

# The Five Most Underrated MCs

Contributed by {{Josh Capers - Black College Wire}}  
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Some great ones got lost amid the hype. (WITH AUDIO)

- What do these MCs have in common? Hear the author.

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When people talk about the greatest rappers, dead or alive, some great MCs get lost amid the hype.

Here is one list of the five most underrated MCs.

Let me state outright that there are plenty of deserving underground MCs (Gift of Gab from Blackalicious, Del tha Funkee Homosapien and MC Juice, even though he did rip Eminem in the Rap Olympics), but this list isn't going to cover that genre.

Also omitted are "old-school" artists, such as Kurtis Blow, Big Daddy Kane and Guru, as that is a separate category.

Joe Budden

It was said that Joe Budden's self-titled 2003 debut album flopped. His label, Def Jam, blames that on people not knowing the artist's proper name.

In the early part of the 21st century, Budden was mainly called "Joe Buddens" on mixtapes and even by radio stations. So when buyers went to look for the album, they were looking under the wrong name.

Budden is on this list for the plethora of amazing songs he's put out on mixtapes.

Budden is the type of MC that you have to find, because he's not going to find you. But when you do, you

truly feel like you've hit the hop-hop jackpot.

Sometimes that jackpot consists of a complex story that he's so ingenious in generating, or something as simple as a freestyle at some random radio station, where Budden will just spew some of the illest quotables, making a listener feel cheated that other artists just aren't that nice.

Budden's versatility and ability to master any type of track or concept makes him outrageously underrated.

There are an easy 15 story-telling tracks that Budden has compiled and released since his debut album that are nothing short of amazing. Listen to "Last Real Nigga Left" and his current freestyle over the "Boy Looka Here" beat.

"Dumbout" is still one of the most amazing songs I've ever heard. It's seven and a half minutes of uninterrupted sickness.

AZ

AZ is one of the most lyrically gifted MCs to bless the mic. It pains me to put him on this list.

AZ came on the scene with his boy Nas when Nas dropped what was supposed to be the Second Coming with his album "Illmatic" in 1994. AZ's verse on Nas' song "Life's a B\*\*\*\*\*" was so well put together that it was only a matter of time before the MC received a deal of his own.

In 1995, "Doe or Die," AZ's debut album, shook up the rap game like Nas and Mobb Deep, AZ's counterparts in the gangsta group the Firm and native New York rappers. In 1997, he joined the group, which consisted of Nas, Foxy Brown, AZ and Nature on the lyrics and Dr. Dre and the Trackmasters on the beats.

But like the Firm, AZ's subsequent albums were disappointments numbers-wise.

Despite his stumbles, the Brooklyn rapper was able to sign with the legendary Motown Records, despite its little-to-no success in the rap game.

AZ's lack of sales is thought to be due to his lack of big-name production and the rather skimpy rosters of guest appearances on his albums.

AZ was able to resurrect his career somewhat when he dropped the album "9 Lives" in 2001, which was followed by what was known as his comeback album, "Aziatic," in 2002.

"Aziatic" is amazing. Some of its songs surfaced on the radio and some of its videos dropped. It had one of the most lyrically gifted tracks to bless the rap game.

If anyone wants to learn how to put together a combination of lyrics mixed with a combination of a vigorous rhyme scheme, "Re-Birth" is the track for you.

When you mix AZ's multisyllabic rhyme scheme with his delivery, flow and content, adding in his witty, slick-talking ways gives you the components of the complete MC.

AZ actually dropped two albums recently, "A.W.O.L" and "the Format." Lyrically, they represent true hip-hop, even though AZ's status never grew like the guy he came into the game with, Nas.

## Big Pun

Another New York rapper who scaled heights and broke down barriers with a skill set never seen on the mic was

Big Pun.

Pun was the first Latin rapper to go platinum, and he came a long way before his debut album, "Capital Punishment," was released.

Pun first appeared on a couple of Fat Joe tracks before showing up on a Funkmaster Flex mixtape, making an underground name for himself.

When Pun emerged with "Not a Player" in 1997, he had the streets going wild. In 1998, the MC released his debut album with the hit single that truly launched his career, "Still Not a Player," featuring Joe. Those who haven't heard Pun's "Capital Punishment" are in for something they're not ready for.

Pun's in-your-face style, with his long-winded, tongue-twisting, high-energy flow and witty lines, was unmatched and unheralded in his time.

It's amazing that Pun had the breath control he did.

One's breathing is influenced by one's stomach muscles and diaphragm, and Pun's weight caused breath problems. His weight fluctuated from 450 to 700 pounds over his last years.

Pun came to North Carolina to get on a special weight program, in which he lost about 80 pounds on what seemed like a road to recovery. But he continued his overeating when returned to his Bronx home, and health issues finally got the best of him seven years ago, at age 28.

Big L

Big L, shot and killed at age 25, passed less than a year before Big Pun. Like Pun, Big L's potential never got a chance to peak.

Big L was absolutely ahead of his time, and he was not afraid of telling that to the world. His boisterous style was one of cocky confidence, but he was sure to back it up every time he got on the mic. His label is indicative of that, Flamboyant Records.

Big L shone in several groups with big names. He was in DITC, Digging in the Crates, and in Children of the Corn, with Killa Cam (now known as Cam'ron) and Murda Mase, before they achieved the full-blown status they have today. Even before Cam started making up words to rhyme with.

Big L also dropped amazing tracks like "Ebonics" and "No Endz, No Skinz," but those are not even the biggest tracks L is known for.

Many hip-hop heads will say Big L's "'98 Freestyle" was simply too sick for words. This is one of the greatest freestyles of all time, and the way he works this form is one reason some acclaim Big L as the dopest MC to grace the mic. His early death hindered him from reaching his potential.

To hear how far he was ahead of his time, listen to his freestyle with Jay-Z in 1995, on his debut album, "Lifestylez Ov Da Poor & Dangerous," and hear how much he outshone Jay.

Royce Da 5'9

Like the other MCs,

Royce Da 5'9, out of Detroit, is cocky in style. He has every right to be. With a rhythmic flow that often syncopates to the beat, Royce is not an MC to be taken lightly, as he quickly showed D12 a couple of years ago.

Royce single-handedly dismantled the D12 crew with a verbal lashing in "Malcolm X" that cut so deep that it caused physical violence.

"Malcolm X" was such a viciously crafted spit of excellence that many couldn't believe he was going at some cats that he was cool with, especially since Royce rolled so tightly with Eminem in his early years in the game.

Royce recently said on his mixtape "the Bar Exam" that no one has ever outshone Eminem on a track like he has.

Royce eventually got off the mainstream tip and went independent. A lot of people think that independent artists are broke because they don't move as many units, but they can

earn 15 times as much as a mainstream rapper per unit sold. Royce's "Independent's Day," released in the summer of 2005, shows his versatility. Since that album, Royce has surfaced on the hip-hop scene with plenty of tracks on mixtapes, Royce-driven or not.

Royce's punches and wordplay are some of the sickest in the game today, and punch for punch, he can spar with anyone in the game.

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