

For Immediate Release

VICIOUS GROOVE

**POPULAR BAY AREA ENSEMBLE
CONQUERS A ‘VICIOUS NATION’
WITH AN INFECTIOUS HYBRID VIBE
MIXING OLD SCHOOL R&B FUNK,
JAZZ AND HIP-HOP**

**Vicious Groove’s Keyboardist And Producer
Wil “Roc” Griffin Has Produced Projects
For Jazz Legend Herbie Hancock and Blues Great
John Lee Hooker, Jr. and Co-Produced Kent
Entertainment Labelmates Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E
In the 90’s with Rick James**

Make no mistake, it’s time to get creative and turn vicious on that tired music industry wisdom that tells bands to pick a single genre and limit their vibe to it.

It’s going to be easier with **Vicious Groove** on the case. Breaking all conventional boundaries as they usher in the bright and funkified future of urban music, the popular Bay Area based ensemble has been winning over multiple generations of fans since 2004 with their winning combination of old school R&B/funk and cool jazz improvisations with a contemporary hip-hop twist.

Beyond the colorful, hard hitting blend of all these textures on the 17 tracks of their long awaited debut **Vicious Nation** on **Kent Records**, Vicious Groove has both history and geography on their side.

Critics who have been blown away by their high energy shows at Uncle Frank’s in Mountain View, The Boom Boom Room and Rasella’s in San Francisco and Club Max at the San Jose Doubletree Hotel—or at the Juneteenth Festival in San Jose or Mountain View Cultural Fest—don’t have to reach very far for favorable comparisons. Vicious Groove is simply carrying on and forging their own path through the long and proud soul traditions of legendary Bay Area groups that conquered the world back in the day: **Sly and The Family Stone**, **Tower of Power** and **Graham Central Station**.

A few notable raves: **Alex Andreas**, owner of the Boom Boom Room, calls them “one of our favorite bands!” Famed percussionist **Bill Summers** of **Bill Summers and Summer’s Heat** enjoys Vicious Groove’s “seriously intense rhythms,” while none other than legendary, multiple Grammy winning keyboardist **Herbie Hancock** seriously understates the matter when he calls VG keyboardist and producer **Will “Roc” Griffin** “a talented musician.”

Griffin first hooked up with Herbie when he co-wrote seven tracks and did sampling, loops and rhythm arrangements on the keyboardist’s 1995 hip-hop/jazz excursion **Dis Is Da Drum**. When Griffin hired his longtime friend and bass player **Frank Thibeaux** (aka **Tebo**) to play on this project, the two set the stage for the hybrid vibe that eventually led them to form Vicious Groove with guitarist **A.B. Taylor** (who once played with **Frank Zappa**) and young

hip-hop drummer and rapper **Gin** (who also has a gospel background) in 2004. For a time, the group largely played instrumentals, but they later tapped vocalist **Jayo** to be their lead singer. Jayo appears on Vicious Nation but has since left the band; their current frontperson **Pamela Hawkins** has been a well known artist in the Bay Area for years.

Griffin first met **Morey Alexander**, the “Godfather of Rap” and head of the Las Vegas based **Kent Entertainment** and **First Kut Records**, when he worked with renowned funkateer **Rick James** in producing Alexander’s group the **Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E** in the early 90s. Griffin’s producing credits also include work with veteran blues scion **John Lee Hooker, Jr.**, including his new release [All Odds Against Me](#).

“Tebo and I have been playing in various capacities together for over 30 years,” says Griffin, “so when I decided in 2004 to start Vicious Groove, I immediately asked him to join and we started auditioning Bay Area musicians. He and I have always been funky together, and there’s almost like this ESP connection between us where we know what the next note the other is going to play without words, just by a simple gesture. I had formal jazz training as a pianist so that element was bound to emerge, but our original concept was for a funk/R&B ensemble with a hip hop flavor. We got that when our youngest member Gin joined, and his modern sensibilities perfectly complemented the funk and old school R&B that Tebo and I brought to the table. We got our name after being on the circuit for a while when fans kept telling us that our music was so hard and vicious but also sensual and cool. We love the balance as much as our audiences do.”

The keyboardist’s goal with [Vicious Nation](#) was to bring Vicious Groove’s live musicians into the studio and keep the energy of the concerts flowing, albeit within a pop song structure. “We decided to take our talents and create three or four minute recordings of dance/funk and a little jazz so that people who haven’t seen or heard us perform live can get into what we do,” says Griffin, who wrote 13 of the tracks. “There’s a lot of instrumentation and strong soloing, and it occurs to us that there really is very little of that flavor in urban music today, so we’re glad to bring it back. The final track ‘Comin Home’ is slightly extended, but the majority are right in the radio friendly pocket. We’re excited about creating something really fascinating here which is a true melting pot of all of the genres we are steeped in.”

Griffin and Alexander have been discussing the promotion of the hypnotic slo-jam “**Oakland**” as a single so as to identify Vicious Nation’s vibe while also branding them a product of the famous Bay Area funk scene. The anthemic track is about some of the stereotypes of the city as a place where drugs are rampant, hoping that this one particular lady is not smoking anything. The fact that there’s Spanish spoken in the song leads to a discussion of the cool and clever, jazzy rap tune “**I Need To Learn Some Spanish**,” which the band sees as a potential urban radio monster. Featuring **Mr. E**, it’s a tribute to Mexican American hip-hopper **Frost** and other notable Latino rappers that speaks the raw language of the streets. Frost was the first rapper Griffin worked with back in the day under the guidance of Alexander.

Another key track is the Fender Rhodes laced old school meets rap discussion of a “**Paypa Chase**” (i.e. the quest for money that leads to a gambling addiction. And the all-instrumental “**Jizznazz**,” which features guest saxophonist **Garry Jones**, is what happens when funksters and hip-hoppers get a hold of a straight ahead jazz groove. Jones is also on the soulful ballad “**How Can I Change Your Mind**.”

The ongoing success of Vicious Groove leads Griffin at times to reflect upon his journey through several generations of urban music. He moved to L.A. from the Bay Area in the early 80s and was part of the funk cover band **Precision** from 1981-88 before leaving to join the hip-hop/funk outfit **Uzi Brothers** in the early 90s.

“The coolest thing now is working with the guys in Vicious Groove and being able to draw from my lifetime of influences to make fresh new sounds and grooves,” he says. “All of these older bands continue to touch my style of playing and I love having the opportunity to release all of these inspirations through my music and see the way people react. We all love being out there onstage, enjoying the way our songs are connecting with everyone. We had the discipline in the studio to create Vicious Nation, but we’re free spirits at heart. We can play a song 30 times, and each time it will sound a little different. All of this flows from the great chemistry we have. We treat each other not only as creative colleagues, but as family.”