

POP

**Lyrical Alliance
Featuring Talib Kweli**

Roundhouse, London



Inspiring: Talib Kweli

TOM WATKINS/REX FEATURES

Politically charged hip-hop is nothing new, but the Middle Eastern collaboration Lyrical Alliance, their collective label itself hinting at some sort of musical militancy, managed to breathe new life into the genre.

Backed by DJ MK, the man behind Roots Manuva and one of the UK's leading hip-hop DJs, Lyrical Alliance were clearly passionate about their art. A well-received but somewhat low-key showcase included satire, political activism, and awe-inspiring flows. Language barriers aside, and the occasionally overbearing sense of political righteousness taken with a pinch of

salt, there were several glimpses of the power of hip-hop as a vehicle, and the universal appeal of rolling flow and lyrical passion.

Featuring MCs from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Algeria, Lyrical Alliance take much of their inspiration from their homelands, and Saturday night at the Roundhouse was an homage to Arabic scriptures, ancient history and the eternal struggles of the Middle East. Unsurprisingly, Palestine was the main topic, but arguments of superiority were put aside in a night-on scholarly display of urban poetics.

By the time the Brooklyn-born MC Talib Kweli bounded on stage, the once respectful audience had swelled to a throbbing and excitable crowd. Mos Def's old sparring partner did not disappoint, storming through bygone hit after bygone hit, backed by a projector showing footage of the Israeli West Bank barrier.

The true East Coast hip-hopper eventually prevailed as the screen switched from challenging Zionist provocations to name-dropping commercial stars. And events turned slightly sour when the venue's security cut the sound mid-encore, prompting a foul-mouthed rant from Kweli. An inspiring night of contrast and contemplation, culminating in a raucous classic hip-hop performance, almost ruined by poor organisation and diva-like antics.

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