

Blaque

Hold on and prepare to blast off to the future world of music. A bold new group named Blaque will take listeners to places never before traveled. Helmed by three young women - Shamari Fears, Brandi Williams and Natina Reed - Blaque explores uncharted grooves with their self-titled debut album for Columbia Records. The innovative collection blends soulful R&B with a funky alternative vibe.

"We go where other groups are afraid to go," advises Natina. "We're straight out of the year 2080." And it's no wonder. Blaque came to Columbia via one of contemporary music's pioneers, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopez of the group TLC. Blaque, which stands for Believing in Life and Achieving a Quest for Unity in Everything, was conceived by Lopez and is signed to Left Eye Productions.

Each member of Blaque has a distinctive sound. Brandi's vocals are as sweet and pure as a baby's breath. Shamari delivers powerful soul stylings while Natina handles all of the rap installments.

The first single, the R. Kelly-produced "808", is just a taste of the Blaque expression. A funk-driven tune written by Blaque, "808" imparts a slow infectious beat with just the right mix of rhythm and rhyme. "Working with R. Kelley was an ex-

perience," says Brandi. "He'd give us lectures about the music business," says Shamari. Track Masters, Michael Anthony and Sadiq "The Beat Freak" provided additional production wizardry to Blaque.

The group penned five of the album's 12 cuts. Recorded in Chicago, Atlanta, and New York under the watchful eye of Lopez, Blaque explores a variety of sounds, from the haunting R&B ballad "Release Me" to the laid-back hip hop feel of "Lenny." Besides conjuring up a unique musical approach, Blaque also dishes out positive messages. "Rainbow Drive," for example, speaks of a time when all races come together while "Stay By Your Side" is about the unbreakable loyalty of friendship. "We're a positive group. We believe in peace and love," says Shamari.

Brandi, 16, was always surrounded by music while growing up. Her grandfather, Bobby Rogers, was a member of the legendary Motown group Smokey Robinson and The Miracles. Her father was a professional singer as well and her aunt is R&B songstress Cherelle. "I've always loved music. I never said I wanted to be anything else. I never said I wanted to be a doctor, a lawyer. I always wanted to be a singer."

Natina, 18, on the other hand, had



Natina, Brandi and Shamari, the girls of Blaque

numerous career goals as a child. "I wanted to be Miss America, a veterinarian, a movie star," says Natina who often played drums in her uncle's church. Her father was also a preacher. As a youngster, she modeled and as she got older Natina began writing rhymes and making up jingles that led to her recording career. "I had been friends with Lisa (Lopez) but we never really talked about music until one day when she heard my jingle for Now & Later (candies)," says Natina, who took Lopez's advice and pursued music. Natina's also written jingles for Sprite.

Dreams of a music career filled Shamari's

much so that while in eighth grade, she drummed up a story about a recording career. "I told everyone I had a deal and was looking for people to join my band," says Shamari, 18, who listens to R&B, alternative rock, rap and gospel.

Destiny brought the three together. Before relocating to Atlanta, Shamari and Brandi lived in the same Detroit neighborhood but their paths never crossed. Natina, who moved to the Peachtree City from New York City, and Shamari attended the same school, meeting when both joined an urban country group called Butz.

when she hooked up with another group called Intrigue. But it wasn't until an audition at Left Eye Productions that they all met.

Managed by Wright Entertainment Group, Blaque is ready for group comparisons. "Listeners will know the difference. Blaque is more urban/pop alternative. It's a totally different vibe," explains Natina. Says Brandi, "Nobody looks like us. We're very futuristic."

Fashion Forward and musically advanced. That's the philosophy behind Blaque. Three young women out to make history.

DANCEHALL REGGAE STARS Tanto Metro & Devonte

With the international success of their single "Everyone Falls In Love," frequent Beenie Man collaborators Tanto Metro (Mark Wolfe) and Devonte (Wayne Passley) are quickly making inroads in the U.S. dancehall and reggae communities. "Everyone Falls In Love," which features the striking vocal contrast of Tanto Metro's bass-rooted toasting and Devonte's sweet alto, has already begun receiving heavy radio airplay in Miami and San Francisco, while The Box has the video in steady rotation nationally.

Tanto Metro's dancehall career began in 1982, when he began his apprenticeship at age 13 with Metromedia, a leading Jamaican sound system run by his mentor, legendary reggae artist Peter Metro. He was invited to join the Shocking Vibes crew in 1986, and soon recorded his first hit, the anti-drug anthem "Stop It". A talented singer, deejay and dancer, Tanto Metro's skills have

placed him in frequent collaboration with dancehall reggae's leading star, Beenie Man. The rich, resonant voice of Tanto Metro's partner Devonte first reached a wide audience at Ghetto Splash '96, a free concert held in Kingston, Jamaica that drew thousands of hardcore dancehall fans. Since then, Devonte has gone on to release several successful singles through his association with the Shocking Vibes team.



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