

## Give Them What They Want: Digable Planets, November 6 at RIBCO

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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The Digable Planets that perform at RIBCO on November 6 will be different from the casually low-key, jazzy hip-hop group that from 1992 to 1995 made a major splash, with the single "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)," the well-regarded albums *Reachin' (A New Refutation of Time and Space)* one Grammy, and another nomination.

But Doodlebug (also known as Craig Irving and Cee Knowledge) insisted that even without Ladybug (Mary Ann Vieira), he and Butterfly (Ishmael Butler) are authentic Digable Planets.

"We're the ones who created the name Digable Planets and produced all the music and wrote

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all the music," Doodlebug said in a phone interview last week. "We decided to continue the tradition of Digable Planets. If she doesn't want to do it, that doesn't mean the group has to die.

...

"Ninety percent of everything that came out of her mouth was written by one of us. Why wouldn't it still be Digable Planets?"

There's no doubt that the current Digable Planets tour -- with solo sets and "30 minutes of some old Digable Planets classics" -- looks suspiciously like a cash-in. But Doodlebug made a good case for the group's current incarnation as something more.

"What's the use of us going into the studio doing all this new music solo-wise?" he said. "To me, the group was the main thing that gave anybody any interest in listening to us as individuals ... . Let's give them what they want. ...

"After 15 years, there's still people who care about us and who still think we're relevant. Why not keep that going ... ? It's something that's very rare in the music business, especially the rap world."

And the two are making new music together -- something that wasn't happening when Ladybug was participating over the past few years.

After its initial breakup in 1995, the members of Digable Planets went separate ways. Doodlebug said he held some hope of a reunion for five years but noted that there were significant personal issues. "At that time, I had no idea that we would ever get back together," he said. "The three of us ... talking together as one never happened. Butterfly and Ladybug never talked much, but I talked to both of them separately."

They remained apart for nearly a decade, until Target's 2003 use of "Rebirth of Slick" in commercials prompted the trio to consider a reunion. They met in the Manhattan studio of Ladybug's husband, Doodlebug said, and "talked it out." They booked a European tour for early 2005, and based on its success they scheduled an American tour.

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The trio played together, on and off, through 2008, Doodlebug said. But he and Butterfly were getting frustrated, because there was only old Digable Planets, never new material.

"Every time we tried to get into the studio, Ladybug always would come up with some kind of excuse why she didn't want to do it or why she can't do it right now," Doodlebug said. "After a while, we kept feeling like she was using the situation to promote her own solo project. ... It didn't seem like she wanted to do new songs with us. ... It was getting to the point where we felt we were becoming a minstrel show."

Ladybug canceled on a spring 2009 tour, and a few months later Butterfly and Doodlebug decided to tour as Digable Planets without her. They have a new track called "Freshout" on their MySpace page ( [MySpace.com/butterflyndoodlebugtour](http://MySpace.com/butterflyndoodlebugtour) ) and expect to record a full album, although they have no time frame to complete it.

While Ladybug's feminine presence was integral to the Digable Planets sound and is frankly missed on "Freshout," the two remaining members have no plans to recruit another woman to flesh out the band. Doodlebug called the idea "corny."

"Let it be what it is," he said. "Most of the lyrics that she said were written by us. All the music was produced by us. ... Promote the new sounds that we have and also try to keep the old faithful fans happy by throwing in some Digable stuff."

*Digable Planets will perform at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island) on Friday, November 6. Doors open at 8 p.m. Cherrywine (Butterfly's band) and the Cosmic Funk Orchestra (Doodlebug's band) will also perform. Tickets are \$15 in advance (available at [RIBCO.com](http://RIBCO.com)) and \$20 at the door.*