

SOLE

AND THE SKYRIDER BAND

With some fairness, Sole's musical arc to this point might be described as a series of battle raps whose range of targets has gradually widened. His early work, beginning with his demo of 1992 (which included such hits as "Cops Ain't Shit") was deeply beholden to the New York rap of that era, Lord Finesse most especially. After all, his first album, self-released in 1994 when he was but sixteen, was entitled, *Mad Skillz and Unpaid Billz*. Though the plural "z's" were dropped from future releases, the forceful language and aura of overconfidence vital to classic battle rap remained. His proper, post-adolescent albums, *Bottle of Humans* (2000), *Selling Live Water* (2003), and *Live From Rome* (2005) each mixed traditional rap aesthetics with a more original and highly poetic approach with growing sophistication.

Live From Rome, the recording of which spanned a near nervous breakdown, a providential marriage, and a move to Barcelona, was a transitional record, personally searching and politically embittered. That period was epochal for Sole, particularly his alternately disturbing and exhilarating experiences touring Eastern Europe and Israel with his wife, Yasamin. They stumbled across a cache of anticon bootlegs in a tiny outdoor market in Moscow, were caught in the middle of the 2005 church and mosque-burning riots in Belgrade (while they watched the chaos on CNN, tear gas filled their hotel room), bribed crooked Serbian police for their freedom, and hosted a radio show on the Israeli Army's Radio Station, on which Sole pumped Gregory Corso's reading of his long poem, "Bomb," and Public Enemy's "Louder than a Bomb." His return to American soil after nearly two years was occasioned by his participation in Sage Francis's Knowmore.org tour of 2006. He was surprised to find that his homeland had not yet fallen to Brownshirts, and he and Yasamin decided to stay and make a home in rocky Flagstaff, Arizona.



Though Sole had spent most of his career working with celebrated producers—primarily Alias, Odd Nosdam (of cLOUDDEAD), and JEL (of subtle)—by 2005 he had for some time been looking for a working relationship with a more exclusively focused yet also uniquely talented group of musicians. His solo instrumental work, released in 2005 on Morr Music and in 2007 on anticon as mansbestfriend, and his yearlong collaboration with half of Barcelona's Tortoise-like improvisational outfit Twelve were aspects of this search. On tour with Dosh, Pedestrian, and Telephone Jim Jesus in 2005, fate landed the caravan at the tropical home of Bud Berning, an electronic musician and dub bassist then recording solo work as Skyrider. Intrigued by Skyrider's sound, Sole later returned to Orlando on a short tour of the Southeast and collaborated with Berning and two musicians who had recently joined the Skyrider fold. Not naturally attracted to music born of machines, Bud had only begun tinkering with computers while immobilized after a coma resulting from a traumatic collision in Mexico City in 2004. The two instrumentalists Berning recruited, Tennessee native John Wagner and trained ethnomusicologist William Ryan Fritch, not only fleshed out Berning's sampler and keyboard-based ideas, but also added their own distinct musical voices. As Sole and Skyrider played, sparks struck, and Sole had the quickness of mind to immediately invite Skyrider to move to Flagstaff and record an album.

Against all odds, the band accepted the offer and before long found themselves sharing a house in Flagstaff. Nearly the moment they arrived, Skyrider began playing and recording intensely at Sole's studio, set at an eight thousand foot elevation at the foot of a mountain amid a garden of collard greens, melons, and green beans. Sole promptly scrapped the ten or so songs he'd already recorded towards an album—with a formidable line-up of producers, no less—and devoted himself fully to realizing the distinct sound he'd long heard only in his own head and further sharpening his art of battle rapping the biggest of enemies: empire, ennui, the industries of distraction, and, not least of all, himself.