

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:00:05	Oliver Wang	Host	Hello, I’m Oliver Wang.
00:00:07	Morgan Rhodes	Host	And I’m Morgan Rhodes. You’re listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> .
00:00:09	Oliver	Host	Every episode we invite a guest to talk about a heat rock, an album that just burns, baby, burns. Today we are going to be dialing it back actually only just a couple years to the 2016 surprise album from A Tribe Called Quest, <i>We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service</i> .
00:00:26	Music	Music	<p>“The Donald” off the album <i>We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service</i> by A Tribe Called Quest. Mid-tempo rap with a steady drumbeat.</p> <p><i>... what, you need to see proof? Recently on the internet they chatting Taking polls, debating who could win in battle rapping Let's make it happen, these cyber flows already par No subliminals with me, you know who the fuck you are Who wanna spar? Ha ha, well, here I are Orthodox spitter or bring on the southpaw No doubt, I'mma set it...</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:00:44	Oliver	Host	<p>When word got out in the summer of 2016 that there would be a new Tribe Called Quest album by the end of the year, I think the collective response was, “Wait, wait, wait, what?”</p> <p><i>[Morgan responds affirmatively.]</i></p> <p>After all, it had been 18 years since the group’s last effort, <i>The Love Movement</i>, and they had famously split up amongst acrimony. And of course, core member Phife Dawg had passed away in the spring of 2016 from complications related to diabetes. The idea that there would be a <u>new</u> Tribe album, 16 tracks long no less, recorded in secret in the months before Phife’s passing. Well, that was a <u>lot</u> to take in.</p> <p>2016, if you recall—and I think many of us don’t have any trouble recalling this—it was a rough year in pop music. David Bowie, Prince, George Michael, Sharon Jones, and of course Phife all being lost to us. Add in the presidential election, whose outcome was just a week before the Tribe album dropped, it was just a tough time. And once we got over the shock, knowing the album was imminent, the natural next question, tinged with a little bit of anxiety, was: “Would it be any good?”</p> <p>Well, we needn’t have worried, because we wouldn’t be here talking about it today if the answer wasn’t a definitive yes. As I wrote for NPR that November of ‘16, “A Tribe Called Quest gave us the best of themselves a generation ago. They didn’t owe us one last album,</p>

yet here it is, a parting gift right when we needed it most.”

00:02:06 Music Music

["The Donald" fades back in. An instrumental section plays for several moments before fading out again]

00:02:21 Morgan Host

We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service was the album pick of our guest today, Cristela Alonzo. Our guest today is hella funny. She is an LA based comedian, made history as the first Latina to create, produce, and star in her own network sitcom for ABC. Salute.

I had a chance to check out her special on Netflix, *Lower Classy*, and I got my laughs on. I appreciate that. Do yourself a favor and run that immediately.

Her memoir, *Music to My Years: A Mixtape Memoir of Growing Up and Standing Up* came out last year, and recently she has toured, is killing it across the country. She's a voice actress, starring in *The Laundromat*, also Steven Soderbergh's thing.

Please sit in with her as she stands before us, talking about topics that are beautiful and beautifully uncomfortable. We are glad to have her with us. Welcome to *Heat Rocks*.

00:03:11 Cristela Alonzo Guest

Thank you so much. I love being here.

00:03:15 Morgan Host

Man, I gotta thank you first for picking this album, because in prep for the chat it forced me to sit with some feelings that I hadn't visited for a while. The first of which was guilt, because I didn't spend enough time with this album when it came out. As Oliver said in his beautiful introduction, there was a whole lot going on in 2016, and I was caught up in—

[Cristela responds affirmatively with "absolutely".]

—the mess of politics and other things going on in music, and all the losses that he mentioned. That it was—it was just too much for me. So, you forced me to sit down with this album, and not just revisit this album but also Tribe in general. So I want to ask you first, before we get to this album. Talk a little bit about your relationship with Tribe Called Quest.

00:04:03 Cristela Guest

So, um, I'm a first generation Mexican-American, and Spanish is my first language. So, I learned English through pop culture. So, I fell in love with Tribe maybe—I was in junior high, I think? I grew up in a border town in south Texas, so all the pop culture we got was old. Everybody already experienced it and we were just getting it.

So for me, my mom used to listen to all of her music in Spanish. She never learned English. And some of her favorite songs in Spanish were called corridos. They're like ballads, right, and they tell the story and everything. And, you know, a lot of the songs that she loved were always about people struggling, and I grew up with that music.

And I remember hearing Tribe, and it was so similar. And it was weird, because I didn't know I wanted it. I didn't know that I was seeking it. But I don't know, there's some music out there that the moment you hear it, you think, "Where have you been?" And it wasn't that my neighborhood was just identical, that my life was identical. But it was so comforting to know that I wasn't the only one living in it.

It had been 18 years, so you kind of forget, you know? It's like, they're there and you think that the phase of your life with them has passed, and it's nostalgic. I actually think that they came at the perfect time for me, because I was really sad. 2016 during the election, on election night, I was on a cruise ship. I was like, on a social justice cruise ship. So basically—

- 00:05:45 Morgan Host What is that?
- 00:05:46 Cristela Guest Thank you, 'cause I was gonna tell you! Oh man!
- [Everyone laughs.]*
- 00:05:49 Morgan Host What is that?
- 00:05:50 Cristela Guest So a lot of wealthy people have a boat, and they booked a bunch of people of color to go on the boat and teach them how to be people of color basically. Like, teach them about the struggles, you know? So basically, we had people from Black Lives Matter saying, "Hey, we matter!" and white people are like, "Are you sure?" You know what I mean?
- [She laughs, and Morgan affirms, saying "right" multiple times. Morgan and Oliver both affirm several more times as Cristela continues speaking.]*
- Like that kind of thing, which is so weird. Now, I was on the boat because one of my dearest friends and mentors is Dolores Huerta. So she had asked me to go on the boat to moderate a panel that she was doing, and then they asked me to moderate a panel with her and Sonia Sanchez. So immediately, yes, I had to say yes.
- I had never been on a cruise ship. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't—especially—that's a different kind of cruise ship than normal. So we were leaving Miami, but we had to get there the night before, which is election day. And the panel I did was to basically celebrate women, but all the questions were kind of framed as if Clinton was gonna win.
- 00:06:55 Oliver Host Yeah. Sure. Right. We believe FiveThirtyEight.
- 00:06:59 Cristela Guest Exactly. *[Laughing]* Exactly! Oh my god.
- 00:07:02 Oliver Host *[Laughing]* Shout-out Nate Silver.
- [Cristela laughs uproariously.]*
- 00:07:06 Morgan Host Word up!

00:07:07 Cristela Guest So, you know, that night I went to dinner, and I felt so out of place because they fit you anywhere you fit. It's only me, and I was placed in a situation where the conversation was so not my kind of conversation. And that already set the tone for the night later on, which I didn't realize. And the election results come in. And as the results come in, first of all, all the people—there were probably like 30-40 people of color that were in that room. And as the results came in, we actually, I think accidentally started noticing that we were kind of—

00:07:47 Morgan Host Gelling up.

00:07:48 Cristela Guest Yeah, like an iceberg, we were just coming together. It wasn't a conscious thing. And then when they announced that he had won, all of us that were gelled together lost it. The cruise hadn't even started yet, and here we were starting the cruise like this.

[Oliver says "ugh" repeatedly.]

The next day, I have to go do this panel where none of the questions apply anymore. And I go into the green room, and Dolores and Sonia Sanchez are talking to each other. And I come in and my eyes are swollen, and Dolores looks at me. She's like, "Hey, what's wrong with your face?"

[Oliver starts chuckling.]

00:08:31 Morgan Host Subtle.

[Cristela erupts into laughter.]

00:08:32 Cristela Guest Like, in front of everybody, too!

00:08:34 Oliver Host Damn. Damn, Dolores.

00:08:35 Cristela Guest I know! And I was like, "I know, like damn. I was trying to hide it, don't call me out on it!" Like, you know what I mean?

So, um. I was like, "Well, I was crying." She's like, "Oh, I get it. This is the first time your country's broken your heart. Don't worry, it won't be the last."

I'm on the boat for the next couple days. I was talking to my friend here in LA, and we both, you know, tell each other about albums. And he's like, "Hey, A Tribe Called Quest dropped an album." And I was like, "What? No way." And he's like, "You should listen to it. You need to listen to it." And I was like, "Okay."

And I downloaded it when we were docked, and I listened to it nonstop for the next, probably half a year.

00:09:21 Music Music "The Space Program" off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Fast-paced rap with a simple beat in the background.

Word to Phife, we're gonna bring it to the overlord

*Drinkin' Cisco chilling with the gold microphone cords
And we grip our balls every time we stuntin' on tour
'Cause we never bore, respond to the ready crowd's roar
And promoters try to hit us with the art of war
We about our business, we not quitters, not bullshitters, we deliver
We go get it, don't be bitter 'cause we not just n-ggas
Jarobi my fiber wove into different cloth
Ain't nothing forbidden...*

[Music fades out as Cristela speaks]

00:09:39 Cristela Guest There were so many songs on that album that just screamed what I was feeling. And not only that, not even that, it was describing the people that get ignored. It changed my life. That album literally just made me take change.

I mean, that song, "We The People..." There's a lyric that talks about like, basically it's like, "Mexicans gotta go, Black people gotta go, Muslims, gays, the poor."

Like, that song summed up for me what the election results had shown. And that broke my heart, but it also gave me salvation.

00:10:15 Music Music "We The People..." off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Slower rap over a steady beat.

*All you Black folks, you must go
All you Mexicans, you must go
And all you poor folks, you must go
Muslims and gays
Boy, we hate your ways
So all you bad folks, you must go*

[Music fades low and plays in the background as Cristela resumes speaking.]

00:10:36 Cristela Guest Man, that is an album that gave me hope when I needed the hope.

["We The People..." fades back in.]

*...and the smog of news media that logs
False narratives of Gods that came up against the odds
We're not just nigga rappers with the bars
It's kismet that we're cosmic with the stars
You bastards overlooking street art
Better yet, street smarts but you keep us off the charts
So motherfuck your numbers and your statisticians
Fuck y'all know about true competition?*

[Music fades back out]

00:11:00 Oliver Host What was your reaction to it when you first heard it?

00:11:02 Morgan Host One was surprise. You know, I thought I was tapped in to the industry goings-on, but I did not see this coming at all. I did not

know they were dropping an album, so it caught me by surprise. 2016 was sadness from start to finish, and in between all the celebrity deaths I had just started working on the first season of *Dear White People*. And we were dealing with controversy, because the title was *Dear White People*.

And white people were mad. They were like, “Nah, you know, we heard all the stuff, the vitriol. What if there was a *Dear Black People*?” And we were like, “That’s not a thing, okay? Get up out of here with that.”

[Cristela laughs in the background.]

Hashtags, you know, boycott Netflix. We end season one. Season one of *Dear White People*, if you have not seen it—and I won’t spoil it, because you should just see the show—but it starts with a racial incident and it ends with a racial incident. And no pressure, we gotta end big, it’s the end of the season. So we gotta come up with the perfect song. No pressure.

[Oliver and Cristela laugh.]

And so I pitched—and we went through a lot of moments, because the scene is very quiet. It’s all the kids looking into the fourth wall. They’re sitting in, you know, I guess the rec room of their dorm, and it’s a very powerful moment. And I pitched Curtis Mayfield, “We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue.” Right? ‘Cause it’s showing everyone’s faces, there’s many shades of Black folks and people of color in this shot, and I pitched this.

00:12:29	Music	Music	“We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue” off the album <i>Curtis</i> by <i>Curtis Mayfield</i> . Slow R&B with strings and drums.
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*Pardon me, brother, as you stand in your glory
I know you won't mind if I tell the whole story*

[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]

00:12:45	Morgan	Host	The thing that you learn over time as music supervisor is it isn’t—the moment shouldn’t be the best song, but the best song for the moment. And although I thought it was a good song, I thought, “This is something a Gen X-er would like, but these kids are millennials, and they need to be able to speak truth to power.” And so we ended up putting “We The People...”. A Tribe Called Quest, “We The People...”
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That was sort of a—Justin and I talked about that, and I thought, “Now, this makes perfect sense. It is today’s version of ‘We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue’.” Perfect for the moment, and a shout-out to him for pushing that song. And I always—so it led me down this road of this album, and I kept playing it over and over again.

My reaction to the album then was—I mean, I didn’t get into some of the themes that we’ll talk about in this conversation. But all I

could think was, “Well damn. If this is your swan song, what a way to go out.”

2016—I mean, the other artists in their peer group that had albums that I remember, was Common, who had *Black America*, or *Being Black in America*, I think that was that album. And De La Soul, who had been gone for a while. And I thought, “The elder statesmen of hip hop have some things on their mind.” If there was a time to have something on your mind, 2016 was it. So my feeling about the album was, “Well played, Tribe. Well played.”

You?

00:14:15 Oliver Host

Well, yeah, I think as both of you are touching on, the time and the context in which the album comes out is impossible to remove from how we listen to it, right? And I was thinking about—I do remember in scattered memories listening to other Tribe albums. Like I remember, for whatever reason when I first got *Low End Theory*—and I might have mentioned this on the episode that we did about *Low End* with Mr. Porter—that I got it from Leopold’s Records at Berkley, got it on cassette, and I just remember listening to it inside of a bathroom stall in my dorm.

[Laughing] This would have been what, like ‘91 or so? But I couldn’t tell you what time of year that was, as opposed to I know exactly when this album came out, because of its timing. The fact that it happened to come out around, within days of the election, I’m gonna assume that was purposeful. Because, certainly the content of the album suggests that, and Q-Tip has talked about this in interviews—they were very aware of what was going on in the U.S. in terms of the election, all of the lead up to it.

So my guess is, you know, they timed it. Had the election gone in the other direction, I don’t know how that would have changed the reception of it. But I think, back to Cristela’s point, it just felt like the album we needed at the point at which a lot of us felt really, really, really low. And so, I think that that, more than anything, is what sort of overwhelms my thoughts of the album, in terms of that timing, what it meant then.

We can get into this discussion in a moment. I think when you try to divorce and just talk about the album on its own merits, I think some things shift with it, and like I said we can get into those elements of it. But, back to the original question here. Again, the reaction to it has everything to do with when the album comes out, and I think it’ll be indelible for me for that reason. Because it was the first thing I started listening to heavily, you know, after those results came in. Like, I needed this. I needed something.

00:16:15 Music Music

“Dis Generation” off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Fast rap over a mid-tempo instrumental backing.

*Magic Mike on the mic, David Blaine, Douglas Henning
In the church of Busta Rhymes it's my sermon you're getting*

*Horizontal spittin', I'm the exorcist of your writtens
Don't interrupt me, n-gga
Sorry, that's a sin unforgiven
Like how we be skipping on beats like cooking crack in the kitchen
Wait
Just spit the package, dry it bag up the wet
This mad city's not a game, easy, quiet on set
Phife, student of the past, trailblazing a daze*

00:16:33 Morgan Host Did you know that it was gonna come out? Did you know they were drop—did you have any hints that an album was coming? 'Cause I didn't know.

00:16:37 Oliver Host Yeah. No, they did announce. They announced, I think, earlier in the summer, or maybe it might've been in the spring—I wanna say it was probably after Phife had passed—that they had put together, you know, a full album when he was still alive. And the only reason I remember this is that when that initial press release came out, I immediately shot a note to my editor at NPR saying, "Dibs."

[Cristela laughs, and Morgan responds affirmatively.]

"Like, I don't want someone else to review—I want dibs on this. I better be first to ask for it." So, that's the only reason I even remember knowing that it was coming, is because of that, yeah.

00:17:11 Morgan Host One thing I wanted to mention too is that—was it 2016? Late 2016 or it might've been—maybe it was 2016. But I went to FYF Festival. It was a great festival. Might've been 2017, but the openers were Missy Elliott and Björk.

[Cristela gasps and slowly builds into laughter.]

Like, going big, you know what I mean? So, my friend was like, "You wanna go?" I was like, "Get outta here! Of course I wanna go." Silly question. She's a Capricorn.

But um, Björk and Missy, and they had some big ones. They had Little Dragon, they had um, Iggy Pop was there, and—I mean, just everybody. Moses Sumney. Like, everybody big. They covered every base, and they also had Tribe Called Quest. And just hearing them perform their songs without Phife was a moment that—it was so real. First of all, not seeing him up there, 'cause I had VIP, yes, it's a humble brag that I was in VIP. So I was up close and it was weird not seeing him.

But it felt differently in prep for this chat listening to him be so sparsely present on the album, because I just remembered like, that I didn't pay attention to that the first time. So there was a lot of guilt listening to this now. Like, why didn't I pay attention to this? And I think there were so many things going on. But, we can get into this later, because I think what this album represents to me is also wisdom. And I think there is some wisdom. Oliver talks a lot about sequencing. I think there's wisdom in the sequencing of this album and wisdom in the places where Phife is used and how he is used.

[Cristela and Oliver both respond affirmatively.]

00:17:53 Cristela Guest I remember seeing Tribe perform without Phife that year, and it was at the Grammy's I think, where—I love that they just hold their fists up when Phife is—when Phife comes on, and that right there, there's just something so beautiful about that, that I couldn't explain to people. That it made me so emotional because it's respect, but he's there. It's like, it's that moment where like, the fist is up, they're all up, and you feel his presence there, you know. There's something so beautiful about that.

00:19:28 Morgan Host Right. And the wisdom of not feeling like, "But we also need like, a hologram." You know what I mean?

[Cristela laughs and affirms enthusiastically.]

"We just want to do this, we don't need to, you know what I mean?" Which would have been a lot.

00:19:38 Oliver Host You know, hip hop, to me, does not have—and I think we've touched on this on this show over the years—it doesn't always have the greatest track record in terms of artists as they age and how do they maintain, whether you want to call it relevance, whatever term you want to apply to it. It's tough to be older in hip hop. It's tough to be middle aged. And there are certainly artists who have persevered in that direction, whether you're talking about your Jay-Z's or your Masta Aces. If you want to talk about someone who's more in the underground, I mean, people are out there grinding.

But, to me, what really stands out about this album is it is a Tribe—you know, again, it was almost 20 years since *The Love Movement* had come out. And if it had been a poor album, whatever that may be. Things fell flat, the lyrics weren't there, whatever. I think it would have disappointed people, I don't think it would have surprised people. Only because we're not used to artists 20 years after their heyday still batting a thousand.

And I think what's remarkable about this—and we can get into a conversation later about where does this rank among Tribe's album—Tribe albums—I think that would be kind of an interesting thing to take on. But regardless of where it ranks relative to their other products, it is still just very consistently them, despite that span of time, I think is one of the greatest things you can say about it.

And we wouldn't have really known that, if not for this album right? It would've been—if *Love Movement* was our last memory of Tribe, trapped in amber, not the best memory to have because it's not their best work. But this kind of gives you this like, "Man, they still got it."

00:21:09 Morgan Host And I also thought—we can get to this a little bit later—that this was a good show of elder statesmen shouting out the young without jealousy or envy. I thought it was a really humble way of not saying,

you know, “We did this, we did that,” going down the line of all their contributions, but very gently sort of passing the torch. But also the timing of it. We’re passing the bar to you, passing the baton in 2016. This is the world you’re inheriting.

00:21:38	Cristela	Guest	They do that in “Kids...” really beautifully, where there’s even that line that they talk about how like, “Yeah, you see us and we walk around and we talk about paying bills, but we were once like you, too.” You know what I mean? <i>[Morgan responds affirmatively.]</i> I love that, because it’s like, yeah. You know, we’re worried about stuff, but we all went through that phase, we all had that, we were all like you at one point.
00:21:55	Music	Music	“Kids...” off the album <i>We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service</i> by A Tribe Called Quest. Mid-tempo rap. <i>And while y'all doing all y'all bids, y'all reminisce as kids Fuck it, kids, the grown-ups won't own up They stood on the corner, like you once upon a Time, and probably felt like a loner And smelled like a stoner, and snuck to Daytona So when they question you about who or who you ain't boning Complaining that you always moaning, never saying good morning Storming out my house and slamming doors like you pay your bills They been through it too, though They were kids like you, though</i> <i>[Music fades out as Morgan and Cristela speak]</i>
00:22:18	Morgan	Host	Exactly.
00:21:19	Cristela	Guest	I think that’s amazing. And also going back to what you were saying about like, yeah, a lot of people don’t seem to age well in hip hop. But then, I always think that the ones that do age are the ones that always had things to say. They always had things to say. Like, look at Missy Elliot. I love Missy Elliot. And you see her at the MTV Music Awards this year doing a hell of a performance that just is still so relevant. It seemed like all of her music could be out <u>now</u> .
00:22:48	Oliver	Host	Oh, totally. Timeless.
00:22:49	Cristela	Guest	You know what I mean? And that’s when you know, exactly. But there’s so many times where like, look. I grew up with hip hop, I love it. There’s certain times where I hear an old song and I’m like, “Ooh, didn’t age well.” You know? But when people have things to say in their own voice, when— ‘cause you don’t know if you <u>have</u> your voice. You’re trying to figure out your voice throughout your entire career and hopefully—you know, you never know you found it. It’s not your job to tell. The people will tell you if you found it or not or you connected with them. But you know, for me, yeah. Tribe evolved in the way that Tribe

would evolve. Tribe didn't evolve into the music industry, they just evolved into Tribe now, which was so important.

- 00:23:35 Oliver Host We will be back with more of our conversation with Cristela Alonzo about A Tribe Called Quest's *We Got It From Here* after a brief word from some of our sibling Maximum Fun podcasts. Keep it locked.
- 00:23:46 Music Transition "Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs
- 00:23:52 Morgan Host Yo, and we are back on *Heat Rocks* talking with Cristela Alonzo about the 2016 heater from A Tribe Called Quest, *We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service*.
- 00:24:03 Oliver Host Cristela, you entitled your memoir *A Mixtape Memoir*, and as Morgan and I have talked about on the show, that there is certainly an art to constructing a good mixtape. Part of it is because you can't go back and switch the order. This is not a Spotify playlist.

[Both Morgan and Cristela respond emphatically.]

Like, once you've committed to that cassette, like that is the commitment. And so we've been talking a lot about sequencing. I think with mixtapes this is especially crucial. Because depending on what you're making the mixtape for, or really who you're making the mixtape for, you think about like, how do you want to open? How do you want to close?

And so there's a lot of competing philosophies around how to make a good mixtape. So I'm gonna ask you this, especially for those first few songs. Now, do you go big right out the gate, or do you kind of subtly ramp things up over the course of let's say the first two, three, four songs?

- 00:24:50 Cristela Guest *[Oliver responds affirmatively multiple times as Cristela speaks.]*
- Oh, I do it slow, 'cause I need people to understand what we're gonna get into. Like, in my book, my playlist in my book starts out really slow. My first song is Boston's "More Than A Feeling". And the last song is "We The People." You know, so for me, I like to start off slow because I think it shows an evolution more. I think you kinda go on a journey more.

Because sometimes when you start out too heavy, you're kind of disappointed by what you follow up. 'Cause that's the thing with music, right? Music is so subjective. If you love the first one, and you think the first one's strong, and the second one, the follow up, isn't as strong, you're already gonna be out. You know what I mean? A lot of people, it's so weird how music is so powerful that it can be so dismissive.

You know, it can be so dismissed by people. If they don't like that flow, if you start off—if you can't top the first one, they're out. That's why, for me, I would rather go more consistent. Go in slow and then lead to the end so that people know that they went through something, you know? It's like, you gotta go through something.

00:25:51 Oliver Host I'd like to imagine an alternative present, where instead of talking about Tribe, we picked Boston instead

[Morgan and Cristela laugh.]

We're just having this conversation about Boston. Shout-out 1970s soft rock and AOR.

[Morgan responds emphatically, still laughing.]

I can still ride for that stuff. I'm not mad at that. That said, I do think this has been a more fruitful conversation, you know, in having Tribe.

00:26:14 Morgan Host Oh, man. So, can we get into some of the hits on here now?

00:26:18 Oliver Host Let's do this.

00:26:19 Morgan Host I told this story—I did this conversation with Spotify for artists, and I told this story—I'm not gonna get into sample snitching, 'cause I know that's a thing—but I told this story of a young man that sent me, you know, a link to a Soundcloud, a couple of beats that he wanted me to consider. And one of them, he sampled "Bennie and the Jets." And he told me that, um, 'cause I was like, "You're not gonna be able to clear this sample. And he said, "No, this is like a really obscure Elton John song." And I was like, "That ain't obscure."

[Oliver agrees emphatically.]

I was like, "Everybody knows what Bennie—that's like Elton John 101."

00:26:55 Oliver Host Biz Markie flipped it, you know? Come on now.

00:26:57 Morgan Host If you ain't know no other Elton John song, everybody knows that one. And so he got really in his feelings and stuff. He was like, "Well, Mary J. Blige sampled this song." I was like, "Elton was on the song with her."

[Cristela laughs uproariously.]

Like, she had—yo, she had permission, right?

00:27:13 Cristela Guest She didn't sample, it was the original!

00:27:14 Morgan Host Like, he was there! You know what I'm saying? He provided some background—I was like, "You're tripping."

So one of my things that I would say in the conversation is, "This is youth." Because the fact that, one, he thought it was obscure. And two, I mean I thought it was smart that he sampled it, but sort of silly that he thought that no one had heard of that song before. And we ended up talking it through, and he was like, "Well, my producer gave me the sample." So he hadn't really heard the song. He couldn't have. He was like 19.

So, it was nice to hear “Bennie and the Jets” in “Solid Wall of Sound”, because I know these brothers are in their 40s, so they had permission. Somebody hollered at Elton and was like, “We need to use this.” And it was—although, I love the way this young guy sampled, because it was so chopped and screwed that it took me a minute to be like, “Is that...?” ‘Cause first I couldn’t imagine. I was like, nah.

But in this it was just wonderful to hear how they flipped it, and that’s one of—not my favorite moment on the album, but at the moment when I was like, “Oh my god. This is ‘Bennie and the Jets’, and it’s clear! They cleared the sample!” Loved it. So, if we could hear a little bit of that.

00:28:20 Music Music “Bennie and the Jets” off the album *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* by Elton John. Mid-tempo glam rock.

*...fatted calf tonight
So stick around
You're gonna hear electric music
Solid walls of sound*

[Fades directly into next song.]

00:28:32 Music Music “Solid Wall of Sound” off the album *We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. The last line from the previous song, but looped with distorted vocals behind it.

*Solid walls of sound (Solid wall of sound, solid wall of sound)
Solid walls of sound (Solid wall of sound, solid wall of sound)
Solid walls of sound (Pushing breaking ground, pushing breaking sound)
Solid walls of sound (Solid wall of sound, solid wall of sound)
Solid walls of sound (Tip and Phife in town, Tip and Phife in town)*

[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]

00:28:47 Morgan Host I mean, one of the things that I love is what they sampled from the song. The part of the song that they sampled. It’s a meticulousness that I always credit originally to Dilla, because it’s the way that he used the samples, it’s how he used them and how many he mixed together. It was like, a soup of samples.

And this is what I liked about this. Although, all across the album I was like, where would Ummah be on this, where is Dilla on this? But to me, this was Dilla-esque, because it was meticulous on how they used it.

00:29:20 Cristela Guest Yeah, it was really seamless, wasn’t it? I remember hearing it the first time and it took me. I think it took me a second time, to listen to it, to actually realize and clock that it was Elton. You felt it, but you felt it was part of the song, definitely.

00:29:33 Morgan Host That’s it. That’s it. They finessed that. And so, there’s a lot to love about this album, but that is one of my favorite tracks on the album.

00:29:43	Music	Music	<p><i>["Solid Wall of Sound" fades back in]</i></p> <p><i>Earlier in the night when we bring out the music With a box and a band killer sound boy movement Live and direct when it all goes down You an idiot boy, you don't wanna fuck round Big tune make the world go round Make way fi di soundboy crown Dem fi know we di wickedest sound One box off in your face make a sound boy frown Sound Solid wall of sound, solid wall of sound Solid wall of sound, solid wall of sound</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:29:59	Oliver	Host	<p>If I can just go on a brief tangent, because I was thinking too about the way sin which Tribe, the early part of their career, which is to say basically their career in the 90s. They were so influential in how a lot of people, including myself certainly, were turned on to just the art of sampling in general. And we certainly have covered this previously. And with this album in particular, and I think it probably has more to do with the fact that I'm just 20 years older, it didn't really matter to me as much like, to have to hunt down and go, "Where did stuff come from?" Though I will confess, I certainly did look up what the sample was for "Whatever Will Be," which is from—</p>
00:30:35	Morgan	Host	<p>Oh, the Nairobi Sisters.</p>
00:30:36	Oliver	Host	<p>The Nairobi Sisters, "Promised Land." And I do kind of kick myself for not just copping it for 75 bucks now that it's like a \$300 45.</p> <p><i>[Morgan responds emphatically.]</i></p> <p>Which has <u>everything</u> to do with them sampling it. Like, you could have found—I mean, it was never a cheap EP, but the price has definitely elevated <u>because</u> Tribe used it.</p>
00:30:55	Music	Music	<p>"Promised Land" off the album <i>Promised Land</i> by Nairobi Sisters. Mid-tempo R&B with a steady beat.</p> <p><i>What a Judgement this will be</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades directly into next song]</i></p>
00:31:05	Music	Music	<p>"Whateva Will Be" off the album <i>We Got It From Here...Thank You 4 Your Service</i> by A Tribe Called Quest. Fast rap that samples the above song halfway through.</p> <p><i>Sublimate their youth, hyper-sexualize their women They ain't got the strong enough hold, so they built the prisons Pumping false religion to all of these n-ggas' systems Every voice devoid of the truth Come on, listen</i></p>

(What a Judgement this will be)

Man look at this, man look at this

Whatever will be will be

Like a billionaire investing in a n-gga's dreams

Certainly a head scratcher, like Pac and Big's killers' capture

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:31:25 Oliver Host But to my point though, it wasn't something that—I mean, maybe there were people who were neck-deep in figuring out every single sample used on here. It just wasn't as important to me, which again, maybe has just more to do with me, or maybe more to do with the culture of sampling. Because there are no secrets. Like, the minute this album or any album drops with samples, everyone's uploaded stuff to like, WhoSampled.com.

[Morgan and Cristela respond affirmatively.]

You've got YouTube channels devoted exactly to this. So, the hunt for it has now been crowdsourced in a way where, I think—and maybe it's more competitive for young people who do this—but as an old head, that act of discovery is not as magical when there is no discovery, because people have already figured it out for you.

00:32:05 Morgan Host Sure, sure. No, I feel that. I feel that. I think I hold onto it and I revere it as an old hit, because at the point where I find myself sort of like, dissolving into condescension, I say things like, "And see, this is what this generation samples. You see how sophisticated these samples are? They're sampling Willy Wonka, okay. They're sampling Nairobi Sisters. What you sampling?"

Right? So it's sort of bragging rights, what they sample. And so I hold on to that, because it's like, you guys out here sampling, you know, I don't know. But if you're not sampling Boston, you know what I mean?

[Oliver and Cristela laugh.]

If you ain't sampling Boston, then what are you doing?

0040:32: Cristela Guest It's like Ice Cube's "It Was A Good Day", right? Like, you know what I mean? I remember when I heard that, blew my mind.

[Morgan responds affirmatively.]

You know? Yeah, 'cause you're like, "Wait, what? Like, together?" I remember being blown away from it, thinking like, it's so g—when a sample's done well, you know where it comes from, but you don't even think about it. You know what I mean? Which is so—you're right, it's like, what are people sampling now?

00:33:05 Morgan Host What are they s—what you sampling now? And then we all knew. It was legendary how deep Q-Tip's archives, his vinyl went. So I always thought like, "Well, this is probably from his own batch at

home.” He didn’t need producers to come in and tell him, with the exception of maybe Dilla, but I thought, “These are albums that we know that he rocks,” and it just made me appreciate their samples more.

00:33:29 Oliver Host Cristela, I’m interested to ask. As someone who grew up with Tribe, if you met someone who had never heard any of their music, and you had to pick a song off of this album as an introduction to, “Well, this is who Tribe is—”

[Cristela responds emphatically multiple times with “oh!”]

What track would that be?

00:33:45 Cristela Guest

Oh, man.

00:33:47 Oliver Host

This is a Morgan Rhodes special.

[Morgan laughs.]

00:33:48 Cristela Guest

Oh, man! That is a great question! Let me see. I’ll probably go with like, either “Kids…” or “Dis Generation.”

[Morgan and Oliver both respond emphatically.]

You know, because it’s got a little bit like, it’s got the old sound but it’s modern—it’s now. But it does have that throwback, where I think if you went back to the thing, you’d think it’s familiar. Does that make sense? Like, you know what I mean? I think those are probably—one of those two.

00:34:16 Music Music

“Dis Generation” off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Fast hip hop switching between several voices with an electric guitar backing.

*Imbibing on impeccable grass
I be in NYC waiting for that law to pass
Past shit been waiting for a Jet's title since last
Richard Todd, Todd Bowles, gang green on that ass
Magic Mike on the mic, David Blaine, Douglas Henning
In the church of Busta Rhymes it's my sermon you're getting*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:34:30 Oliver Host

[Morgan makes “oo-ee” sound.]

Yeah, I think I have to agree. I think this would be a great—

00:34:32 Cristela Guest

Because it’s got that music—’cause you know like, it’s hip hop, but it’s another thing. It’s Tribe hip hop, you know what I mean? It’s got that feel.

00:34:42 Oliver Host

That vibe.

00:34:43 Cristela Guest

Yeah, like for me, I think that’s a good one.

00:34:46 Morgan Host

And it’s clever.

[Cristela responds affirmatively.]

It's clever, and you get to see, to me, that's Phife at his best. And it's got one of the best lines on there, which I think is—

00:34:56 Music Music

["Dis Generation" fades back in]

You can't define us, XY us, or Z us, you generational Elitists have your chi in virtual think pieces

[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]

00:35:01 Morgan Host

You can't classify us. We are timeless. But it doesn't beat you over the head with it. It sneaks that in on you and then it moves on to the next. You know, and they say to the next generation, "Show us what you're gonna show us." You know what I mean?

[Cristela responds emphatically.]

"What y'all got? We've done as much as we could to get you to this point. Now it's on you." And I just love the banter, I love the back and forth. Because it has a check the rhyme-esque nest to it, which I really love.

00:35:25 Oliver Host

Morgan, you said earlier when we were talking about "Solid Wall of Sound" that that wasn't your favorite. So, let's get into this. What is the fire track off this album?

00:35:34 Morgan Host

Ooh, the pressure. You ain't right.

[Cristela giggles.]

Um, I like "Conrad Tokyo."

00:35:42 Oliver Host

Interesting choice!

00:35:44 Morgan Host

I don't know that that's the fire, but I love that, okay? It's between that and I also love "Melatonin." So, those are my two favorites. I love what's being said in "Conrad Tokyo." I love that they sampled the J.B.'s, okay? I love that "Gimme Some".

I love "Melatonin" because it's the presence of women on the track, although we have Jay Davies' little vocals behind "Enough!!" But I like Marsha Ambrosius, and I like Abbey Smith, who's also known as Yebba. And that's also—that song also has my favorite moment.

"Conrad Tokyo" I love. I mean, I just love the message behind it. I love when it comes in the album, 'cause I'm not expecting it. I love the vibe, I love the BPMs. It just makes me wanna wild out. I don't know what it is.

00:36:33 Cristela Guest

That's one of my favorite songs off of it, too.

[Morgan responds emphatically.]

You're right, I was not expecting "Conrad Toyko". Like, when I heard this album, I didn't look up any of the tracks, I just kind of—you know, I listened to it. That came as a surprise, and the lyrics. I mean, the politician's politic, like oh my god, I love it! I love it!

00:36:50 Morgan Host

That's it.

00:36:52 Music Music

"Conrad Tokyo" off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Mid-tempo rap with a firm drumbeat.

*Conrad Tokyo, Sapporo, pistachio
Just done mash a show
Dog is off on sabbatical
Rather watch the Nixon shit
Than politicians politic
CNN and all this shit
Gwaan yo, move with the fuckery
Trump and SNL hilarity
Troublesome times kid, no times for comedy
Bloodclot, you doing...*

[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]

00:37:10 Morgan Host

That one just makes me want to wild out. And then I'm like, "I'm too old to be wilding out," but then I just still wild out anyway.

[Cristela laughs.]

But that's the one. That's it.

00:37:20 Oliver Host

Cristela, how about you?

00:37:21 Cristela Guest

Favorite? Oof. I mean, honestly—

00:37:23 Oliver Host

Oliver: It's gotta be "We The People", right?

Cristela: It has to be "We The People." I mean, I wrote—

Oliver: Yeah, I mean you ended your book with it.

00:37:27 Cristela Guest

I ended my chapter, I ended my book with it. And it—look, to me, "We The People." I think that "We The People" is such a brilliant use—we use the word inclusive a lot, but we don't mean it. When we talk inclusive, we talk about our own community. Like, what about us? This song, I think that they did a great job of saying, "Look, there's a whole group of us that are in the same bubble. And we have been overlooked, and we have been mistreated."

And for me, like, it made me feel included, yet it made me feel aware of other communities that I don't pay attention to because it doesn't affect me. You know, and it's just—it's a human thing. But for me, the music's great. It starts off with that siren, so like right away you're like, "What are we doing?" 'Cause it follows Willy Wonka, so like right now we're going from Willy Wonka to like, "What's this alert?" Right?

But also it was just like, when they talk about living in a fishbowl. You're in a fishbowl. And it's true because like, for me, there are certain cultures, like the Black culture, it's like, I do feel like it's in a fishbowl where everybody looks at it and they want to be a part of it, but do you really want to be a part of it? Do you really, like, you pick and choose what you want from it.

00:38:47 Morgan Host And when you want to be a part of it.

00:38:49 Cristela Guest Exactly! You know, it's so funny how you can—you know, it's kind of like when I say that people like to tan. It's like, well you can tan, but you don't have to—then you don't have all the stuff that comes with the tan, with having the permanent tan, you know what I mean?

So, for me, "We The People", that was a great song where—I mean, for me, I don't know personally in my career, I have felt like I get disregarded a lot, too. Because being the first or one of the few to do something, you constantly get overlooked. Which I think goes back to Missy.

I think that Missy is such—she is a pioneer, that people never gave it up for her. They don't honor her like they should, because she is—she's building the house while drawing the blueprint. You know what I mean? So like, for me, "We The People", that speaks to what this country—

00:39:38 Cristela Guest I'll be honest with you. "We The People".

I stopped doing stand-up in 2016. I took a break from doing stand-up. I devoted my life for the next three years, traveling the country, helping out communities, helping out people that needed—that were shell-shocked from the election, because of this song.

[Oliver responds emphatically with "damn".]

That's what I did. I left stand-up, and I decided to devote my life to the community because of this album. So like, when I knew I was coming on here, I wanted this album because I know that the podcast is about an album that changes your life. This song changed my life. Like, that's how important music is. That like, this song, "We The People" changed my life.

You know, and I'm also diabetic, so it takes on a different feel for me. Because you kind of want to know what message you're leaving, you know? And it's that thing where like, it was just perfect place, perfect time. So for me, "We The People"—when I tell people that are not familiar with Tribe that they should check out this album, I always tell them, "We The People." But like I said, "Dis Generation," that's for Tribe overall.

00:40:51 Music Music "We The People" off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest.

Boy, I tell you that's vision

*Like Tony Romo when he hitting Witten
The Tribe be the best in they division
Shaheed Muhammad cut it with precision
Who can come back years later, still hit the shot?
Still them trying to move we off the fucking block*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:41:08 Oliver Host Well, I wish I had offered my fire track before, because I can't follow that.

[Morgan and Oliver laugh.]

00:41:13 Cristela Guest Well, I mean, look. I mean, I'm the guest. I'm leaving.

[Everyone laughs uproariously and affirms several times.]

00:41:20 Morgan Host Indeed, indeed. What you got, baby?

00:41:24 Oliver Host Yeah, I did have trouble narrowing this down, because I think that—the two other songs that were runner ups were either gonna be “Space Program”, because I just think it's such an important way of opening the album. Or “The Donald”, which is just an important way to close it.

But for me, I always think of the fire track as being—if I'm just gonna pluck something off here that I just want to bump—bump eternal, to use your term, Morgan—it's gotta be “Black Spasmodic.”

[Cristela and Morgan both respond emphatically.]

Christian?

00:41:51 Music Music “Black Spasmodic” off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Grooving instrumentals overlaid with a sound akin to Morse code beeping.

*Yo, y'all ready?
Yo, Phife, you ready?*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:42:02 Oliver Host So this song, number one, offers my favorite moment, which is just how it opens. I think it opens just fire. I mean, just that rhythm bump.

And I love it when hip hop artists sample from reggae. And I'm not—I'm by no means the deepest like, dance hall or reggae head. Not a fan of ragamuffin, if we're gonna take things back to the 90s. Like, that was not my sound.

But there's just something about a really good rhythm, when you use it properly, and this album has at least two of those instances, right? Including this one, where just like, the bounce on this is just so infectious. And to hear Phife at his like pugilistic best is just such a gift and such a gem. So, for me, this is the fire track.

00:42:45	Music	Music	<p><i>["Black Spasmodic" fades back in]</i></p> <p><i>Fuck made me wanna see these n-ggas in person Third song in, motherfuckers dispersing Only to realize Donald Juice in the building Big tune this for man, woman and children Back on my bullshit, Busta Bus then we kill them</i></p> <p><i>They don't make thugs of this caliber (Spasmodic) Who kept up the buzz the whole calendar (Black) Used to sell drugs out the Challenger (Spasmodic) Used to keep guns with the silencers</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i></p>
00:43:05	Morgan	Host	<p>It's tough on here, 'cause to me, there's like 16 heaters on here. But I love that. I love the rhythm, as you mentioned. And I love the patois that you hear all over the album between Busta and Phife going back and forth, and it adds something really hot to the album. So, I'm with you there.</p>
00:43:21	Oliver	Host	<p>You had teased your favorite moment earlier. So, what is your favorite moment?</p>
00:43:25	Morgan	Host	<p>My favorite moment is on "Melatonin." And it's the point at which Abbey Smith starts singing, and I love the way that her voice alongside Marsha's voice and also Q-Tip's voice end up gelling together.</p>
00:43:38	Music	Music	<p>"Melatonin" off the album <i>We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service</i> by A Tribe Called Quest. Slow hip-hop with layered vocals.</p> <p><i>So many thoughts in my mind making it very hard to unwind Guess I should take one, just one</i></p> <p><i>This one's for good girls that all gone bad This one, I'm taking when I feel sad This one, I'm taking to make me strong</i></p>
00:44:01	Oliver	Host	<p>So let's get into a dangerous conversation here.</p>
00:44:04	Morgan	Host	<p>Alright, then.</p>
00:44:05	Oliver	Host	<p>Where does this album rank amongst Tribe's LPs?</p> <p><i>[Cristela responds emphatically with "oh, man!"]</i></p> <p>And I'm gonna start this one off.</p>
00:44:10	Morgan	Host	<p>Shots fired.</p>
00:44:11	Oliver	Host	<p>I got it at number four, because it's—I mean, for all the reasons that we've talked about. You know, the timing, what it meant, incredible in so many ways. But if I'm just listening to them as albums, right, cut away from social, historical context. It's still—it's gonna be better than <i>Love Movement</i>, which is just—</p>

[Morgan and Cristela respond affirmatively, with Cristela laughing uproariously.]

I'm really glad this is the last Tribe album because I don't think *The Love Movement* was terrible, there's some decent moments on there, but it's just an album I never find myself wanting to go back to. Um, but this is not gonna—*We Got It From Here* is not gonna overtake *Low End*. It's not gonna overtake *Midnight*. It's not gonna overtake *People's Instinctive*.

Or, actually no, I miscounted. I said to put it at four. Actually, I would also put it behind *Beats, Rhymes, and Life*, which is, I think, an album a lot of people, a lot of fans were not a fan of back when it first dropped. I think that album has actually aged really, really well. It's so much better than I think a lot of people gave it credit for, even though at the time what they wanted was like, *Midnight Marauders* part two. And this took things in a different direction, partly because of Dilla's influence on it.

But I think because of Dilla's influence on it, *Beats, Rhymes, and Life* sounds amazing now. So, I would actually have to put this album I guess at number five, with *The Love Movement* coming in at a very distant six.

00:45:29 Morgan Host Fair enough. So *The Love Movement's* gonna just be dead last no matter what.

00:45:34 Oliver Host Well, unless this album had just been a total flop, which it's not. And—though I think I am giving it a boost because of, again, when it came out. I think, divorced from that, I don't know where it would rank relative to that. But *Love Moment* just doesn't have a lot of magical moments on there, and this album does for me.

Yeah. How about for you?

00:45:55 Morgan Host [Clicks her tongue and sighs.] I love you so much, man, but I hate this question. But I'm gonna work through it. I'm gonna process it.

[Cristela chuckles.]

00:46:00 Oliver Host It's how we do.

00:46:01 Morgan Host It is. It is.

I cannot—it's very hard for me, because I attach memories to music, and I attach memories to albums, and sometimes the preciousness about what was going on in my life. *Midnight Marauders* came at a great time for me, but to me it was like a party album. I was in college. Don't do the math, like I said, I'm not gonna get into any numbers. But I was in college. And so, it'll always—just the feeling of when I first heard “Electric Relaxation”, I'll just never—

00:46:31 Oliver Host Oh my god, “Award Tour.” I mean, yeah.

00:46:35 Morgan Host That's always gonna be precious, okay? So, period. And heretofore, I would've said *Low End Theory*. But for me, it's always gonna be—

number one for me is gonna be *Midnight Marauders*. And it's hard, because *Low End* to me is classic material. But *Midnight* just gave me a feeling.

Number two is gonna be *Thank You 4 Your Service, We Got It From Here*.

[*Oliver responds emphatically with "wow".*]

Because of some of the things Cristela's saying. What I needed at the time. In 2016, any individual one of those losses that you mentioned just collapsed me. It doesn't make sense to lose Prince in the same year that you also lose George Michael, to lose Sharon Jones. It's—you can't imagine it. And then on top of that, homeboy wins as president?

And so, I like the things that they were saying, and I respect it so much, because this album, to me, is a teachable moment. How to close a show, we're on the metaphor, how to age gracefully, and what to leave behind. And this, to me, is if this is the last album, I don't need anymore.

Like you were saying, had they not done this, had they just stopped at *Midnight Marauders*, that would've been fine. But to end this way after so much time pushes this above, because of the feelings that I attach to this. What I needed in 2016.

And the feeling of sitting with some of these songs knowing we were going to have this conversation, I thought, "Damn, I don't feel like I missed anything." If I go back to *Midnight Marauders* it takes me right back to that year. But here, it takes me back to how I felt and what I needed, and so that pushes it above. Do I think it's a better album than *Low End Theory*? No. But it makes me feel something.

00:48:19 Oliver Host I feel you. Yeah. How about you, Cristela?

00:46:22 Cristela Guest I actually, I'm on the same one. *Midnight Marauders* is always gonna be my number one.

[*Morgan responds emphatically.*]

Because for me, *Midnight Marauders*, if it hadn't been for that album, I wouldn't know Tribe. Like, so for me it's like, you can never rank it higher. But, thank you for this—

[*Oliver laughs.*]

Thank you for—I mean, this is gold. And for me, *Low End Theory* was—again, I got pop culture late. So, Tribe had already been a thing when I discovered Tribe. So it was weird to like, go and—I heard songs out of order. So, you know, it was really weird to find out the evolution. For me, we got what we got, you know? So for me, this album, *Midnight Marauders* will always be number one, because that was it. But yeah.

And I struggled, because I almost wanted to say three, because *Low End Theory* really is, musically, like, it's classic. But I'm here on this podcast because I love this album, so it's gotta be number two. Hands down.

00:49:26 Morgan Host Sure. I wanted to ask you, because you wrote about this. You know, going into this when you were writing about this you said you wanted to, but knowing that this or feeling like this was their last album. Like, what sort of emotions did it pull out of you writing about this? Because it's not your average review, right?

00:49:42 Oliver Host Well, it's funny, because I had the same experience, or similar experience recently, writing about the new Gang Starr album, *One Of The Best Yet*. Which, very similar to this. I mean, it had been over 15 years since the previous Gang Starr album. Obviously, Guru is gone in the same way that Phife is gone.

And it's one of those things where, it's not that it makes the albums—I mean, the term that often gets used like review-proof or critic-proof. I mean, you can still engage with it. You can try to break it down on a formal level. But for me, what I'm more interested in, especially these days, is just what is the response, what is the kind of emotional thing these albums evoke from us. You know, nostalgia of course being part of it, but also what does it say to like, where we are in the moment?

I think sitting down with it knowing that it was the last album, I didn't feel sad about that. I mean, I felt sad about Phife being gone. But, as I was sort of alluding to, they didn't need to do this, right? No one—I mean, people were asking for a Tribe album for years, but this was not something that they did because a label told them to do it, or because they needed the check. They did it because they wanted to do it, because they knew perhaps Phife's time on this Earth was short, and if that was the case, they had to squash beef, and they had to do it for themselves, but also it was a gift to us.

And so, for that, I thought it was kind of as perfect as you could ask for as a last album.

00:51:05 Music Music "Lost Somebody" off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest. Hip hop with fast rapping but slower backing instruments.

*Let's progress the story just a little bit
Malik, I would treat you like little brother that would give you fits
Sometimes overbearing, though I thought it was for your benefit
Despite all the spats and shits and cinematically documented
The one thing I appreciate, you and I, we never pretended
Rhymes we would write it out, hard times, fight it out
Made grace face to face, made it right
And now you riding out, out, out, out
Damn*

Have you ever...

[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]

00:51:29 Morgan Host We ask our guests often, if you had to describe the album in three words, what would they be?

00:51:38 Cristela Guest Power over ignorance.

[Both Morgan and Oliver respond delightedly.]

00:51:41 Oliver Host I always like it when our guests come up with phrases.

00:51:44 Morgan Host Bars in here.

00:51:45 Music Host "Conrad Tokyo" off the album *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* by A Tribe Called Quest

*Conrad Tokyo, a far road, pistachio
Conrad Tokyo, a far road, pistachio*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:52:01 Oliver Host If our listeners really enjoyed listening to us talk about this Tribe album, what should they follow that up with next?

00:52:09 Morgan Host Under normal circumstances, I would have a fresh pick, you know, something else similar. But based on this conversation, I'd say if you like this, just go back to the catalog of Tribe. Just go back. Go back to *Midnight Marauders*, go back to *Low End Theory*, go back to *People's Instinctive*, go back to *Beats and Rhymes* so that you can appreciate this last one even more. So that you can see the development over time of them, and so that you can see the true spirit of Tribe wasn't lost on this album.

Short of that, I would say as a companion piece, go back and listen to Dilla *Donuts*. It is another last album. It is another great assembly of samples from a man who knows that his days are limited, and that he picked the perfect number of tracks to coincide with what he knew was imminent. And you can also see the architect of some of Tribe Called Quest's really beautiful, beautiful work. So it's like listening to one of their cousins, and also one of their producers and the architect of this whole sample thing.

So, that would be my decision, my pick.

00:53:13 Music Music "U-Love" off the album *Donuts* by J-Dilla. Complex, multi-layered vocals over instruments and record scratches.

*Just because I really love you
Just because I really love you
(Dilla, Dilla, Dilla)
Love you
Love you*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:53:31 Oliver Host So, I already teased this a moment ago, but I would suggest people

check out Gang Starr's *One Of The Best Yet*. I do think that—I mean, the comparison is very easy, because these are two golden era groups, there's been a long hiatus between. I think it also makes for an interesting contrast for reasons that I'd been alluding to a moment ago. Which is that the main difference is that, in this case, Guru's lyrics—and I don't know the full backstory—but they definitely sound like they were recorded probably back in maybe '05-'06.

There's been some time. So, unfortunately he wasn't—he's been dead since 2010. There was no opportunity for Premiere to be able to get Guru back into the studio and record stuff that would have spoken a little bit more to the moment. And it's not that Gang Starr was ever the most topical artists. I mean, they weren't really referencing current events necessarily in their songs, but I do think that the key difference between this album and that album, a similar as they are in some ways, is just the fact that again, Guru wasn't here in 2018 or 2019 to be able to put together the album. That said, it's kind of amazing that we have a new Gang Starr album to listen to that sounds like what you want a Gang Starr album to sound like, which I think is the same way that we responded to the Tribe album. So, I think, yeah, again, for 90s kids like me, I mean, it's a no brainer. You're gonna listen to that Gang Starr album. But if you haven't yet, if you're not a 90s kid, then yeah you should go check it out and just come think about what works in both albums and maybe what doesn't work for one or the other maybe because of some differences in the circumstances.

00:55:04 Music Music "Bad Name" off the album *Bad Name* by Gang Starr. Mid-tempo hip hop with complex, multilayered instrumentals.

*We all know that the game has changed
It's crazy out here, rap's got a bad name
Think about it, what if bling never happened?
And the true artists were getting rich from rapping
Word to God, something should give
Let's delete the politics so real hip-hop can live*

00:55:20 Oliver Host Cristela, what do you think people should listen to after this album?

00:55:22 Cristela Guest Um, I'm gonna go—

00:55:23 Oliver Host Boston.

00:55:24 Cristela Guest —old school. Yes!

[Morgan and Cristela laugh.]

'Cause Tribe is more than a feeling!

[Everyone laughs uproariously.]

I would say 2pac. And actually, I would probably recommend—I think it's the *Greatest Hits*, because I want to say that "Changes" was released after he passed, I'm sure. But like, to me, 2pac and Tribe go hand in hand in talking about the world that they were

living in, in a way that even if you hear it now—especially if you hear 2pac now, same thing. Same. It's like, same world, different day.

And for me, I think that if you like the message of this album from Tribe, then you will love going back and listening to 2pac, because it's just different perspective about very similar things that had actually—once I listened, like, if you listened to 2pac, I think you would be curious to see what he would have to say right now. Which I think allows itself to kind of have like a before and after, I think, a then and now.

00:56:28 Music Music "Changes" off the album *Greatest Hits* by 2pac. Fast rapping over a piano and drum backing.

*...distant strangers
And that's how it's supposed to be
How can the Devil take a brother if he's close to me?
I'd love to go back to when we played as kids
But things changed, and that's the way it is*

*That's just the way it is
Things will never be the same*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:56:44 Oliver Host That will do it for this episode of *Heat Rocks* with our special guest, Cristela Alonzo. You have just wrapped up the book tour. What are you working on now?

00:56:53 Cristela Guest Um, the Spanish version of my book is coming out December 10th, which, you know, so I'm doing everything but now in Spanish, promoting it.

[Cristela and Oliver both laugh.]

But also, you know, it's funny. People keep asking me. They always ask me if I'm ever coming back with a TV show, or what I'm doing next, and I always tell people, "I don't know." Um, I think a lot of people try to create content because they feel like they have to. We were talking about that, like the Tribe album. For me, I like things. I like to have something to say.

00:57:26 Oliver Host Yeah. Not just for the sake of doing it.

00:57:28 Cristela Guest Yeah, because I think the people can sense it. The audience knows when you mean it, and when you're just doing it. So for me, the book was a big thing that was so special to me, and the tour was—this tour is actually my first tour since 2016.

So, I recorded my Netflix special in August of 2016. So, I stopped doing stand-up in 2016. I just started this tour in October. It's my first time back to stand-up. So, this was a big undertaking. It was 40 cities in three months. And it was my way of saying that I was back. And now, it's different.

It's a weird thing, because I'm mentally in a different spot right now,

where I don't know what's next. But, you know, I have choices. And that, I think, is one of the best things you can say. That's—I almost feel guilty saying that to people, when they're like, "What are you working on now?" I haven't chosen yet. I haven't decided yet. It seems very indulgent, but it's the truth.

00:58:35 Oliver Host

Flaunt it if you got it, though.

[Morgan responds affirmatively and Cristela laughs.]

00:58:38 Morgan Host

That's it. It ain't tricking if you got it. But up next for you gotta be a mixtape. You know, you coming out here talking about hits, Boston and such. I think you need to get a mixtape together. That's gotta be next up for you.

00:58:49 Cristela Guest

I should do it, man. I should do it. Oh, man.

00:58:50 Morgan Host

Absolutely. Curate something for the people.

00:58:54 Oliver Host

Where can people find you online?

00:58:55 Cristela Guest

Instagram and Twitter, @Cristela9. The number 9 because Cristela was taken by people that don't use their accounts, which is so frustrating!

00:59:04 Oliver Host

Eight people in front of you.

00:59:06 Cristela Guest

[Laughing] Well, you know, there was a Cristela 1 and and a Cristela 2, and I was like screw it, I'm just gonna do 9. Like, I'm safe. And my website's CristelaAlonzo.com, with uh, Cristela with no "h", please.

[Music fades out.]