

# Mp3 Leroy Smokes - Love Hustle Theater



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This eclectic group of MC's and live instrument musicians have taken the Minneapolis music scene by storm over the last few years with a sound that's inspired by The Roots, Black Eyed Peas, and NERD. 22

MP3 Songs HIP HOP/RAP: Hip Hop, URBAN/R&B: R&B Rap mix Details: Hanging out with the Leroy Smokes is like being an outsider watching a close-knit family interact. You might never suspect that infidelities, betrayal, separations and splits have occurred in the past and put the group through trials of stress and uncertainty. The men of the 'Smokes Family seem bonded by way of brotherly love and respect, overcoming obstacles, and a healthy dose of familial bickering and taunting. Front-men B Rukus and Buss One, totally different in form and race, seem to play off of each other like brothers. Each brings out the vocal style, delivery, and stories of the other. Keyboardist Friendly Fred is the clown and the flashy showman, doing anything he can for the love of entertaining. Trumpeter "Highstyle" Kyle is more subtle, but no less energetic in his ability to stir up a crowd and brass-up the music. Bespectacled Jesse Lee is a gem in the sea of local guitarists, bringing a surprising soul and bluesy voice to the 'Smokes sound. Darek "Hashbrown" Stephens? Don't let the aloof, detached persona fool you; his attention to the bass keeps the band firmly grounded in funkiness. And definitely not least, rookie Nic Woods happens to be the baby of the 'Smokes family, yet drums with the passion and skill that his years of experience have given him. In its tumultuous past, a constantly changing collection of musicians presented challenges for Leroy Smokes, but also helped to shape and define the band's sound and songwriting process.

Established in the late '90s as a hip-hop/funk jam-band, the Leroy Smokes released two independent albums, each one different in style and band lineup Their second and more prominent album, The Plot Thickens, was released in 2002. The band played local and regional shows to support it and became popular locally for being an energetic and fun live show. Unfortunately, the album never captured that

same energy in the recording booth. After some unreliable management and several contract disputes, the 'Smokes once again found themselves in a period of transition. Between 2001 and 2003, significant changes took place. Most importantly, local media freelance-artist Nick Abdo took the reins as manager and booking agent of the band. Vocalist and turntablist DJ Syrum left the group, followed by founding member and percussionist APZ; both for personal reasons. Emcee Greedy-G left to pursue a solo career, but remains affiliated with the Smokesignyl family. During these departures, founder and multitasker B Rukus moved from rapping behind the drum kit to performing at the front of the stage, and drummer Ben O' Grady picked up the sticks. Finally, Kyle Borchert added his reggae-influenced trumpeting to the band. In addition to their notorious stage presence, the 'Smokes are constantly producing and recording as part of their ongoing studio enterprise, Smokesignyl Productions. While recording an R&B project at Pachyderm Studios for singer Denwiddie in 2003, the band formed a working relationship and friendship with the singer's rapper/producer Buss-One. They immediately started collaborating and creating with the singers Casey Noelle, Venus Divine, and Mystic Blu from the Denwiddie project. Thus, the short-lived but popular "Super-'Smokes" era of the band began. Their shows -- visually improved and more dynamic with three talented female vocalists -- drew large crowds, and plans were made for an impending release. However, the musical flourishing of next two years was overshadowed by struggles to maintain a stable lineup and a unified sound, while constantly playing shows to pay the bills. A large debt hung on from the slow-moving *The Plot Thickens* album. The women each went their separate ways. Uncertainty strained the band when long-standing guitarist and bluesman Jesse Lee, founding member and bassist Hashbrown Stephens, and drummer Ben OG left the band to form the jazz/blues trio *The Gitdown*. After a few stints with local talents Matiu Unga and Paul Berg to replace them, the 'Smokes were relieved when both Lee and Stephens rejoined the group. Now, in 2006, the drama-and-change-weary Leroy Smokes feel they might just have the solid musical family they need for the long-run. The upcoming release *Love, Hustle, Theater* is a much-anticipated piece of work: the culmination of three years of drive and creativity loaded into one musical Midwest Hip-Hop love story. Allow them to re-introduce themselves. This is not just an album. For this group, this is redemption

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