

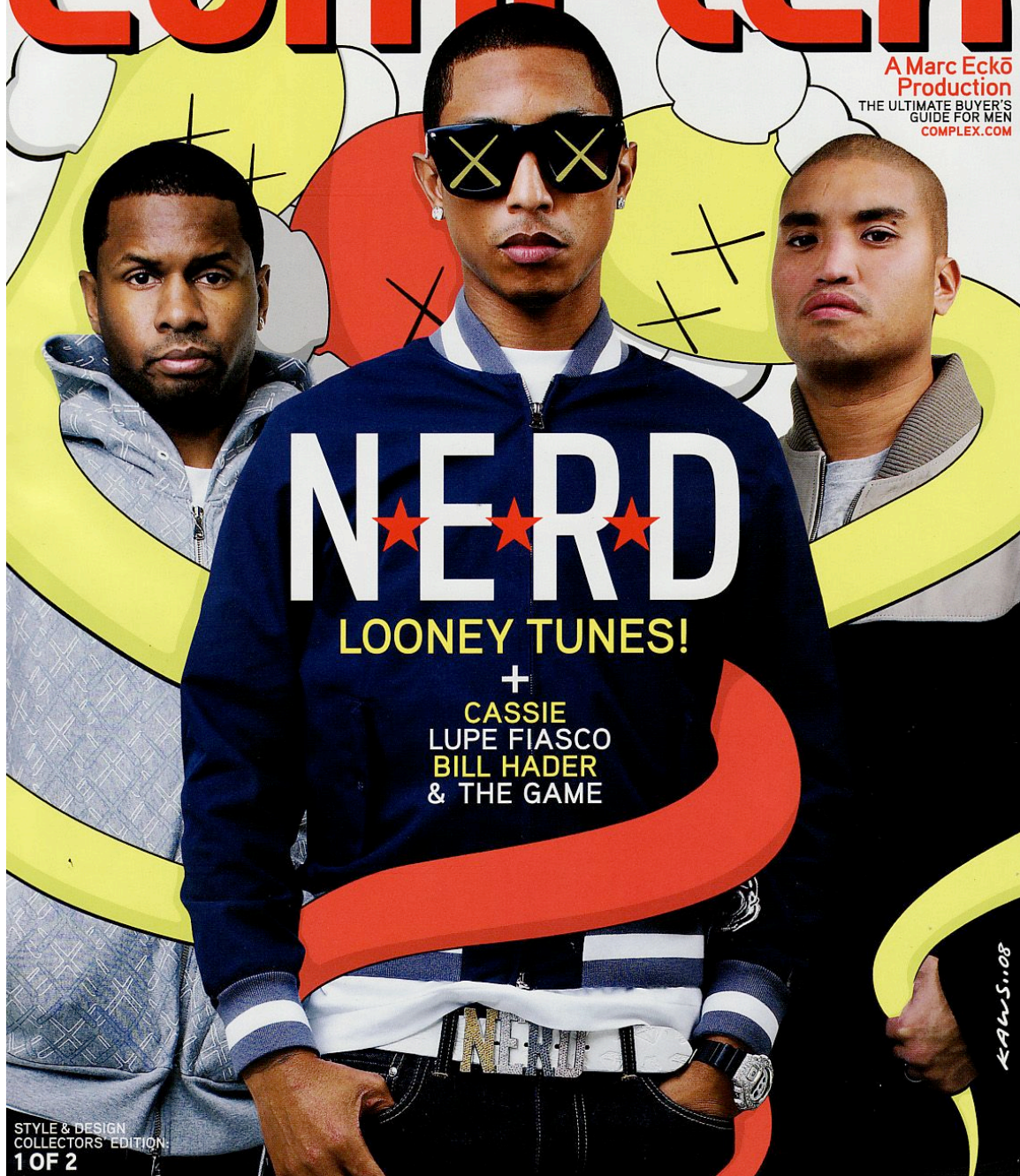
OLIVIA MUNN
LICKS THE PLATE

SEX, FIGHTING & FREE BOOZE:
BAR ETIQUETTE 101

MAIL-ORDER BRIDES
REVIEWED

COMPLEX

A Marc Eckō
Production
THE ULTIMATE BUYER'S
GUIDE FOR MEN
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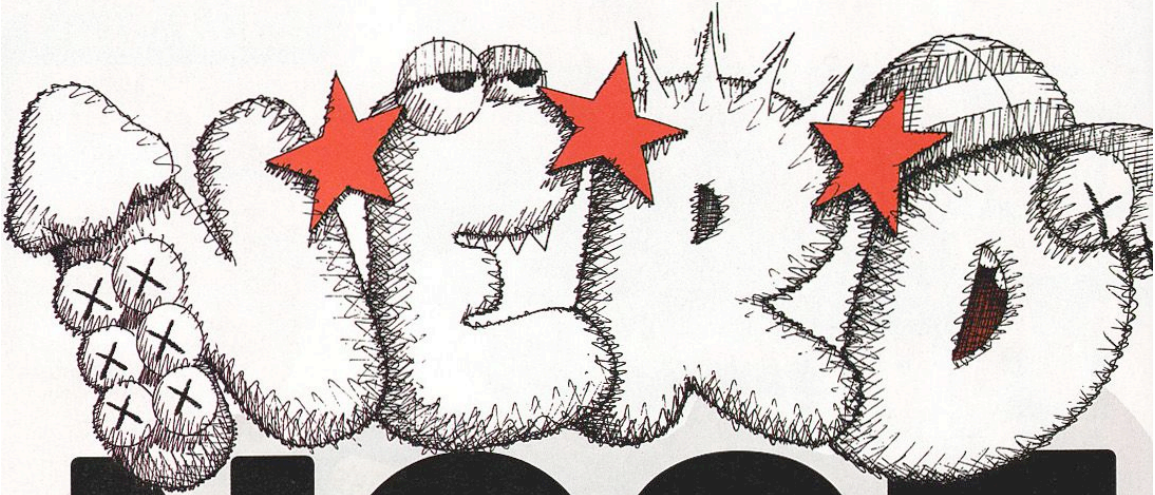
NERD

LOONEY TUNES!

+
CASSIE
LUPE FIASCO
BILL HADER
& THE GAME

STYLE & DESIGN
COLLECTOR'S EDITION
1 OF 2

KAWA.S.08



NOSE WHAT'S UP

THE VIRGINIA TRIO IS BACK FOR
THE THIRD TIME. IS THAT THE
ELUSIVE SMELL OF SUCCESS?
IF YOU DON'T NOSE, NOW YOU NOSE.



BY **BRENDAN
FREDERICK**



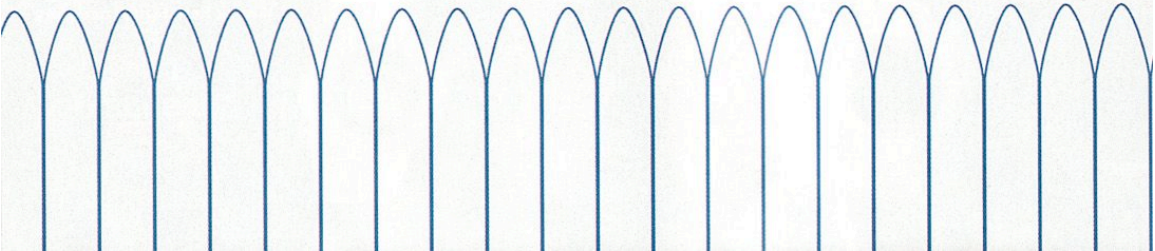
ILLUSTRATIONS
BY **KAWS**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MATT DOYLE



STYLING BY **ANOMA
YA WHITTAKER**





HOW IS IT THAT THEIR BEATS-

for-hire business has been a gold mine for years, yet their do-for-self mission has been so hit-and-miss? Easy answer: Weirdness is a risky business. When they provide the backdrop and let someone else deliver the message, they're a novelty, and an infectious one. When they're delivering their own message, though, it's a lot harder—being at the vanguard is lonely when no one can match your speed.

REMEMBER HOW WEIRD THE NEPTUNES USED TO BE?

And then how, when they hooked up with their boy and formed a rock group, you couldn't figure out what they were going for? Well, they're still weird—at least compared to the baggy-jeaned aesthetic that ruled hip-hop when they first came around—but their brand of weird has become the new center. From fringe to mainstream, Pharrell and Chad remade hypebeasts in their own images. When it comes to N.E.R.D., though, they're still searching.

THEY'RE DOING THEIR BEST TO

bring people up to tempo, though; their most recent record, June's *Seeing Sounds*, adds a sprinkling of high-energy dancefloor sounds to their usual stew. And as an act on 'Ye's phenomenally successful *Glow in the Dark* Tour, they've inundated the country with "Everybody Nose," their ode to nasal candy and the eye candy that loves it.

BOTTOM LINE:

Weirdness is the cousin of genius. Madness and artistry go hand in hand, and it's what's made them design icons in addition to just musical ones (LV, BBC, Bape—should we go on?). And most important, they're just being themselves. You might not understand it, but you gotta respect it. N.E.R.D. = life, son!

Besides this shoot, I heard that KAWS recreated the Sistine Chapel in your house using Smurfs. Is that true?

Pharrell: Yeah. I'm a huge Smurfs fan. And he did some *Family Guy* stuff for me, and he also did SpongeBob. There's a bunch of that kind of stuff in my room.

What is it about his stuff that you like?

P: I like his mentality, I like how he approaches things—he makes use of negative space. But I think he does it in a great cartoon way.

Are there any artists or designers that you think are really underrated?

Shay: There's this group out in Ohio, and they started a clothing line called Fresco. It's a dope brand—I rocked one of their shirts in the ["Everybody Nose"] video. They have dope quotes across the back.

Chad: I think Pharrell Williams, as a designer. I think people are sleeping on that.

[Laughs.]

C: Seriously.

How are people sleeping on him?

C: People look at [BBC] and they see the imaginary rocket ship and a lot of the animation, and it's hard to understand at first 'cause it doesn't fit into the mold of, like, Izod and regular name brands.

Musically, you guys aren't exactly mainstream, but you're probably the biggest producers that ever made it from the world of hip-hop. But then from a style standpoint, it seems you try to keep a proximity to the exclusive shit. You don't have BBC brand in Macy's, which you could.

Why do you feel that's the way to go for clothes, as opposed to how you handle your music?

P: Certain things are meant to be amongst a smaller populace. You don't want everything you do to be ridiculous, you know? Exclusivity is a good thing. It keeps it close to you.

But at the same time, a lot of styles you guys pioneered, and Nigo started, sort of trickled down to a lot of the mall brands. Does that worry you?

P: I'm not here to take credit. I'm just really appreciative of the opportunity. The most important part is the process.

The process of designing?

P: The process for everything. It's just having fun, being creative. Of course you want to think futuristically, but I think that if you just kind of walk with today, and you never fall backwards on yesterday, and you're not stepping too quick towards tomorrow, it's fun. Today is a process that leads to the finish line of tomorrow. Does that make sense? I'm not trying to be all philosophical and shit.

"CERTAIN THINGS ARE MEANT TO BE SMALL. EXCLUSIVITY IS A GOOD THING."

You don't try to overthink it.

P: Yeah, I just have fun. I think that's the most important part. If you build this brain-fuck labyrinth for yourself, you become too entrenched in the fact that it's your stuff. Instead of looking at it like it's my stuff, I like to look at it like it's my world and I can have it my way. You can design your life. Whatever it is you want to be, there's a blueprint for it. And that's the fun part: creating the blueprint and following the instructions.

When you guys first came out as the Neptunes, you were outsiders: You dressed different and the music was on some next-level shit. But now you're on this big tour with like-minded artists, there's an avant-garde sensibility to it. Clearly, the musical climate has changed.

Is this tour meaningful to you for that reason?

C: We're from the same influences, and we influence each other. We're for the same cause, which is moving hip-hop and the culture. It's a culture thing. We're all very honest.

What does it say that these artists, who five or 10 years ago were probably looked at as unusual, are now on the biggest tour out there?

P: We're all fighting the same fight.

Which is what?

P: Individuality.

There are a lot of artists right now, like Gym Class Heroes, who are bringing N.E.R.D.'s mix of hip-hop and rock to the mainstream. Do you feel like the marketplace is more open?

P: We say, "Thank God." We're glad that those groups exist.

S: I feel like early Black Eyed Peas, bands like OutKast, bands like N.E.R.D. definitely paved the way for Gym Class Heroes, Gnarls Barkley. But as a team, we still have a lot more to do.

Music right now is a little redundant. I feel like it's definitely open for something else to creep through and shake up the airwaves a little.

Do you think that's what going to happen with this album? With the much better reception from the radio and so on...

S: I definitely feel like the window's open for something. ATL had its run, Florida is having their run right now, and fans are eager to hear something a little more refreshing.

In hip-hop, it's no longer only about being a dope-boy rapper. Groups like the Cool Kids and the whole '80s-baby style have really proven that things are opening up. Do you feel responsible at all?

P: I'm very excited that music is finally far more diverse. It's come like a 20 on a Richter scale to the industry because they don't know how to recoup their money anymore—the new program director is not the radio station, it's a kid who's been armed by Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs has disseminated the virus of individuality. And the record industry is helplessly and helplessly collapsing from the inside.

Are you a fan of any of these younger artists? The Cool Kids? Wale?

P: Of course, we're working with Wale. I like all those guys. The only thing I don't like is when things become incredibly repetitive. And I don't like when program directors get in the way of DJs who want to spin innovation.

When you guys are in the studio as N.E.R.D., how is the working relationship different than when you guys are doing a Neptunes record or a Pharrell album?

C: It's about...I don't know...hallucinating and transmitting thoughts between each other.

Transmitting thoughts?

C: We don't say anything, we just speak through the notes and the speakers. So whatever comes out just kind of has enhanced transmitted notes on a theme. And it's documented onto digital tapes.

How did "Everyone Nose" come about?

P: We listened to a bunch of jazz records really fast.

I can see that.

P: I really like tempo, man.

So you listened to a bunch of jazz records and you just got that beat...

OPENING SPREAD

Shay: Hoodie by OriginalFake, Pharrell: All clothing by Billionaire Boys Club; sunglasses by Lanvin, Chad: Jacket by Billionaire Boys Club; T-shirt by Nike

THIS PAGE

Pharrell: Jacket by Billionaire Boys Club; sunglasses by Lanvin



Jacket and hat
by Billionaire
Boys Club;
sunglasses by
Lanvin



P: Our song is 140 BPMs. When I was a kid, I couldn't stand drum and bass. It just didn't make sense to me. So I wanted to make our contribution to what it felt like to me, but I also wanted to make it edgier and rockier.

C: Everyone knows what Chad and Pharrell do from the Neptunes. But what does Shay do?

S: I just try to push them to the full extreme and have them do records that they normally wouldn't do. That's why we're always like, "Neptunes is what they do, and N.E.R.D. is who we are."

So give me an example. How do you challenge them to think outside the box?

S: I mean, throughout the hiatus, I was doing my research, listening to tons of jazz records, listening to tons of rock records, and they were doing it as well on top of working—and by the time we got in the studio last summer, we had so many ideas of going about this album. That's why we call it *Seeing Sounds*.

How would you say this album sounds compared to the previous ones?

S: Naturally, we matured. The first two albums were like fronting records that we threw out there, but this has more of a purpose.

Let's talk about the Ice Cream shit a little bit. How difficult has it been to find acceptance in the skateboard world?

P: I never really gave it that kind of thought—the only thing that really matters to me is that I'm offering them an opportunity I didn't have. I wasn't good enough, by the way.

To skate?

P: When you hear "Skateboard P," that's just like in the hood, skating around. They never called me that, but that's the name I wish I would have had. When I was a kid, I never had a nickname; it was always just Pharrell.

Back when Clones came out, there was talk about you guys making a movie called Dude, We're Going to Rio.

P: Are you trying to torture me right now?

No, I'm just curious what happened to that.

P: It was just bad. Not surrounded by the right people. Just a shitty arrangement. Those guys were nice, but I didn't know what was appropriate. But now I'm working with Joel Silver so we're producing something. I'm doing some television things with McG.

I'm surprised you haven't made the Hollywood move already.

P: But that's not my place. I think Hollywood is great, but I don't think that's where I'm supposed to live or be stationed.

But can you see yourself producing movies and stuff like that? More behind the scenes?

P: Yeah, we're working on a couple of things. **Speaking of movies, I saw a video on YouTube called "Is Chad Hugo happy?"**

C: Really?

And it was just a bunch of pictures of you not smiling.

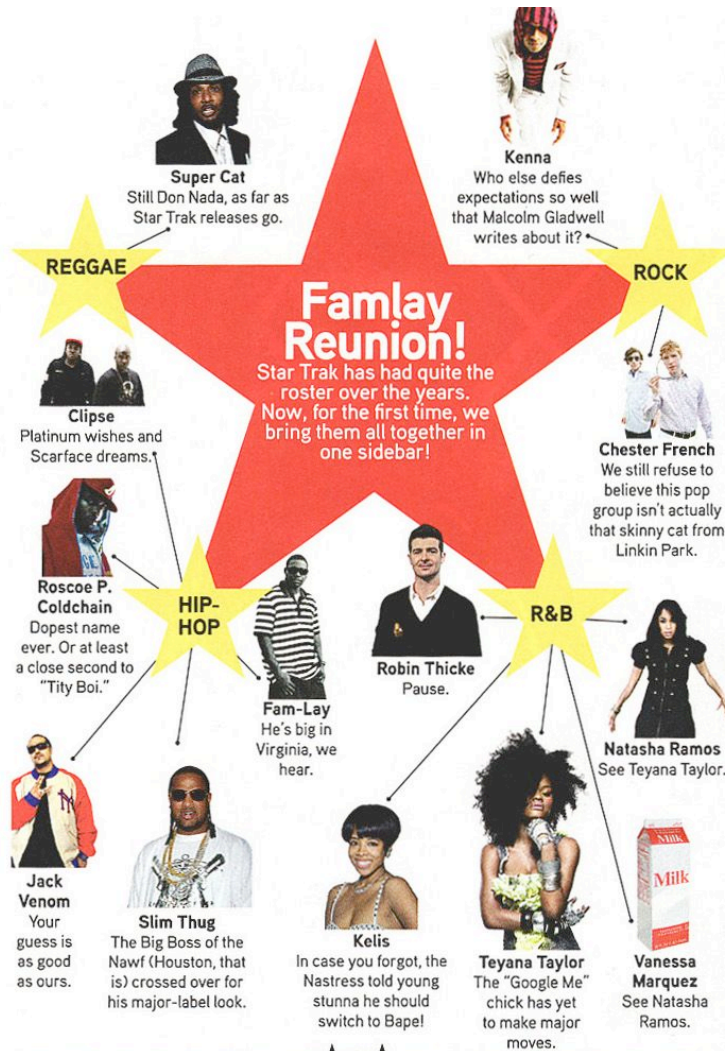
C: Oh yeah, I produced that myself.

You did?

C: Yeah, sure...I just took all these pictures. People need to smile. Where they could just grab a Coke and have a smile.

So for the record, you do smile.

C: Yeah, of course. No, I actually don't know



who made that, but I'll look into it.

P, you often rap—and sometimes sing—about a very hyper-consumerist lifestyle. Do you feel conflicted about that when we're in a recession?

P: That was one little small era. All of that is just the nerdy guy going, "Ha ha!" But when's the last time you heard me rap about that stuff? At this moment, right now it's all about N.E.R.D. and it's about energy. I'm just inspired by that. When I was doing that kind of stuff before, it was because I felt like I was doing something different, but in essence it wasn't really. It was the same shit I'd been hearing.

Are you referring to the solo album [In My Mind]?

P: Yeah, that's an album that should have been made into a compilation.

Any new projects outside of music you're into?

S: I'm working on two cartoons. One Adult Swim cartoon and a *Teen Titans*-style cartoon.

Are you actually animating, or are you the big-picture idea guy?

S: I'm an idea guy. I work with my partner Dub, he's a great artist. We sketch the characters, me and another guy wrote the story line. Now it's under development. I'm sending it to guys out in Hong Kong to bring the characters to life.

Any other high-fashion collabos going on?

P: Well, I just did jewelry with Camille Miceli and Marc Jacobs from Louis Vuitton. That just hit the stores. I just did a chair with Domeau & Pérès. It's cool, a little pricey though—like three G's. I think that's going to come in spring. And a sick, sick, sick, stupid, retarded collaboration with Brooklyn Machine Works. We did one for Barneys, a BBC x Brooklyn joint with another company I can't tell you. Marc Newson and I are gonna do something together too, but I can't talk about it.

All right, man, I see how it is. Don't talk about it.

P: [Laughs.] I'm not trying to be funny. I promise you. But it's going to be cool. I'm thankful, man. I can't complain. ☺