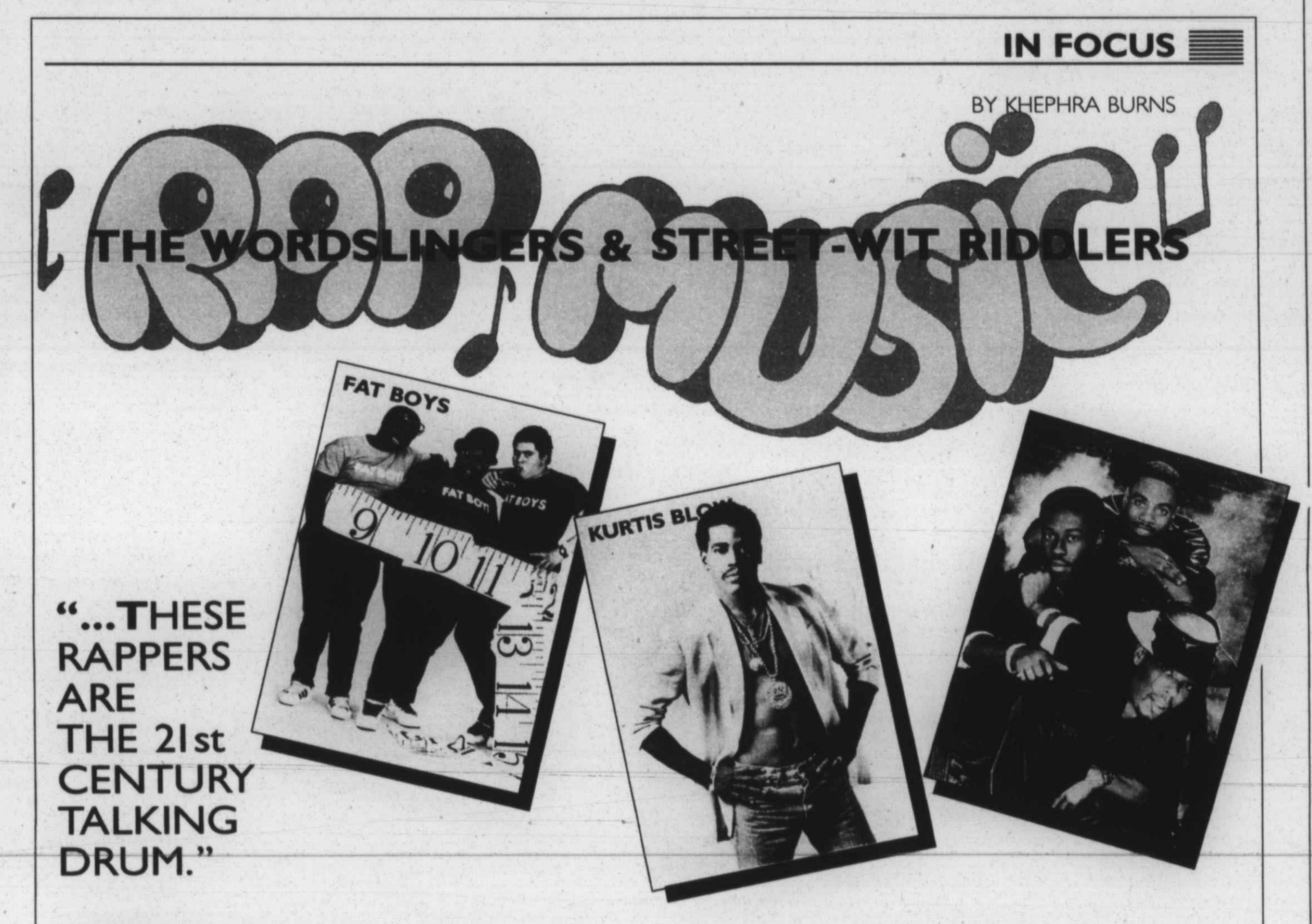


Alive with pleasure!

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Quitting Smoking Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.



rom New York City's South Bronx, where the architecture of ancient ruin plays host to a thriving Black youth culture, comes a sound like whips cracking at the nape of one's neck - electronic shocks that keep the beat for the elliptically allierate and rhythmical rhymes of street-wit riddlers. The culture is "hip hop," and the boys (and girls) - grandmasters of rap and the "wheels of steel" (the dual turntables deejays use to "scratch," mix and cut between records to collage the new beats). If you missed it in movies like "Krush Groove" and "Beat Street," you almost certainly have seen it in T.V. Fast-food commercials and heard it broadcast from the luggage-sized stereo cassette players that are regulation equipment among the youth in your community, wherever you are!

In rap, the language of the Black community emerges once again as a major force in the shaping of culture and communication. Rap is not a new phenomenon. It is part of an oral tradition that stretches back through jive-talking radio deejays, hipsters, Bo Diddley, the Last Poets, skip - rope rhymes, toasts, signifying, the dozens (verbal shoot-outs between wordslingers), and even the boasting of West African story tellers or griots, all culminating in such rockin' oratorios as Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock" and Melle Mel's "The Message."

Much of the music that backs rap today is written for specific rhymes. Originally, though, it consisted of the instrumental breaks and B sides of twelve-inch singles. In the mid-Seventies, a Bronx deejay known as Kool Herc (besides coining the term "b boy") came

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up with collages of these instrumental breaks he called "b beats." Another deejay, Grandmaster Flash, took it a step further, innovating the technique called "scratch," in which fragments of a recorded musical phrase are repeated, forward and back, by manually reversing the direction of the spinning disc. With that, deejays began to play the turntable, improvising on it like jazz musicians do on a musical instrument.

Rap traveled locally through homemade tapes until 1979, when a group called the Sugarhill gang recorded "Rapper's Delight." With its success, rap (as the rhymes of MCs came to be known thereafter) went international. But what was once a fluid, dynamic art in live performance became defined by the recorded version. Where a live rap had consisted of a series of cleverly ad-libbed catch phrases, the need for recorded raps to be commercial oriented them toward the telling of a story.

Today, three basic, though often overlapping, styles of rap have emerged; the boast (a successor to the tradition of the badman toasts like "Staggerlee"), the putdown (which developed out of the "dozens" and is directed mostly at rival rappers — the "sucker MCs"), and social commentary (which dates back to the work of artists like the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron in the early Seventies). Rappers like Run-DMC, Kurtis Blow, the Fat Boys, and Doug E. Fresh are in the vanguard of this new form which appears to be growing in its influence on language, music and culture as it evolves and becomes more refined. These rappers are the twenty - first century Afro-American talking drums. Give a listen. Their rhymes and rhythms carry a message.