

FOCUS

Ice Cube Unleashes New Blend of Rap

Joins beat with commentary, dash of silliness

(AP)— Before he was an actor, before he made TV shows and movies with his own production company, before he had a record label, Ice Cube was a rapper.

Cube was just a kid in 1988 when he and NWA helped launch the gangsta rap genre with "Straight Outta Compton," a raw collection of catchy rhymes about inner-city injustices that appealed to audiences of all kinds.

Now he's returning to his rap roots with his first solo album in six years, "Laugh Now, Cry Later," out June 6.

In it, Cube unleashes a 20-track blend of bass-thumping beats and social commentary, with a dash of silliness thrown in for good measure.

"I didn't want to make a record that was like a history book," the 36-year-old says, sitting inside his Cube Vision office, the walls dotted with posters that include Muhammad Ali and the movie "Scarface." "I wanted to make a record that does what all good hip-hop do. It makes you feel good, it kinda pumps you up but it also shows you a part of life that you might not have been paying attention to or might not even know exists."

On "Laugh Now, Cry Later," the targets of



Ice Cube at his office in Santa Monica, Calif. (AP photo)

Cube's lyrical fire include George W. Bush, money-drenched gangsta rappers, racial stereotypes and his own evolution as an artist. Rap sends a message, he says.

"That's really the essence of the music," he says. "Yeah, it's got ego and macho and all that stuff, but at the end of the day, it's music that you can learn from."

The godfather of gangsta rap ought to know. Before it was a genre with its own

streetwise name, Cube and his crew called their rhymes "reality rap." They said what they wanted and people responded. Their work paved the way for other artists to express themselves, Cube says.

Of course, music is still a business - one that Cube describes as "gangsta" and "shady" - where money calls the shots, altering what some artists can say.

That's one reason he released his new record on his own Lench Mob label. Working without corporate constraints made recording fun again, Cube says.

"There was no pressure, no time limits, no schedules, no A & R, nobody telling me what kind of record to do," he says. "It was just me going in there and doing the record that I like, that I think my fans would like. I took my time with it."

Cube has been busy with a string of films, including 2002's "Barbershop," "All About the Benjamins" and "Friday After Next." Other credits include 1999's "Three Kings" and the 1997 sea-monster thriller, "Anaconda."

He took a yearlong break from movies to focus on the new album, collaborating with some of the hottest names in hip-hop, including Snoop Dogg, Scott Storch and Lil Jon.

Hearing Lil Jon's beats inspired Cube to start rhyming and eventually head back into the studio, he says.

"I started writing to (the beats) and ended up, like, not stopping," says Cube, who also contributed two tracks to Lil Jon's latest album.



Shanice brings a more adult flavor to a new set of sexy songs in 'Every Woman Dreams.'

Beauty and Ease

R&B songstress Shanice returns to the music scene with her new album "Every Woman Dreams."

Boasting a five-octave range, which she handles with beauty and ease, the CD follows a 5-year hiatus over which she did a lot of writing, performing and also started a family of her own.

Shanice was a child prodigy who had her first album at 14. As an innocent 18 year old, she stole

hearts with the addictive hit "I Love Your Smile." She brings a more adult flavor to this new set of sexy songs.

The single "Every Woman Dreams" tells the story of a woman that has been through hardships with past relationships but now touts the confidence to demand the kinds of things from a man that her heart truly desires.

The album also features the single "Take Care of You," co-written by Shanice and Flex Alexander.

Paintings Embrace Hispanic Culture

Mixed media paintings by Cristina Acosta celebrate and honor the traditions of Hispanic culture and the gifts of the environment. Works by the artist are on display this month at Onda Arte Latina/Cross Currents Gallery, 2215 N.E. Alberta St.



Prince Honor: Web Innovator

(AP)— Prince will be honored with a lifetime achievement award for his use of the Internet to distribute music and connect with audiences.

Tiffany Shlain, founder of the Webby online awards, described Prince as a "musical genius" and "a visionary, who recognized early on that the Web would completely change how we experience music."

The 47-year-old pop superstar was the first major artist to release an entire album, 1997's "Crystal Ball," exclusively



Prince performs during the "American Idol" finale show May 24 at the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles.

on the Web, according to the announcement, and "long before MySpace and iTunes, Prince used

the Web as a new way to distribute music, premiere videos and build his relationship with his fans."

His website <http://www.npgmusicclub.com> has more than seven full-length CDs of music unavailable elsewhere. The awards ceremony will take place June 12 at Cipriani Wall Street in Manhattan. Rob Corddry of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart" will host the show.



Beyonce Knowles

Another Solo for Beyonce

(AP)— Beyonce Knowles will celebrate her 25th birthday with the release of "B'Day," her second solo album. Columbia Records said the CD will be released internationally on her birthday, Sept. 4, and in the United States on Sept. 5.

The first single, "Deja Vu," features Knowles' boyfriend, rap mogul Jay-Z, as a guest artist. Knowles, who fronted R&B girl group Destiny's Child, won five Grammy Awards for her top-selling solo debut, 2003's "Dangerously in Love."

She stars opposite Jamie Foxx and Eddie Murphy in the Hollywood adaptation of the Broadway musical "Dreamgirls," slated for release Dec. 25.



Batwoman is shown as a 5-foot-10 superhero with flowing red hair and knee-high red boots with spiked heels.

Batwoman Comes Out

Character's point of view changes

(AP)— Years after she first emerged from the Batcave, Batwoman is coming out of the closet.

DC Comics is resurrecting the classic comic book character as a lesbian, unveiling the new Batwoman in July as part of an ongoing weekly series that began this year. The 5-foot-10 superhero comes with flowing red hair, knee-high red boots with spiked heels, and a form-fitting black outfit.

"We decided to give her a different point of view," explained Dan DiDio, vice president and execu-

editor at DC. "We wanted to make her a more unique personality than others in the Bat-family. That's one of the reasons we went in this direction."

The original Batwoman was started in 1956, and killed off in 1979. The new character will share the same name as her original alter ego, Kathy Kane.

"She's a socialite from Gotham high society," DiDio said. "She has some past connection with Bruce Wayne. And she's also had a past love affair with one of our lead characters, Renee Montoya."

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