



Artist Spotlight: ESG

Description



ESG (Emerald Sapphire Gold) are a band that defy definition. Drawing influences from the **latin rhythms** that surrounded them growing up in the **South Bronx** and the likes of **James Brown**, the group played venues devoted to **punk, disco** and everything in-between.

The band was founded in 1979 by the **Scroggins** sisters **Renee** (vocals), **Valerie** (drums), **Deborah** (bass) and **Marie** (congas, vocals), who learnt to play when their mother bought them musical instruments to keep them off the streets and out of mischief. She couldn't afford to pay for lessons so the girls taught themselves and started entering talent competitions, where they would eventually meet their first manager Ed Bahlman of **99 Records**.

We licensed ESG's **My Love For You** for [Volkswagen's T-Cross campaign](#), their natural instinct for rhythm and groove making them the perfect fit for the spot's playfulness and embrace of versatility.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX7rihMkUJI>

Their best known track, **UFO**, has been sampled by the likes of **TLC**, **Public Enemy**, **Nas** and countless more, much to ESG's chagrin. Not only were almost all of the samples unlicensed, but the group objected to the often misogynistic lyrical content that their music was being used to support.

As Renee Scroggins discussed in an interview with [The Quietus](#), "don't these guys realise that women wrote this music? And yet you're calling every woman a bitch and a whore and treating them like garbage. And they're using my music to write their beats. That's what I don't like. Because I do not support what they're saying. We don't find out about it until after the fact, and then they want to fight you about your music, and it's like, ok, you've already insulted me once and now you're insulting me again. I don't appreciate it."

The track itself made its way onto their first EP by chance. When recording with **Factory Records** producer **Martin Hannett** in Manchester there were 3 minutes left on the tape so **UFO** was tagged onto the end of the session to fill the space.

ESG are renowned for their exhilarating live shows, which in more recent years have included Valerie and Renee's children in the lineup, making it a truly family affair. Their live appearances have become rarer, with the group partaking in one-off shows rather than extensive tours, however their energy is still undeniable after 40 years of performing as ESG.

The band's love of "take it to the bridge" style grooves led them to transcend typical genre definition and the scenes that the group were involved in and influenced. No-wave, funk, proto-hiphop, post-punk labels fall away in the face of their infectious floor filling songs. Not only that, but as women of colour who grew up in the South Bronx of the 1970s they were able to step outside the confines of what might have been expected of them. They blazed a trail within a heavily white male dominated space, often playing to majority white audiences, but their love of music and determination to perform allowed them to rise above it and inspire others.

According to Renee, "The thing of it is, when we come to perform I don't see races. I see people! I don't think about whether it's white, black, green, blue. I don't think about it's people out there dancing. Music is multicultural, multiracial. I think it's the one thing that crosses the colour line."

Listen to our ESG Artist Spotlight playlist here: