

Yolanda Adams

For Gospel legend Yolanda Adams, her stirring Elektra debut *Mountain High...Valley Low* was an opportunity to bring both her inspirational vision and her wide range of influences to an audience hungry for spiritual fruit. Since her 1988 debut, the acclaimed and uplifting *Just As I Am*, Yolanda has been wowing gospel audiences all over the world. Now in 1999, four studio albums and one live album later (the Grammy nominated *Yolanda...Live In Washington*), the Houston, Texas native is ready to extend her magnificent reach without watering down the

message. "I'm not one of those singers who wants to expand my audience at the expense of the people who already know my music," she says determinedly. "And I've grown both vocally and spiritually since by first album, through each phase of my career. So choosing Elektra was just another step of growth. Gospel music has stepped up and gathered a myriad of influences - jazz, hip hop, R&B. I need to be in a place where my message can be heard by everyone. I understand my purpose. I understand what I was put here for. I take that on

every day of my life."

It's precisely that kind of conviction that has caused critics to refer to Yolanda as one of gospel's "seminal" voices. It has also empowered her to venture out of gospel's more sanctimonious confinements, and hook up with some of pop's most formidable producers, such as Keith Thomas, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. Yolanda stresses, however, that it was the process of "sharing" talents that made the unique collaborations such a great success. Thomas produced and wrote "The Things We Do."



Blackstreet

While Rhythm and blues has never been more popular or commercially viable, it has also reached a creative impasse. Beats that were once innovative now seem formulaic as hit after hit reaches the airwaves but the record buying public is left still wanting...feelin' for music that does more than taste great.

It is into this arena that Blackstreet releases their third CD, *Finally*. More than a follow-up to '96's phenomenally successful *Another Level* (which would go on to sell 6 million copies and spawn the chart busting and Grammy winning #1 smash "No Diggity"), finally is, as the title might evoke, a definitive statement. A declaration for the end of the century. Or to put it more succinctly and less poetically, the bomb.

Featuring Blackstreet's finely honed harmonies and solo turns, and the incomparable, but thankfully never predictable production and songwriting (not that word) skills of Teddy Riley, *Finally* sets the template for what R&B must sound like as we enter the year 2000.

Although Blackstreet has enjoyed continuous acclaim since its platinum debut in 1994, the pressure was on when it came down to recording *Finally*. "It was all internal pressure," Teddy explains. "Because we really wanted this album to be it, we went back home," Teddy points to his heart, "here," he gestures out into the room, "and then we went into tomorrow. The sound and the styles of music on this CD are so broad. It sounds like such a cliché to say, 'there's something for everyone,' but there's so much here that everyone who hears this album is going to be able to say, 'That's the jam. That's the song. That's the one.'"

Offers co-founding member Chauncey, "I kept thinking this time, we need to come out of the box with another 'No Diggity.' But the more we wrote and thought about it, the more I realized, 'No. Let's be different, again, like we were with 'No Diggity.' Let's not go by those record industry rules. Let's make some new ones up.'"

One listen to *Finally* and it's clear

that the group has taken it to the next level. From the pyrotechnic grooves of "Can You Feel It," which uses snippets of the Jackson's song of the same name, to the lowdown grimy bass beats of "Don't Stop," the sweeping ballad "In a Rush" (which boasts harmonica from Stevie Wonder) or the inspirational message of the title track (featuring the renowned gospel star Hezekiah Walker), *Finally* is about R&B that is willing to work without a net. It is confident and schooled enough to give the people what they want and deserve, like everything Teddy Riley has touched in his 15 years making music, and not just a collection of dope ass beats. It is that bag of chips and the possibilities and the promise of R&B, delivered by four of its soulful practitioners.

Three of those practitioners are no doubt (no diggity) familiar to Blackstreet fans. The latest component of Blackstreet is Terrell Phillips. A native of North Carolina and a seasoned studio and touring vet, Terrell's powerful singing style is showcased on the anguished track "Misery." "Finding someone like Terrell is a blessing," says Teddy.



Photo by Taryn Simon

Teddy Riley, Eric Williams, Terrell Phillips, Chauncey Hannibal

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