



Phonte, *Charity Starts at Home*

MAY 14, 2012 / WRITTEN BY RUSSELL NICHOLS

**R**

The word “charity” and the word “whore” come from the same Indo-European root.

This might explain the origin of the age-old debate about whether true altruism exists. Or it might just be an interesting “the more you know” tidbit that has no real value. Either way, you don’t have to be a philosopher to know that there’s thin line between a treat and a trick.

Rating: 4 / 5

[Read More](#)Posted by:
Zhaleh BoydShare:

By definition, charity means benevolence to the poor and helping those in need. But like God, real, enlightenment, love, democracy and classic, the word charity has been overexposed to the point of obscurity. It has, in many ways, become a diluted representation of the Ideal, to steal from Plato (who stole from Egypt). That’s unfortunate.

I believe that, as a whole, we’ve forgotten the words theologian John Wycliffe wrote in 1383: “Charity should begin at himself.” For background, Wycliffe was a forerunner of the Reformation, who translated the Bible and wanted to replace the existing hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church with poor priests. His quote has been remixed over the years by other famous writers like Sir Thomas Browne and Charles Dickens. But its latest iteration comes from Phonte, the North Carolina-bred rapper/singer of Little Brother and The Foreign Exchange fame.

His solo debut, *Charity Starts At Home*, is a working-class near classic with good-for-the-soul beats and rhymes that stick to your ribs. He’s spitting slick raps beside verbal acrobats like Elzhi and Pharoahe Monch one minute, then showcasing his vocals on songs about relationships the next. Granted, he was always the standout lyricist in his Little Brother days. On this album, he strays from the conceptual approach the trio was known for from *The Listening* (2003) and *The Minstrel Show* (2005). This time, he trades in the social satire for stark honesty about life as he knows it.

5 dollar gas, and poverty rates/ are rising much higher than your hourly rates/ So if you thinkin 'bout quittin you should probably wait/ Cuz everybody gotta do a fuckin job that they hate/ "Go and live out your dreams" that's what they tellin/ Fam in my ear all day and they yellin/ "Keep it real Te", and don't ever sellout/ But how the fuck you sell out when ain't nobody sellin?

- The Good Fight

He’s not the guy tricking out Maybachs. He’s trying to make ends meet. In this post-*Watch the Throne* era, this recession rap makes his quotables more relatable, which ironically undermines his earning potential. But that’s how the rap game’s always been. Like Linus and the Great Pumpkin, these masses keep their idols on a pedestal of myth. They like their heroes in costumes, impervious to the trials of everyday life. They’re addicted to the sugar rush of candy-coated bling-a-long fantasies. True stories about a grown man’s struggle with monogamy and mortgage payments hit too close to home. But you can tell by his track record and the album title alone that Phonte doesn’t care to sit at the popular table.

In hip hop, the very idea of charity runs counter to the genre’s pervading “get mines” posture. Not to say that rappers don’t give back. Some have started their own foundations. Some use their status to promote good causes and what-have-you. Recently, 50 Cent launched a Facebook campaign in honor of World Hunger Day, pledging to feed a million hungry children if the page receives a million ‘likes’ in a week. Some might celebrate this as a selfless act of goodwill. Others might say he’s a shrewd businessman, pimping the system. Either way, the line is thin. But with Phontigallo, you never have to guess. On *Charity*, you know good and well where his heart is.