarobi talks about their earliest days, breaks down the meaning of Tribe lyrics, shares the last words Phife ever spoke to him and so much more. Starita was the last engineer to ever work with Phife, and brings us into those final days of frantic work and heavy emotions. Check it out. Subscribe now on [iTunes](#) or [Stitcher](#) to stay in the loop on future Talkhouse Podcasts.
— Elia Einhorn, Talkhouse Podcast host and producer

Full Transcript:

Starita: Phife was working on the Tribe record and then wanted to start doing some sessions closer to home so he came to Fantasy Studios which is where I was engineering with him. We hit it off, started working on thing. We were working on some tracks that didn't even make the record and then Dis Generation as well. Phife he was just, he was kicking ass and taking names in the studio. He was blazing through everything.

Jarobi White: The [00:00:30] last few records that he made, those last Tribe records Phife was on fire. Definitely was on fire.

Starita: The last two that we recorded was called Forever. It was a trip. The vibe in the studio ... Phife didn't seem down or anything but there was a little bit of heaviness in the air and he said, "Yell I'm going to pull up this track. Let's see if we can knock this one out". Sitting there, he's writing and writing and then he's like, "I'm [00:01:00] ready" and he jumps in the booth and that was like three verses in there. It's long and he starts telling the story of when they grew up together from the beginning all the way up through the problems that Tribe had and then to the current day. He told the entire story and it was almost like a goodbye letter.

Jarobi White: It definitely [00:01:30] was. This is heavy, it took us a while to listen to this shit. Talk for a while.

Starita: Yeah just back to that track it was a while. It just kind of sat there for a little while because everybody was kind of ... I don't think could deal with it at that point in time. I mean the track, it's just so heavy and it was almost like he got that off his chest and was like, "Okay [00:02:00] I'm cool now". You know?

Jarobi White: For him to be able to put so much emotion into that song and for shit to be lyrically sound still and be a dope fucking track it's a feat in itself.

Starita: Yeah.

Jarobi White: I don't know how he got through that, I don't know how he got through that. Listening to the shit like, he very specifically says goodbye to me Tip and Ali [00:02:30] and all of the fans, very specifically and thank you. He is the most amazing man in the world because nobody gets to close their shit out. Phife got to absolutely close his life out. He did everything he wanted to do, how he did it, close it up and got a send off. He was like, "I'm finished" and he got to finish. Who the fuck gets to finish? [00:03:00] Nobody gets to win. Nobody gets to finish except for Phife Dawg. He is the most amazing motherfucker ever to me.

[00:04:30] Phife was, he had a grueling schedule. He would like do dialysis in the beginning of the week in California, [00:05:00] fly to New York, record, then go back home. Do dialysis in New York, fly home and repeat this. It's a lot. Not just on the body or whatever but time wise it was becoming a lot. We decided to have him start doing some of the vocals in California to kind of make it easy. That's how we looked for a studio and that's how Roots stumbled on Starita.

Starita: [00:05:30] Yeah that's how it all went down. It was ... I was glad that he was working in the Bay Area. Me and Phife were working together up until the Saturday before he passed on that Tuesday. It was very bittersweet because I was so excited to be working on the Tribe record and working with Phife and then that happened. It was an interesting situation how it all went [00:06:00] down. I couldn't imagine having that sort of schedule back and forth.

Jarobi White: Yeah it was crazy, it was grueling but like it was funny because like he was so happy just to be doing the album. He had to be in some kind of discomfort or whatever but you would not notice it. You would not see

it, you could not see it. You're not going to be able to tell, he wasn't even down in spirits. I would be tired you know what I'm saying? He wasn't even tired. He was just made of some incredible shit.

Starita: Yeah like I was saying when he was in the studio [00:06:30] it was just I mean just on fire. It was unbelievable to see a master like that. A master lyricist just ... I mean I've worked with a lot of folks over the course of my career but that was top of the part. That's on of the best MC ... is the best MC I've ever worked with.

Jarobi White: You started off like ... when we first initially started writing for this shit he was like, "Joe does that sounds good?" Like are you fucking kidding me? Yes you are murdering shit right now, what are you on right now? It's like everybody was just [00:07:00] so in the pocket, so in the zone when we were recording everybody's performance on that whole damn album was just so spectacular. That was just like the perfect storm really. That's exactly what it was. It's not like we sat there and planned any of the things to happen the way that they did. Just the subject matter, everything, everything was just so timely and on point and so in the moment it was crazy. Phife had a crystal ball on a lot [00:07:30] of these things like talking about Donald Trump and all this shit. That was amazing that he did that. That swayed the whole shit. Hey if Hilary would have won would the Tribe albums been this big? You know what I'm saying?

Starita: Right, right.

Jarobi White: Kind of got to thank Donald Trump maybe? No, no I won't thank for nothing.

Starita: Don't go that far.

Jarobi White: You know what though? You know those funny thing about it, crazily enough Donald Trump is bringing people together.

Starita: He is.

Jarobi White: In a really [00:08:00] crazy twisted way he's definitely bringing people together because we're all saying, "Dude this can't be fucking happening". Everybody see's the writing on the walls like you've got to be fucking stupid. What's more amazing, a lot of the people that I know voted for him they're like, "You were right the whole time. You were so right the whole time. I don't know what I was thinking, I don't know why I thought that this man thought about anybody besides himself". I was like, "I don't know why either" Know what I'm saying?

Starita: Yeah, yeah it's ... I mean it was obvious. Living in the Bay [00:08:30] Area we're kind of in an echo chamber. Everybody is like, "Oh nobody is voting for that guy".

Jarobi White: Right, yeah, yeah.

Starita: I was like, "Hey y'all need to straighten up. You drive an hour outside of town and there's Trump signs everywhere". You got the same friends on Facebook that believe the same way that you do and if they say some shit that you don't like then you unfriend them and then it starts slimming down and down and then everybody gets in that echo chamber and they think that's the way things are. I think that [00:09:00] people might have taken action a little earlier. You're right, it's bringing folks together you're starting to see folks ban.

Jarobi White: Absolutely.

[00:09:30] The street naming like when Phife passed I was like, "I want all of these things to happen, I want ..." The street naming was one of the things because they were talking about having a Tribe Called Quest street in our neighborhood which is bizarre. You see tributes or murals that people make ... they have tributes and murals everywhere but to have [00:10:00] the street and the mural in the very place that we stood, it's not like it's down the block or in the Queen's center. Statue in the center no, our monument is immortalized right where we stood, right where we hung out all of those days, all of those nights. ON the block 192 and Linden. You know what I mean? To have that, we were just standing over there and I get overwhelmed. That's my neighborhood, I [00:10:30] moved back recently to the neighborhood and it's overwhelming to see a tribute to yourself like my face it right where my face used to be. Just put my shoes there because that's where I used to be, you know what I mean? It's crazy to have that, that's really humbling. Really exciting.

I know that Phife would have loved that because of all the rappers in the world, I don't know who said [00:11:00] Queen's more than him. I can't think of any other rapper who said Queen's more than Phife. It's really appropriate to have that in our neighborhood, it's really dope to see when you drive by and for other people. You know what I mean like on the internet or whatever, people are like, "Yo I just drove by. I just drove by Phife Dawg Way". That's ill, Phife Dawg way, it's fucking crazy.

Starita: It is. That was a beautiful day too. So many [00:11:30] people came out, what we were saying probably a couple thousand people there, it was packed.

Jarobi White: Yeah it was packed. The best thing we did that night was afterwards we all got a couple bottles of liquor and went and hung out in a park like we would usually do on a Friday night like the shit that we would do with Phife. With people who are celebrating and with all of our friends that we grew up, all the guys that we hung out with we were all there. All in a park late a night, somebody turns the radio [00:12:00] on in their car and you stand around and you drink your beer. It's whatever, cops don't bother ... it was amazing it was beautiful.

Starita: It was cool.

Jarobi White: I was like, "Damn man I just saw one of my friends Shake earlier today". Shake lives in Germany but through technology is wonderful, I was Facebook living so he got a chance to be there to. You know what I'm saying and just the thought of that, he's from around our way [00:12:30] and he definitely grew up and he definitely had an impact and influence on Phife's life as well as mine. He wasn't there but he still got to be there. I was telling him today, it sucks that it takes something as devastating as losing one of us for all of us to get back together and shit like that. In Phife's death for me is very bittersweet. His sacrifices afforded our success and our getting back [00:13:00] into the mainstream and all these things but not to have my ace next to me is like ... especially doing TV shows like the Grammy's and shit like that. There would have been so many jokes, there's so many jokes that I can really express and get out sometimes and shit. I know that he's very proud and I know he's smiling down on us. I used to get really sad about this shit but it makes me so happy now, you know what I'm [00:13:30] saying?

It's a sacrifice I always like to say about that because I feel like he definitely sacrificed his life for us. So in the future musical endeavors and all that shit, I'm just going to ... the last thing he said to me before ... last time I saw him he was like, "Jarobi I want you to kill them blood clot, kill all them blood clot". That was the last thing he said to me and if you know Phife with a [inaudible 00:13:50] accent it's really fucking funny. It's really fucking funny. Because I was just like, yo ... He was like, "All right I'm about to get my Uber" I'm like, "All [00:14:00] right cool". He was like, "Come upstairs with me" I'm like, "Dude all right fine. You leaving I know fine bye, what are you doing?" He hugged me, he hugged me kind of hard and it's like, "Ew get off me, what's wrong with you?" Just playing like we do and he's like, "Kill them blood blot, kill them blood clot". He left me with an energy and a power that's so crazy. It sucks that I had to lose so much to attain it but I'm grateful for it which is kind of weird [00:14:30] to feel. I don't know.

Starita: Yeah it was a trip. The last tune that we recorded was called Forever. It was a trip. The vibe in the studio ... Phife didn't seem down or anything but there was a little bit of heaviness in the air and he said, "Yell I'm going to pull up this track. Let's see if we can knock this one out". Sitting there, he's writing and writing and then [00:15:00] he's like, "I'm ready" and he jumps in the booth and that was like three verses in there. It's long and he starts telling the story of when they grew up together from the beginning all the way up through the problems that Tribe had and then to the current day. He told the entire story and it was almost like a goodbye letter.

Jarobi White: It definitely [00:15:30] was. This is heavy, it took us a while to listen to this shit. Talk for a while.

Starita: Yeah just back to that track it was a while. It just kind of sat there for a little while because everybody was kind of ... I don't think could deal with it at that point in time. I mean the track, it's just so heavy and it was almost like he got that off his chest [00:16:00] and was like, "Okay I'm cool now". You know?

Jarobi White: For him to be able to put so much emotion into that song and for shit to be lyrically sound still and be a dope fucking track it's a feat in itself.

Starita: Yeah.

Jarobi White: I don't know how he got through that, I don't know how he got through that. Listening to the shit like, he very specifically says goodbye to [00:16:30] me Tip and Ali and all of the fans, very specifically and thank you. He is the most amazing man in the world because nobody gets to close their shit out. Phife got to absolutely close his life out. He did everything he wanted to do, how he did it, close it up and got a send off. He was like, "I'm finished" and he got to finish. [00:17:00] Who the fuck gets to finish? Nobody gets to win. Nobody gets to finish except for Phife Dawg. He is the most amazing motherfucker ever to me.

That was me dropping the mic, word. Sorry. Sometimes I can get through it without breaking down just not right now.

Starita: [00:17:30] It's all good.

Jarobi White: [00:18:00] Phife has mad verses floating around. Of course there is shit that we didn't use and it probably ... you'll probably never hear it. I mean I don't know, I don't know. I kind of want to do something to get a lot of the songs that he did late because [00:18:30] the level that he was on when he passed was the best he's been in a long time. Not that he was ever bad but I'm just saying, he was killing shit. That Nutshell song? Good lord man.

Starita: Oh I know.

Jarobi White: Good fucking lord. To remix like ... yo so I want people to hear those you know what I mean? Because [00:19:00] one of the things that I hope to accomplish with this album is to kind of put the dick to ageism. You know what I mean because any other form of music, 20 years in, 30 years in you become a virtuoso right? So in hip hop for some strange reason I think they think our brains fall out of our heads at 35 or something like that. I don't know but there are [00:19:30] a lot of guys that were rapping when we were rapping that are better than these fucking little kids. I'm not in opposition to the young dude, I fucking love the shit out of the young cats but I just wanted to show people that we're still viable. You know what I'm saying? I think that's ... I hope we accomplish that and you don't have to say bullshit, you don't have to talk trash. [00:20:00] You can give people good food and they'll

eat it. You don't have to eat Mcdonalds all the time, go get some salad, some protein, some veggies on this motherfucker.

Starita: Yeah it would be really great if some of that stuff would come out because I was a little bit bummed when the record came out. I was like, "But what about these and these and these?". [crosstalk 00:20:27]

Jarobi White: Me and Phife made this [00:20:30] killer song and we didn't use it. We didn't use it. When I do my solo album I don't know I might snatch that joint and put it on mine, you know what I'm saying? Real talk. I could do that he wouldn't be mad.

Starita: Yeah.

Jarobi White: I don't think Phife would be mad if I did that.

Starita: He wants everybody to hear it too.

Jarobi White: More than anybody else he wants everybody to hear it. That's why I was like ... I don't know about letting them sit or whatever or going to let them sit I don't know. [00:21:00] I know he really wanted everybody to hear this shit. He was really like, "Yo, we're busting ass yo". Oh my god that was crazy we're in like this crazy zone I don't want to talk about it too much. You know who the dude with the hot hand? He's like, "Don't touch me, don't touch me". You know what I'm saying? Don't touch me, don't touch me, that's how we was feeling like know what I'm saying when the basket opens up like that.

Starita: Yeah.

Jarobi White: Yeah so I hope that we get to do something fun with [00:21:30] it. Maybe we can do something fun with them and have a bunch of producers, you know what I'm saying? Have a bunch of famous producers submit shit and pick what's the fly shit.

Starita: Right.

Jarobi White: Something I don't know.

Starita: So you've got a solo joint coming down the line?

Jarobi White: Yes sir. It's like I don't know I don't know if I ever really considered doing a solo album before, you know what I'm saying? The [00:22:00] response that I'm getting from this album, people are like, "Yo my dude, oh my god I didn't know you could rap". I'm like, "You're silly then". How am I going to be around Q-tip and Phife for 20 year and I can't even rap? That doesn't even make sense if I have half a brain I've got to absorb something. You know what I'm saying, I have to get something from the two of the best dudes to hold mic ever. Like I'm not going to get nothing from it?

Starita: Yeah.

Jarobi White: People are [00:22:30] asking for it which is crazy. I've only ever done ... I've done one single before and was scared to put it out. It's a dope song I kind of put it on Soundcloud for a couple of days and took it down because I was chicken shit.

Starita: Well it's a different thing. That's what I'm doing with this record, I got into engineering and producing because I wanted to do my own shit and then my career went in a different direction where I was doing everybody else's shit for 20 years. [00:23:00] Then I said it's time for me to do my record. This shit is scary because my ass is on the line now. It's not me hiding, producer on the record or engineer or something like that. It's like my name is on this thing and it takes a lot to yourself out there on the line like that. It's been scary for me I'm used to being on the other side of the glass and it's like okay, now you better step up.

Jarobi White: Yeah being in a group is easy because you're insulated from a lot of shit because you don't have to ping, [00:23:30] ping, ping. They're tried by the time they get to me so they take it easy on me. Now, they are fresh like, "Hey Jarobi". I just want to make sure that it's the dopest shit in the world hopefully, if I have that we'll see and [inaudible 00:23:46] hopefully.

Starita: The biggest thing has just been letting go for me and being like, you know what? It is was it is. I've busted my ass on this. You get so close to it to where you're like, "I can't tell if this shit's good or not anymore".

Jarobi White: Good or not and I don't [00:24:00] know if I want to let it go. This is my baby do I let you? It's like you know if you have kids, the first time that you let your kids have a babysitter. That's what putting a record out is like. You know what I'm saying?

Starita: For sure.

Jarobi White: I know you're going to be all right but oh something could happen. I know you're going to be fine but oh ...

Starita: Right.

Jarobi White: It's hard sometimes to let those records go especially when you invest so much time in them. I don't think people really understand [00:24:30] how much time you invest in these songs.

Starita: I don't think they do either. It's deep.

Jarobi White: Well if you care about your music that much because some people don't. People like us like we are mixing and ... we're mixing every instrument. We're not just mixing the whole track. Every instrument, every snare hit, everything. It's ... it takes a [00:25:00] while, it takes time.

Starita: Yeah it does.

Jarobi White: I don't want to give away any of our secrets especially if you do it the old school way it's really time consuming and that's what we do. You can tell if you listen to it.

Starita: Listen to it.

Jarobi White: You can tell. Yeah once you have spend so much time and so invested it's hard to be in the picture and see it sometimes. It's hard. [00:25:30] You can tell who the people who are really invested in making music by the shit sounds and how you feel after listening to it. I'm not going to disrespect nobody or say nobody or nothing but you know when you hear the shit what's what. If some guy is just bragging so he can pick up some more girls or try to get money for a car or something. You can tell and the people who are sincerely trying to make fucking epic shit. [00:26:00] Like my boy over here.

[00:27:00] We were shooting a video today.

Starita: We were shooting the music video for Rules.

Jarobi White: I love to do this all the time when people come around the way and they want to know about how we grew up. I take them route that [00:27:30] we walked everyday. From mother's house to his grandmother's house because his grandma lived on my side and his mother lived on Tip's side which is about 10 blocks apart from each other. We all take this particular route and I show them how we walk there, went to the store, the corner store. I told them about ... in the dedication song to Phife on the album the line [00:28:00] ... I say something like, "Brand new pair of Nike Airs, avenue of sairs, mailbox mayors, all our rhymes was written there". I show them the corner, Sairs ave. I had to explain to him, I'm like, "Yo, you see the mailbox? We were the mailbox mayors because if you wasn't cool you couldn't sit on the mailbox. You could hang out and around but you couldn't actually sit on the mailbox unless you were cool".

We always got to sit on the mailbox and we'd sit there and I'd bang on the mailbox, make beats on the mailbox and he would write his rhymes [00:28:30] and shit. People from other neighborhoods up and down would come to that corner and try to battle us. If a nigger wanted to battle you know Phife didn't care. You know what I'm saying? That's like some real shit it wasn't even a rhyme I was just telling the story. I love showing people that shit because where the other side where Tip and Phife's mother lives that was a little bit of the rougher part of that neighborhood. You had to walk from [00:29:00] the rough part past the mural. The mural ... our neighborhood in St. Albans, Addisleigh park it was like a haven for jazz musicians. Just for black people really, black entertainers where all black people with money in the 30's because that was the closest they were able to live in Manhattan was in our neighborhood. Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Roy Campanella, Illinois Shicade, Hurricane Carter, [00:29:30] fuck man.

All these people they all had houses. Walk from the hood past the sign everyday and that shit gives you hope. It's like if these great motherfuckers come out of here, we can do it too. You know what I'm saying? Most of that with Run DMC living 200 to fifth. These things, that gave us juice to be like, "We could do it too. All these people are [00:30:00] so different, we could do this shit too". You walk from ... you pass that mural and then you go into my neighborhood which is the good part, "the better part". The duality of having both of those experiences in life goes to show you, I can really make something out of myself. That's really important. I love to show people ... that's what makes us and shit because like [00:30:30] half of our experiences like Cosby show but the other half of our experience is like the fucking hood. I think that's what lead us to our music being able to blend so well and that's why I think a lot of people can identify with it because it's shit you identify with. You know what I mean?

I love to show people that little walk from there to the store to the park. It's like that ... taking that walk and that walk [00:31:00] changed what music is today. It's little simple shit like that that I love to see. If me, Tip, and Phife didn't take those walks everyday who knows what music would sound like today? Who knows if there would have been a Pharrell or Kanye or Outkast, you know what I mean? Who knows. Well what kind of music would they be making, you know what I'm saying? It's just a great fucking to have and [00:31:30] to be able to share that shit with people, it's an amazing feeling and for people to even give a fuck is even more amazing. Yo dude, 17, 18 years we didn't put out an album has that ever been done before? Seriously?

Starita: Right, no.

Jarobi White: 17 years, we've never had a number one album before. That's the crazy shit about it we've never had a number one album before. Then we wait 17, fucking 18 years and then we have a number one album in [00:32:00] I don't know how many countries, 20 something countries they told me.

Starita: It's like 39. I think that was the last number that I saw.

Jarobi White: Yo, that's insane. I always think, the Grammy experience was really funny to me because I got to see a lot people that I don't know. They don't know me and I don't know them. They know of me, they know Phife and Tip but they don't know me. It's [00:32:30] cool to see how people really are you know? For me, it's like the more popular the more fame, popularity I'm saying, popularity and fame these things specifically not money necessarily but like those things should make you humble. They shouldn't make you act like a dick. I saw people who are uber fucking famous and they are acting like a dick. I'm like, "Dude you're whole life is because [00:33:00] how someone else feels about you". That's the most humbling shit in the fucking world dude and you're going to be a dick to people? If anything that makes me want to love people more. You ... well I guess it kind of depends where you make your music from too because our music is definitely from our heart. It's definitely what we feel and what we think, it's definitely pieces of us. For people to be like, "Yo that piece of you my dude is the dopest shit in the world dude. [00:33:30] Your left ear, oh my god dude your left ear is the shit. Your pinky toe? Dude your pinky toe ..."

You know what I mean? That doesn't make me ... that makes me want to hug people more not be like, "I'm better than you". No I'm not because my whole life is your service. That's kind of where the title of the album comes in. We are definitely in people's service.

Starita: Amazing, I think we [00:34:00] talked about this before to of like keeping throughout our careers, keeping that golden rule of to be successful you don't have to fuck people over.

Jarobi White: No, no.

Starita: And be disrespectful and be a dick like you're talking.

Jarobi White: No.

Starita: It's actually you get so much further when you actually respect people. Bottom line not just in music but in life and everything. If you just have that common respect and love for your fellow human then everything [00:34:30] else seems to fall in place. You got to stay aligned and do what's right. I've seen so many cats that have muscled their ways to the top and hurt a lot of people getting there and it doesn't always last.

Jarobi White: Yeah all of this shit is so fleeting and temporary and finite definitely and shit. Those are the people when are coming on the way down now you don't get those guest appearances anymore. You know what I'm saying. [00:35:00] You see people, you're like, "This motherfucker hasn't made a record in how long and how is he rapping with the hottest dude in the world?" Because he is a cool guy and now I need your help and they are like, "Of course, whatever you need OG". That's how you kind of have to be because everybody kind of has their time.

Starita: Yup.

Jarobi White: We have ... that's why we are the luckiest boys in the world because we get to do it twice. This shit is just mind boggling dude. It's mind boggling, it's mind boggling, [00:35:30] word.