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Subject: Re: New vocalist: Pamela Luss / The Monkey

Posted by [lon](#) on Mon, 20 Mar 2006 05:08:22 GMT

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These subject lines are starting to look kind of goofy but I'm going to reply here on the care and feeding of the Signifying Monkey which was just a phrase that popped into my head in the earlier post but has some relevance. You see, the Signifying Monkey started out as a 'toast'. Toasting was the earliest predecessor of rap according to things I've read from places like Rounder Records (but I have no original research.) Rounder likely still has this in their catalog. Rounder Records is in Cambridge Mass. You see, back in those days --early 80's -- when the records were coming our way, Rounder Records compiled an album full of toasts under the title "Ups On The Farm" I think. The toasts were gathered from prison inmates in much the same way that what his face John Simon (?) did in Appalachia to record the original musics of the hill peoples. Well anyway, the Signifying Monkey was one of the original toasts-- folklore. That's why there's The Monkey, The Elephant, The Buzzard, etc. Unfortunately these oral traditions based on The Dozens contain many expletives. The Monkey has been fed over the years by entertainers as diverse as Oscar Brown Jr, Rudy Ray Moore, Johnny Otis and Nat "King" Cole. Right here I'll make another pitch for the value of point to point file sharing because without it I'd have no access to the couple of Signifying Monkey routines that Rudy Ray (The Human Dynamo) Moore does-- one as a duet with Big Daddy Kane! --> Important note: Big Daddy will be covered under its own well-deserved heading. Not Big Daddy Kane, Big Daddy (plain). These materials would be lost or extremely isolated if some individuals had not posted them from their record collections. The Monkey even has a book written about it by a big time black literature historian which I can probably find yet because it is only a couple years old. I suppose the first Monkey you hear is always the favorite. First one I heard was from a quintet called "Snatch and the Poontangs" which was later identified for me as Johnny Otis working under a pseudonym. The most accessible version of the Monkey toasts was written by Oscar Brown Jr. who recently passed away: "Said the Signifying Monkey to the lion one day, There's a big bad elephant coming down your way. He talked about your mother and your sister too, And he didn't show too much respect for you. Lastly, the Signifying Monkey and Nat King Cole: the song "Straighten Up And Fly Right" is another take on this 'monkey business.' This is all oral history: just things I remember. I am no book author myself but I'd be glad if these musings didn't go down the black hole of web authorship along with other stuff I have written. Problem with net authorship is that these search tools are so poor. But a look at the wiki for Signifying Monkey if there is such a thing would be worthwhile. Perhaps the wiki has these things already. More when manual block asks me something....