



**NIAGARA MOVEMENT INC.**

## Biography

The inextricability of music, spirituality, and Black culture is something that award-winning singer-songwriter-producer veteran TL Cross recognized early in his life growing up in the Jamaica section of Queens, New York. The historical communities served as hubs for jazz musicians like Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, and John Coltrane and later became an incubator of the burgeoning hip hop scene of the 1980s which produced the legendary likes of LL Cool J, Run DMC, Salt-N-Pepa and later, A Tribe Called Quest and Nas. This sample-heavy era of hip hop drew Cross to their musical origins which he would discover in the treasure trove that was his father's eclectic and sizable record collection, secured in the basement of their home.

Cross' father, an ordained minister of music who was raised in a spiritually and artistically rich family in New Orleans, grew up singing with his five siblings opening for acts like Mahalia Jackson, The Mighty Clouds of Joy and the Staple Singers before they would find great individual successes in their endeavors within the arts. He would also find himself working in night clubs, and had a strong affinity for the music of the day including Donny Hathaway, Earth, Wind and Fire and Luther Vandross. "His love for all these various different types of music gave me a philosophy that a person's not divided in their reverence and commitment to being a person of God, and being a person in love," says Cross. "He taught me in my personal life – before music – that there is no struggle between one and the other. Everything is all-inclusive. I think it's a very Marvin-Gaye-ish philosophy: 'If the spirit moves you/Let me groove you...' I think my father laid the groundwork to something that was so much deeper. It was a whole big philosophy that came about and it has worked its way into my artistry."

There is tremendous evidence of this explanation in Cross' own body of work which spans almost a quarter of a century. Cross exudes the confidence to approach his own art with a methodology that most always demonstrates the breadth of Black American music creating thoroughly conceived odes, nods and nuances juxtaposed with the continuum of a modernism that his progenitors fought for.

You can hear it in the [music] Cross produced for the 2016 BET Hip Hop Awards cypher, which featured freestyles from rap stars Jidenna, DJ Khaled, Lecrae, Big Tigger, and Remy Ma, among others. Fit for a rendering from Otis Redding, with a sonically modern variation that speaks directly to the heart of an emcee. You can feel it in the quartet scream which has become signature to Cross as it was to Archie Brownlee of the 5 Blind Boys from Mississippi, and later artists like Ray Charles Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and "Little" Michael Jackson. You can testify to it on the opening of his buzzed about *The World Soul EP, Vol. 1* abound with a preacher-style declaration of love, laced with organ and an amen corner of "Yeahs" and "Talk about its." You can experience it at one of his *Bridge to Cross* events: an interactive, live series which is part performance, part Q&A, part jam session and curated as an intersection of VH1 Storytellers, MTV Unplugged, and Stevie Wonder on Soul Train circa 1972.

Cross has worked with an impressive roster of heavy hitters like 50 Cent, Jazmine Sullivan, Musiq Soulchild, Ghostface, Usher, P. Diddy, Jadakiss, 112, Yolanda Adams, Mary J Blige, Carl Thomas, Dave Hollister, Kelly Price, and Montell Jordan, has also spent the last fifteen years satiating a burning curiosity about the historic diversification of the Black experience and -- most importantly for Cross -- the inherent shared identity within it