

Felipe Coronel's Tech Revolution

The NYC rapper on his new documentary and his visit to Afghanistan

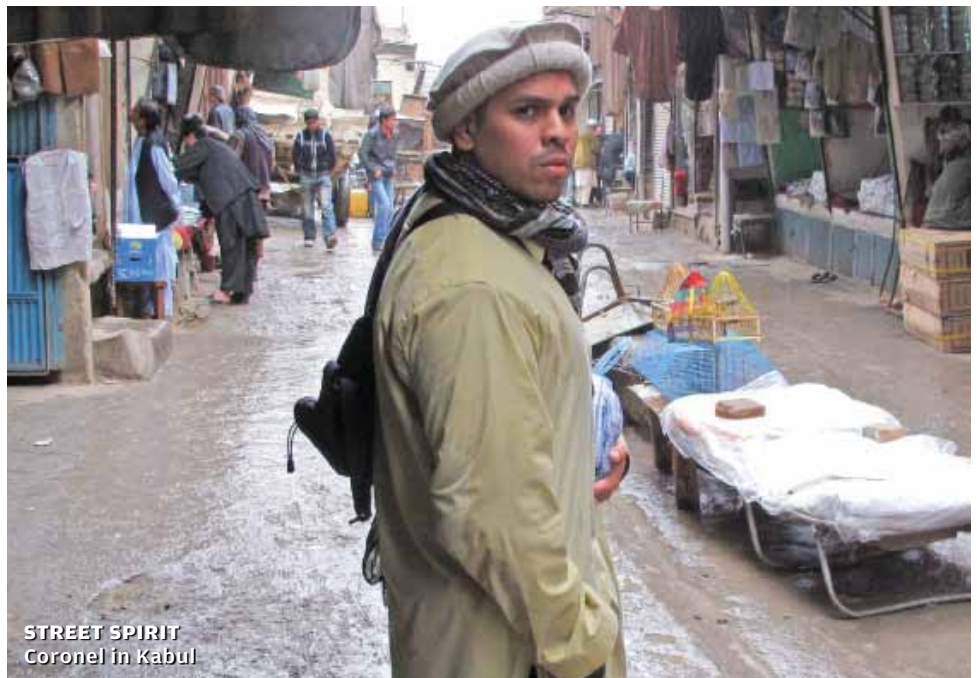
By Jake Hanrahan

FELIPE ANDRES CORONEL, better known as Immortal Technique (or Tech to his fans), is in the back of a New York cab, animated at the prospect of the full release (in July) of the documentary *The (R)evolution of Immortal Technique*. The film – 10 years in the making – tells the story of the rapper's rise from the streets of Harlem to touring the world, selling (by his reckoning) over 200,000 records and – in 2008 – helping to build an orphanage in Kabul. He did all this without signing to a major label, not wanting to dilute his tales of war, civil unrest, institutional racism and political conspiracy.

"I wanted people to know that this isn't something that just happened. It wasn't like, 'OK I didn't sign with a major label and it all worked out perfect.' No. It was a very long process, just like revolution is – it's not something to be romanticized. [The film's] going to be eye-opening."

Born in Peru, but raised in New York, Coronel wrote much of his early material in state prison, having been convicted for a string of minor assault charges as a teenager. He was paroled after a year and was allowed to stay at his father's house, on the condition that he went to college. He studied political science at Baruch College, but after graduation he found it hard to get a job. So Coronel began to sell his own mixtapes on the street and to compete in freestyle battles around the city, where he soon established himself as one of the sharpest rappers on the scene, blending free-flowing metaphors and complex subject matter.

The 34-year-old's reputation as a socially conscious rapper is a product not only of his understanding of the underground and the underprivileged, but also his pursuit of philanthropy. *The (R)evolu-*



STREET SPIRIT
Coronel in Kabul

tion of Immortal Technique sees him spending two weeks in Afghanistan to help Omeid International construct the Amin Institute, which serves as a school, medical facility and orphanage for kids whose parents were killed in the war. (Currently, the institute is home to around 20 kids.) Prior to his trip, Coronel held several benefit concerts and donated all profits to the cause.

cated issues greater candidates for success."

Never one to shy away from controversy, Coronel has been an outspoken opponent of the 'War on Terror' from the outset. Songs such as "Bin Laden" – which features Eminem and Mos Def – affirm his controversial views. "They funded Al Qaeda and now they blame the Muslim religion/Even though Bin Laden was a CIA tactician," he spits.

"The Afghan people liked the fact that I wasn't there to destroy anything; I didn't roll through their country in a tank."

"It seems like something incredibly difficult to accomplish – going to Afghanistan, staying alive and finding the supplies and the things you need," he says. "But once we'd made the blueprints for everything, it was very clear that there was no turning back for me. It was a big part of my experience in growing as a man and it really gave me a sense of helping with a greater cause. If people can be successful in a place that has such harsh living conditions, then that should make [those of us who live] in a place that doesn't have all those compli-

The rapper's long-awaited fifth album *The Middle Passage*, due out in July, is, he says "not exactly a continuation of *Revolutionary Volume 2* [his second album], but it's definitely a push back to that feel. There's so many different concepts that I wanted to fit in. The more angles and diversity there is in the conceptuality and the sound, the better it makes the record. People will understand that I've not only evolved lyrically, but also in the production style that I use."

His time in Afghanistan wasn't just another case of a

musician pledging allegiance to a cause to score a few extra column inches. Coronel actually got his hands dirty – hammering nails, lifting blocks and putting in hours of hard labor out in Kabul. He also spent time living with the locals and learning about their country.

"The Afghan people were some of the most gracious hosts that I've ever had in my life," he says. "They were very kind and respectful. More than anything they had a lot of questions for me about the perception of their country in the United States. They liked the fact that I wasn't there to destroy anything – I didn't roll through their country in a tank."

"[In Afghanistan], you got people who fought against the Russians, you have the Mujahideen, you got people who fought in the jungles, and their entire purpose was to try and find freedom," he continues. "But can you find freedom without violence? You don't always have to destroy everything in order to try and build something new. I think there's a difference between trying to reform a system and having a revolution against it. The widespread chaos is what the people organizing this system count on us being afraid of." 27