

Before MTV

Talking with Ralph McDaniels, New York VJ and hip-hop's great uncle

by Paul Barman

As a child, Ralph McDaniels's Trinidadian family played Calypso music and his uncle introduced him to Motown. Now that he is New York City's uncle, VJ Ralph McDaniels returns the favor by locking up Saturday nights on Channel 25 NYC-TV. The Bridge, a new show devoted to old school hip-hop videos, airs at 11 p.m. Ralph, cohost Tiffani Webb, and executive producer Trevor Scotland unearth classic videos to rock minds and shock bodies. [Press Record]. Then, at midnight, Video Music Box blazes across screens for its 23rd continuous year, debuting new videos and Ralph's classic exclusive interviews. [Reewiiiiind!!!]

Did you always call yourself Uncle? No, I originally was VJ Ralph McDaniels. Red Alert started calling me Uncle Ralph and coined Luke Skywalker, from 2 Live Crew, Uncle Luke. It came about because anybody who's been around for a little while, helps people out, broke a bunch of groups, "Oh, you've got a video, you gotta go see Uncle Ralph, he'll take care of you."

How does it feel being an uncle to a huge group of people you never even met? I've affected two generations. I've got a 40-year-old who's grown up with me from watching Video Music Box in the '80s, and there are kids who



are listening to me right now. Kids will come to me like, "You know my mother!" and I'm like, "Oh Lord . . ."

What acts would you take credit for breaking on Video Music Box? I can say pretty much everybody.

You didn't have to be a superstar to be on the mic. You could be just some dude walking down the street. I meet people now like, "I was on Video Music Box back in such-and-such—yo man I was big that summer!" The people were the stars of the show and I think we have to bring that back. We invented the shout-out.

I pick up on certain things that I think the audience will be interested in. Even if it's something I may be totally off and I'm wrong. I may have believed in an artist more than they believe in themselves sometimes! But the audience will be like, "We see what you saw, Ralph. No problem," because they know it's from my heart.

You played New Kids on the Block long before anyone else. Some things you know are gonna be a hit because it's generated from the record companies. Irish kids from Boston are pretty thugged out! It's like going to Bensonhurst, it's some pretty thugged out white dudes. I saw that this was gonna be something—I didn't know what. Once it became totally blown out, I was done with it.

Why did you give Native Tongues [Jungle Brothers, Queen Latifah, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Black Sheep, more] two entire episodes of The Bridge? It used to be where the artist would influence the society. Native Tongues had a big influence on the culture in the city. Now the government has more influence on everything. There was a time when if KRS One said it, "black cop, black cop," whatever it was, it was like whoa, forget about what Bloomberg or Bush said, it doesn't really matter, KRS One said it. Now, Bloomberg said something, young 18-year-olds are paying attention to what he is saying.

Really? I think so. Look, if you got arrested in the projects, your parents could get kicked out of their project building. That was a slick little move right there. All of a sudden that

kid is thinking a lot different than how he was before. You better fall in line.

The Bridge premieres Saturdays at 11:00 PM. Encores Sundays at 11:00 PM and Thursdays at 9:00 PM. Reruns until May, when season two begins. Not in New York? Stream The Bridge [here](#).