

# THE BAKA BOYZ

BY HASSAHN LIGGINS



*The dynamic duo who radio and the music industry have come to be know as The World-Famous Baka Boyz are the real-life brothers from Bakersfield, CA. Nick and Eric Vidal have more than twenty years in the game. They used their Yin and Yang chemistry to create a bond that resonated with listeners in the various markets they have worked in and they have dominated the airwaves in the process.*

*Eric and Nick want to continue innovating, creating unmatched content, cultivating new talent, breaking records, and elevating the culture. From their humble beginnings to their big break at Power 106 in LA, mastering the art of the Miami airwaves and beyond, to returning to LA, where they are currently killing the weekends at KDAY, the Baka Boyz are more than just legends—they are considered radio royalty. We had a chance to catch up with them to talk about everything from their syndicated radio show to them being music producers and the potential return to hosting mornings.*

**Hassahn:** I know you guys are DJs first, then hosts but how do you feel about the state of radio from your start in the industry?

**Eric:** Personally, for me, I think there's a lack of talent out there. There are not a lot of great personalities. Nobody is pushing the envelope, pushing the needle, bringing up new bits. Nothing is

new under the sun, but there's always a way to flip anything.

You can always make it new, like, for instance, the roll call. When we brought the roll call to LA, it was originally in St. Louis. Somebody else did it and we just made it better than what he did. We made it more prominent. We gave it mass appeal because obviously, we were on Power

106, one of the biggest stations in LA, and when we came with that, that shit reset everything. It reset the whole market—we were beating the night show that was killing everybody with Love Line and Poor Man.

I just feel like nobody is pushing that envelope and being creative, thinking outside of the box, but that's something we've always done. We've never followed

anybody else. We've always blazed our own trail and thought of different ways to do things. Like live mixing back in the day, there was no live mixing on LA radio when we first got that gig. It was all pre-recorded. Every other DJ that played on Power pre-recorded their mix to a reel, but we were doing it live. That real raw edge gave us an advantage.

**Nick:** To answer your question from my side, I'll say radio has changed over the last twenty years. It's become more homogenized and more streamlined, and there hasn't been creative advancement since Poor Man, since the Baka Boyz, since Mancow [Muller]. Think about the great legendary radio DJs: the Dick Clarks, The Wolfman Jacks. Everybody I named had their own style, sound, vibe, and energy. Nobody stepped on anybody's toes because everybody was original; that started going away a little over twenty years ago. They stopped hiring new talent, then stopped teaching talent how to do radio and how to be great at radio.

**Eric:** Yeah, no talent pool.

**Hassahn:** **Something you said kind of resonated with me. You said that nobody's original or creative, and since you guys are hip-hop aficionados too, do you also feel the same way about mainstream hip hop? Like, back in the 90s—which everybody calls the golden era, right?—you had like Busta, A Tribe Called Quest, Diddy, Wu-Tang, and all of them are from New York, but all of them were different. But now, I feel like New York dudes sound like dudes from Atlanta, Atlanta dudes sound like—does that make sense, what I'm saying? I know there are a lot of original artists out there, but as far as mainstream, do you feel like artists are kind of mimicking radio with the lack of creativity?**

**Eric:** I'll let Nick take this one.

**Nick:** I think radio music, the record industry, and the artistry are all alike. It's kind of like, follow the guy with the hottest record, all right? You brought up a few names, so I'll talk about producers

because things changed around 2000/2001. Let's say The Neptunes have a big record with Usher, or that Lil John has a big record with Usher, so all the A&Rs, all of the rappers, and all the other extras around the world will want that same, big record that is hitting right now. So, they'll all run to Lil John—whoever is the hottest guy at the time with the biggest records. All the A&Rs [artists and repitioire] were lazy as fuck (back then), and they say, "Hey, I'll grab that record that sounds like that record." What you have is a follow the leader thing, and it never ends.

You go in phases, you know: Neptunes had their phase, Timberland had his phase, Lil John had his phase. It eventually runs out, but then here comes Travis Scott using the voice box—which has been overused over the years and started with T-Pain—and then you have the anti-voice box stuff ...

**Eric:** Auto-Tune, Nick.

**Nick:** Auto-tune. Yeah, that's what I mean. That's why I felt like there's been lazy A&Rs.

**Eric:** To Nick's point, there's no artist development. As he said, they're lazy. They want to go on TikTok or YouTube. If you have a dance and a video with it, or there's a challenge attached to it, then they're like, "Oh, this is gonna be the hottest record," you know what I mean? So that's kind of what they do now.

**Hassahn:** **Is it more challenging to be creative when preparing for a syndicated show versus a local show?**

**Nick:** It's difficult for both. We've been doing weekend programming for twenty years now and we've created our lane. We stayed in that lane, which was music-driven, PPM-friendly programming. So, now that we're back, we have to consider who our audience is and how we are going to engage them. It's difficult because we've got to be thoughtful on so many different platforms and in so many ways.

**Eric:** We'll have different things that we could talk about—there was a time when

we were talking about voices in general. There was research done that people with deeper voices are more outgoing and more into casual sex.

**Nick:** Sexually-driven.

**Eric:** We started getting people calling in, like, "Yeah, I have a deep voice. I'm into casual sex." We have to find those topics that could resonate without having a region or boundary that people become involved in that can massively touch everybody.

As far as the content is, as long as you can get people involved, the rest follows. Good content is good content, good radio is good radio, great radio is great radio, and I feel like that's what's missing from radio in general. People still remember everything we did, which is a testament to who we are and what we bring to the table.

For people to remember you after that many years—that's like placing a great song that puts you back in that moment at that time—that's nostalgia, and there's nothing more powerful than nostalgia to me.

**Hassahn:** **I agree entirely. I remember you being on air, and I get to LA all the time, so I hear what you guys do. You guys have been very instrumental in the careers of Big Boy, DJ E-Man, etc., and several others in the radio industry. When you guys were first coming in, who groomed you? Who influenced you? Who made you say, "You know what? I can do this."**

**Eric:** Nobody. We wanted to emulate KDAY, so we would listen to the high-energy shows, and the Mix Master show, Greg Mack, all that stuff, and we would want to do what they were doing. In our city, Tony G and Julio G were the ones who influenced us, but they weren't personalities on the air. They were personalities with their hands.

What they did influenced us so much. We would listen on our rooftop with a big ass Fisher-Price stereo, with an antenna connected to it, to listen at two or three in the morning in Bakersfield; we could

get the station because it was from LA on AM, but AM would travel at night. So we would listen and record to emulate what they did, how they scratched, what records they played. We would then take that tape to LA record stores a couple of weeks later and say, "We need this record," So, they molded us.

And on the DJ side . . . the personality came from us having to just cut our teeth. We wanted to do a mix show, and our dad knew the owner of a radio station in Bakersfield, KLYD, owned by the late Alex Klein, And so our dad told Alex, "Hey, my sons want to do a show on your station." And Alex said, "Sure. No problem. That's \$75 a week."

So, we had to pay to be on the radio. We had to pay to go up in there, and this station was Classic Rock during the week. They were playing Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, Queen, Foreigner, all kinds of stuff like that, and then on Friday and Saturday nights; you got two little kids who've never done radio, who never knew what to say. I think our favorite word was "Urr" back then. Back then, Nick was doing most of the talking because I wouldn't talk, but now I won't shut up.

**Nick:** It elevated the DJ culture and showed the rest of the DJs what was possible, and it made everybody step their game up and sharpen their tools. But, there's a lot of people who did not take advantage of the pandemic. Eric V was one of them. My brother, who took full advantage of my Twitch channel—which we started like in 2018—built it up to like 5,000 followers over the last year, so it's hard to get DJs to raise the bar of what they're capable of doing, or what they think is necessary to do to maintain your identity throughout the entire pandemic.

**Hassahn:** Back in the day, you used to do live mixing, but how has being a DJ specifically aided in your radio career? Are there things where you could do things that somebody who's not a radio personality couldn't?

**Nick:** I think it's helped us immensely. We're so close to the music, the artistry of the music, and the production of the

music. As DJs, we need to know the ins and outs of every record that we're playing when we're playing it, so we have to be intimately involved in knowing that music, and that's a relationship a lot of radio personalities might not have. Like, about Hurby "Luv Bug" Azor, who produced Push It by Salt-n-Pepa in 1985, using the drum machine. Now, these are the kind of things that we have intimate knowledge of because as DJs, we wanted to know—when we bought that record—who produced this record? What label is it on? What A&R person signed this record? Who's involved in this entire project? That's the kind of knowledge that has helped us. Being able to talk about these records so intimately and knowledgeably is something that other people just probably might not get.

**Eric:** Little information, little tidbits. When we would get serviced from the record pools, there was one guy that would master records, and he would sign the record on the wax. It was Herb something . . . I forgot his name, but it seemed like whatever he signed was the dopest record for some reason. We would look at those things, like the little tidbits that nobody else would pick up on; as DJs, you have to know what's poppin', what's hot, what new artist is hot, and you have to stay up with what's going on, and we've continued to do that because we have two current mix shows that run on current radio stations, CHR, Rhythmic, Urban, and Pop. We have to know the new Justin Bieber, the new "Baby," the new "Lil" whoever, you know what I mean? Whatever is out there, we have to be up on what's going on.

**Hassahn:** Right. And so I was talking to a friend of mine from LA right before I got on with you guys, and I told them, "I gotta go to interview the Baka Boyz," and the first thing out of his mouth was, "Pistol Grip Pump!" That's one of the most legendary songs you guys produced, so I have to ask: did you just go into producing because that was a natural progression from DJing? Or did you feel it was important to diversify your portfolio, especially in radio?

**Nick:** We were forced to produce records because they would not let us on the radio in Bakersfield. We were on that one station for the summer of 1988 in Bakersfield, and they rated for the first time, and I don't know how many years, just with that one little summer of the Baka Boyz being on the air, eventually the guy, he changed formats, so we got kicked off the show, or off the station, and we were searching for another radio station. We did find one but it wasn't the same energy. Eric started going to work and we were asking Tony G, who became a friend of ours, "How do we get into producing music?" We saw that Tony was starting to put out production pieces and works, and we used to play his music, so we're like, "Wow, how'd you do that?"

And he told us, "There's one drum machine you have to get. It's called the SP 1200." Eric went to work, saved every check for the entire summer, and eventually saved enough money to go to Los Angeles. We purchased that drum machine because we were trying to get into Bakersfield's big FM radio stations, but they refused us. We were 16/17-year-old Mexican kids with very little radio knowledge and we did not have the licenses they required, but regardless, they just turned us down.

**Eric:** Back then, if you didn't go to school to be a radio broadcaster, you couldn't be a radio broadcaster.

**Nick:** Me and Eric are like this: if we want something, we will find a way to get it, no matter what direction we need to go. We said to ourselves, "Look, if they don't want to let us play music on the radio, we will make music, and they will have to play our records on the radio."

We had already kind of like said, "Fuck radio. We're just going to produce records." We started producing records, and we started going back and forth to Los Angeles, working with Tony G, Julio, Kid Frost, Mellow Man Ace, Lighter Shade of Brown, and eventually growing into working with The Pharcyde and so on.

That's where Pistol Grip Pump comes in, around '93. Between 1990 and 1993, when we were just heavily focused on producing records, I started working with Lighter Shade of Brown by DJing for them. I had a couple of clubs, a couple of dates, and one of those dates was back in Bakersfield, so we wound up performing in Bakersfield.

My dad once again introduced himself to the program director, Steve Wall, at that time at KKXX and me and Eric. We already said goodbye to radio when I was on tour with Lighter Shade of Brown—radio just wasn't in the picture.

My dad said, "These are my sons. They want to be on the radio," and Steve gave Eric a business card and said, "Call me on Monday," so we did, and he offered us a weekend gig at KKXX to do the Saturday night mix show, which we did. We got into producing music to answer your question because radio rejected us, and we wanted to get on the radio regardless, even if it wasn't directly on the radio station.

**Hassahn: Do you have a particular market that you love the most?**

**Nick:** Every market has its own special time, and every market was different for different reasons. Power 106 was the very beginning; it was so exciting for us. We were young—I turned 21 on the morning show at Power 106—and with no college, no schooling, and nothing like that, it was super exciting for Power to be our first big job.

But there was another step in our career that we wouldn't have been able to grow into if we were still in Los Angeles, which was the syndication, so that was special. Also, being in the Bay Area at a legendary station like KMEL gave us even more credibility because we went from Los Angeles, which is predominantly Latino and successful, and then we went to a predominantly Black market; KMEL was straight-up urban, and we won there as well, so that was satisfying for us.

Going to Miami was next in 2003, which was another challenge because now we

were moving across the country, and, if you've been in hip hop for a while, there's this whole East Coast vs. West Coast, "We don't play West Coast music, and they don't play East." It was that whole time and era where E40 never got played in Miami, for instance.

So when we would go across the country, the whole thing was like, "Okay, well, they're not Cuban or Puerto Rican. They're Mexican. What are they going to do over here?" In the end, we broke that barrier as well, and we were very successful in Miami. So every market had a very special meaning to us for different reasons, and I can't say I like one over the other. Every market had very unique experiences that helped guide us and bring us to the professionals that we are today ...

**Eric:** ... and mold us. I would probably have to say the most fun market for me was Miami. Do I love LA? Yes, absolutely. This is home, but Miami was like a second home for me. It was just wild; we did so much crazy shit on the radio out there. You know we did the April Fool's joke with the chicken breasts? "Free chicken breasts for the first 103 women that showed up to the station," we said and they lined up outside.

We brought them into a room and had a fake doctor say, "This is Dr. Purdue, blah, blah, blah," and all the stuff like that and we had him read out loud, "Hey you're entitled to a pair of free chicken breasts," and the women went nuts and started throwing chicken everywhere. The cops came. That was awesome.

They ushered us out of there like, "You guys gotta get out of here. Fuck you, Baka Boyz, you motherfuckers. I knew this was a joke the whole time." It was fun, man, it was really fun. We did so much crazy stuff on The Beat 103.5—shout out to Steve Smith for bringing us in and trusting us.

The way I look at it is like, we moved across the country and we're not Cuban, but I think if you're good at whatever you do, nobody makes an issue of your age, of your ethnicity, or of what you do.

What matters is what comes out of the speakers and the connection that you make with that listener. There are still people that love us out there in Miami. They know what we did. I mean, we used to do this crazy song—Nick made up the song about the weather because Miami has the weirdest weather system ever.

One day, it's raining on one side of the street but on the other side, it's sunny. It's just some weird shit. So, I would read the weather and it'd be like 70 degrees and a chance of isolated thunderstorms, so one day Nick puts on this booty bass, Miami up-tempo music, and we started singing "Isolated thunderstorms, isolated thunderstorms," over that shit, so then people would start calling us and be like, "Man, I'm looking outside my window, It looks like isolated thunderstorms," you know, they wanted us to sing the song. It would get people hyped. The weirdest things would resonate with people: from seeing our Sanford and Son intro, to the isolated thunderstorms, to the roll call, to drop bombs on your mom's, all these things have hit people in different ways. It's awesome which is what stays with me.

**Hassahn: So how would you describe how each of you bring the most to the table?**

**Eric:** Nick's energy is infectious. Of the two of us when we're on the air, he's the leader, like, "We're doing this." And he starts it off and his energy spreads to me so I can bring what I bring to the table. But I think his chemistry with me is that we're brothers, are there any other duo's that are brothers? Are the Babalu Bad Boyz brothers, Nick?

**Nick:** They're twins. Rich and Ray are twins.

**Eric:** Yeah, they're twins. I just feel like our energy is the Yin and Yang. He's positive and uplifting, and I'm on the monkey wrench. There would be no Baka Boyz without Nick, 100%. I can do what I can on my own, but it's not the same. When we're together, it's like Voltron, like two different pieces combining.

**Hassahn: I used to love Voltron by the way. But anyway, Nick, same question to you, about Eric.**

**Nick:** Eric is a very special individual. His mind and his thought process are . . . I can't even come up with some of the things he says off the top of his head. Like Eric said, when we're combined, we're just going back and forth and working on each other, because I'm quick-witted and he's quick-witted.

But I'm quick-witted in a more positive way, trying to put a positive spin on things, and Eric is the one who's going to say some stuff that you just can't believe he said out loud. And I'm like, "You cannot say that! You cannot do that! It's not acceptable."

We're just constantly going back and forth on the good cop, bad cop thing, so it works well. As far as the music is concerned, I think his mastery is his knowledge in selecting music and his love for music and he's the smartest DJ that I know with the way he plays his music. So, his music selection, his quick-wittedness, and his evilness—there are three different aspects.

**Eric:** I lean to the dark side, bro.

**Hassahn: Nick, I saw in an interview that you'll go to some of those small-town artists' shows with like three people to look for new talent. Is that still the same?**

**Nick:** Yeah. I'm kind of a nerd like that. I like to be first to the party so I can tell everybody how dope it was and let them know what they're missing. I think I'm special like that. I can see things like four or five years in advance and tell that this person or this sound is going to be something special, and so I take it upon myself.

My job as a DJ is to be groundbreaking; to be the first one to say, "Hey, man, Nick V broke this artist, or Nick V found this artist, or this producer, this writer, this rapper, this singer, this guitar player, this amazing drum player." This talent needs to be heard, needs to be seen, and anyway I can bring it into my world, I will

do my best to do so, and Eric V doesn't see it sometimes and he's like, "I don't know bro, I don't know."

**Hassahn: Eric, give me an example of somebody Nick brought to you and you were like "GTFOH."**

**Eric:** I never say get the fuck out of here. I've learned to trust his ear because he's so advanced when it comes to music. Like Nick said, I don't say I love music. I love listening to it and I love where it takes you, but I don't listen to music daily. I love silence.

So, when I'm playing video games or driving in my car, it's silent. Music is a distraction for me, so that's why I don't listen to it. But for instance, Nick told me about The Weeknd, maybe eight years ago now? And when Nick believes, he is a pit bull; he will not let go. He will tell everybody. He'll go to a homeless person. "Have you heard The Weeknd?" Shit like that, you know? He will sell it to everybody—if you ain't got it on your phone, he'll get on your phone and buy it for you. That's how far he goes.

And he told me about Jhene Aiko and Anderson .Paak. He knows his shit. I'm the opposite of him—I call it the Ignormeter—I just go with shit that's kind of ignorant, that will sometimes work on the hip hop side. I know when a record is not all there, obviously, and I know what's gonna work, but Nick's passion is bar none about everything. He's always looking for new artists to discover and new artists to share and his passion is really about that shit.

**Hassahn: If we were throwing a party for the Baka Boyz to celebrate your success, who would you pick to DJ your party?**

**Nick:** Okay, I'm gonna go with DJ Melo-D from the Beat Junkies, Mr. Choc from the Beat Junkies, and J Rocc from the Beat Junkies. There are three right there. I would love to see them at my party, DJing it out.

**Eric:** Tony G, man, we got to get Tony in there. Mr. Choc for sure; did you know we grew up with him in Bakersfield? His

devotion and love for the art of DJing surpassed what he was when we first knew him at Bakersfield. He is a teacher, he is a student, he's gone leaps and bounds that I didn't know he could go to, and he's still dope as hell. So, I would say Tony, Julio and probably Melo-D for me.

**Hassahn: What's next for you guys? What do you want to accomplish with this radio show?**

**Eric:** We want to bring great radio back to radio. We want to bring great personality and excitement to the radio stations that we're on. We've been asked multiple times to get back into the Monday through Friday business from a lot of programmers and a lot of great friends.

The knowledge that we've acquired from the program directors that we had, from Rick Cummings to Steve Smith, and Michael Martin . . . we've taken everything from everywhere that we can, to make us who we are today, and that goes for DJing as well.

The programming that Nick talks about—as far as my selection, I think about every record that I play and why I'm gonna play that record—that skill is all about what we've acquired over all the years, and I want to be able to bring that excitement back to the radio.

**Hassahn: What about you, Nick?**

**Nick:** This is a tough one for me, brother. I've had my love affair, and my not-so-love affair, with radio over the years, and more than anything, that's because of a lack of movement and a lack of being able to see and apply the knowledge of technology that is available to us and happening all around us.

That's made me feel like radio probably isn't the next best thing for me as in my career, honestly. What I want to do is recreate radio. I want to recreate the magic that radio is by utilizing all of the different platforms and capabilities that we have and getting the audience back on the air.

The audience needs to be a bigger part of what their radio station sounds like. Since the very beginning, it's been a one-way street with radio; that's why the roll call and those interactive things that we brought were so important. I think that's necessary now—today more than anything, people are not as excited about radio.

We want to make people excited about turning on their favorite home radio station and listening to their favorite on-air jocks who are bringing good energy and positivity and talking to you, listening to you, and utilizing this powerful medium called music to bring the community together.

**Hassahn: Average, everyday people that I know prefer to go to outlets like Spotify, Tidal, Apple, and iTunes. Speaking of that, do you feel like the streaming platforms make it difficult for radio to be as successful as it used to be?**

**Eric:** There are more options now, so you don't have to listen to that radio station anymore to hear your song. You can make your playlist and put what you want on there. I feel like radio is going through what the record labels went through when they didn't adapt to digital platforms. Radio has not adapted.

It's not interactive. We do radio here and there, but it's not what it used to be. People are visual now. They want to be involved in stuff and you have to make them feel like they are a part of it by making it more interactive. You have to look at what's out there and what people are using.

People are listening on apps but if I go listen to a radio station on an app, that's all I can do there—listen. What if I want to call them from that app? I can't? What if I want to video chat with them from that app? I can't? That's like saying, "You can come to the club, but you can only watch from the outside." For radio, there needs to be more interaction between the audience and the station so that listeners can become a part of the show.

Everybody likes when they're a part of something.

**Nick:** If you're a regular person out there who loves music and you have your Spotify or Tidal, you get to be creative with what you listen to; you become the creator of your own radio station. If you want to listen to Biggie Smalls and then you want it to go to a country record, guess what? You can. You can't do that with radio; it's one thing, one style of music, one sound, and it's the same twenty records for three months. How is that going to win over a platform where you can dictate what you want to hear next with nobody talking to you and nobody selling you anything on the air? It's a tall order like we're trying to turn around the Titanic here.

**Hassahn: We're making a soundtrack to the Baka Boyz life that talks about your legacy—whether it's an industry, your personal life, or whatever you want it to be—and you guys get to pick the artists and the producers of the soundtrack. Who do you pick?**

**Nick:** That's beautiful. That's a great question.

**Eric:** This is a Nick V question all the way. I will trust his judgment, his ear, and his knowledge to put together the best soundtrack for us.

**Nick:** We're gonna have to start with the producers. They're the ones who are going to bring the blank slate for the artists to do their art on, so Quincy Jones will be a producer on the album. We would call in Dr. Dre, just to be a part of it and Marley Marl. I think, between those three producers, we should be able to get a nice tapestry of sound and collect it for the Baka Boyz.

As far as writers are concerned, that one's a tough one. I want to be as smart about the writers. If we could call in Marvin Gaye, that'd be awesome. Biggie Smalls, I would love to bring him in. People who can paint pictures with their words like Ice Cube. I would love to get

a voice like Michael Jackson and Prince involved Vocally. Maybe the roots can do the instrumentation and Just Blaze can direct them.

**Hassahn: Do you want to promote anything else that you are doing?**

**Eric:** Oursocials—Instagram and everything is @thebakaboyz, T.H.E.B.A.K.A.B.O.Y.Z. Also on Twitch, like Nick said, we're on a road to 5,000 followers. I stream there and we're going to be streaming the show that we're doing for Bounce.

You're going to see what we do and how we do our show, like a behind-the-scenes live. So every day, Monday through Friday, we will be doing our show for Bounce on Twitch, and you're gonna see the uncut, raw, in-between. Whether we're talking about what we're gonna do next or we're arguing about something, you're gonna see it all, so the curtain will be unveiled.

I do a lot of live mixing on Twitch, as well. Usually, Wednesdays and Thursdays I stream and I'll play a lot of that stuff that you love. I'll play Michael and Prince then I'll go into my R&B tangent. The channel is all over the place and that's the beauty of that platform.

**Hassahn: It's been such a pleasure to talk to you today. Thank you for rocking with me. I wish you all continued success and thanks for what y'all do for the culture.**

**Eric:** No doubt, man. If we ever get to Chicago, we've got to hit you up and you got to take us to some spots.

**Hassahn: I got you, bro. We got some great food in Chicago. And, I'm gonna challenge you on one thing, Eric. You said the weather in Miami is crazy shit? It ain't got nothing on Chicago. Literally in one day, I've seen it sleet, snow, have sunshine, and then be warm enough to wear shorts, later that day. It happened in 1994 and I'll never forget it.**

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