

Maria Isa: Incendiary, lethal

Written by Alaina L. Lewis



Nowadays, rappers are about as common as disposable Bic lighters. As soon as you emit a flame, its met by the simultaneous flick of a competing Zippo. Way too common. Since there are so many embers cascading through the industry, Hip Hop could easily ignite a forest fire. Yet, in a world layered with candles, only few can keep ablaze. Only *some* come equipped with their own endless supply of lighter fluid, while the others lay around doing nothing, waiting for a refill.

And then there's the distinct exception.

In walks Maria IsaBelle Perez, *roaring* with the pint size presence of an *enormous* fireball. At first glance the eye discerns that she's skating on the softer side of Kermit's

Rainbow Connection

. But after being honored by her presence you come to realize the truth: she's about as cuddly as a kitten holding a ball of nitrogen.

Equipped with a lethal conversation that's backed by a wit of understanding. Smoldering with a heart for the movement, and laced with a pride for "Sota-Rico." She encompasses so many astounding abilities perfectly packaged in her unassuming petite frame. A rapper, singer,

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actress, teacher, activist, poet... to say the least, *Maria Isa* is an Artist.

Isa was born and raised in St. Paul, but has always had one foot in *MinneSota* and the other firmly planted in her roots of Puerto

Rico.

She's gained notoriety in the community for her infectious music, being both a rapper and a sultry songstress who is easily compared to artists like Lauren Hill and Alicia Keys. Her music is quite unique --a spicy blend of "Spanglish" lyricism over Hip Hop and Reggaeton rhythms. Rather than being backed by manufactured beats, whether she's in the studio or at a live performance, her music is always amplified by an authentic purity, thanks to the skill set of her talented band The Baker's Dozen.

Having had a mother who was a philanthropist, and also embodying that same mentality of humanitarianism, she took her talent for rhyme slinging and filled the mic with a potency of purpose. Wanting a voice to promote change is how she molded her journey through music. "I wanted to preach to people in a different way about social justice, but rather than behind a podium, I chose to do it under the rhythm," she said. "At one point, I was flowing about nice kicks and stuff and I still do from time to time, but it's also about what means more to you? Lexus? Who knows if the company will be around in 25 years, their company might drown. But my people, they're still going to be here, and they don't want to be in the same predicament that this economy is in right now. The mission is to have a voice *behind* the music, and a voice *in front* of the music."

Gearing up for the highly anticipated release of her second album *Street Politics*, Isa's excited to bring life to an important message and hopes it will encourage her audience to embrace well-thought change. "

Street Politic,

is a balance of the government and the people. It's a balance of the streets. You've got your block, and you've got Sesame Street going down," she said. "You've got different people, different shades, but it's the same street just different stories. People are probably waiting for a gangsta album, but this is me being a gangsta's daughter and speaking out."

In the Twin Cities, she's amassed a significant cult following, and on the East Coast and in Puerto Rico she's becoming an arc to get under. But apart from her growing bulb under the glow of her own spotlight, her life apart from the stage doesn't stray from the elements of her mic mission. She's an alumna and now a teacher at the El Arco Iris Center for the Arts, a non profit organization created to elevate the Latino community. Her everyday lifestyle is saturated with a pride for her culture, and her mission through each endeavor is continually preserving her Latino roots. "Without your culture you become a descendent. You lose what you want to represent," she says. "This is who I am. Everything I do in life flows, maybe on a different rhythm or a different influence, but it all comes together in the end."

She's all set for her CD Release Party for *Street Politics* at First Avenue's Mainroom on June 6, hosted by her good friend and frequent collaborator Muja Messiah. Soon after she'll begin preparing for an appearance at the Puerto Rican Day Festival in NYC on June 13 and 14. By

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the end of summer she'll test out her acting skills for the large screen, when she begins work in California on an upcoming independent film.

In a world full of budding flames that ride the coal of a roaring fire, the others are likely just sparks, but Maria Isa is an *eternal flame*.

To learn more about Maria Isa and her music, please visit, www.sotarico.com or www.myspace.com/mariaisalolita

To learn more about El Arco Iris Center for the Arts, please visit, www.elarcoirismn.org