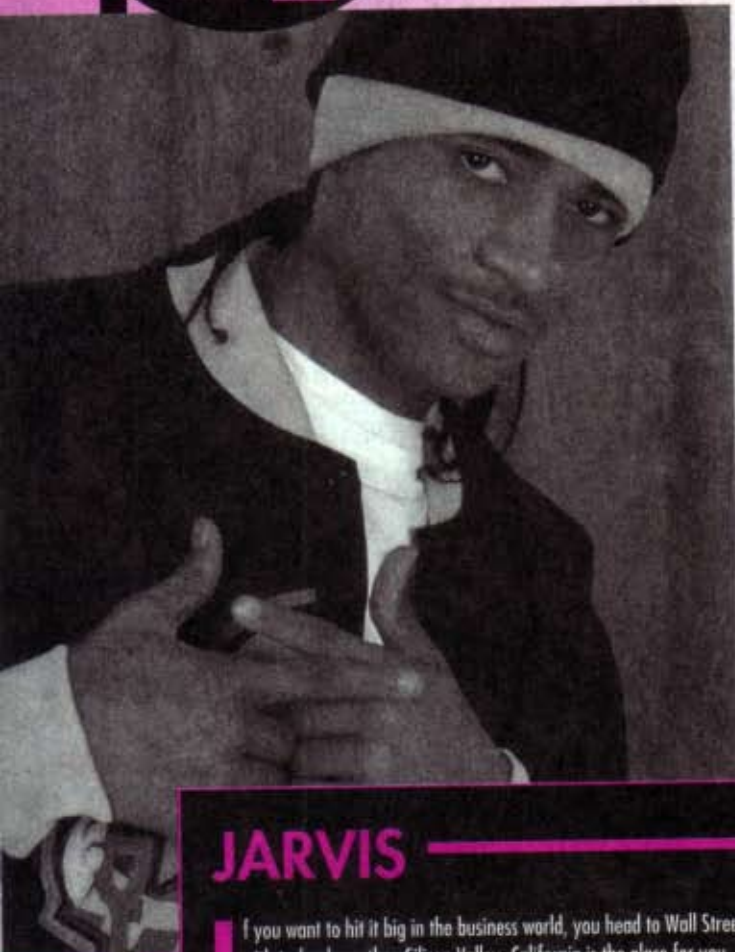


Hot spot



NORTHERN STATE —

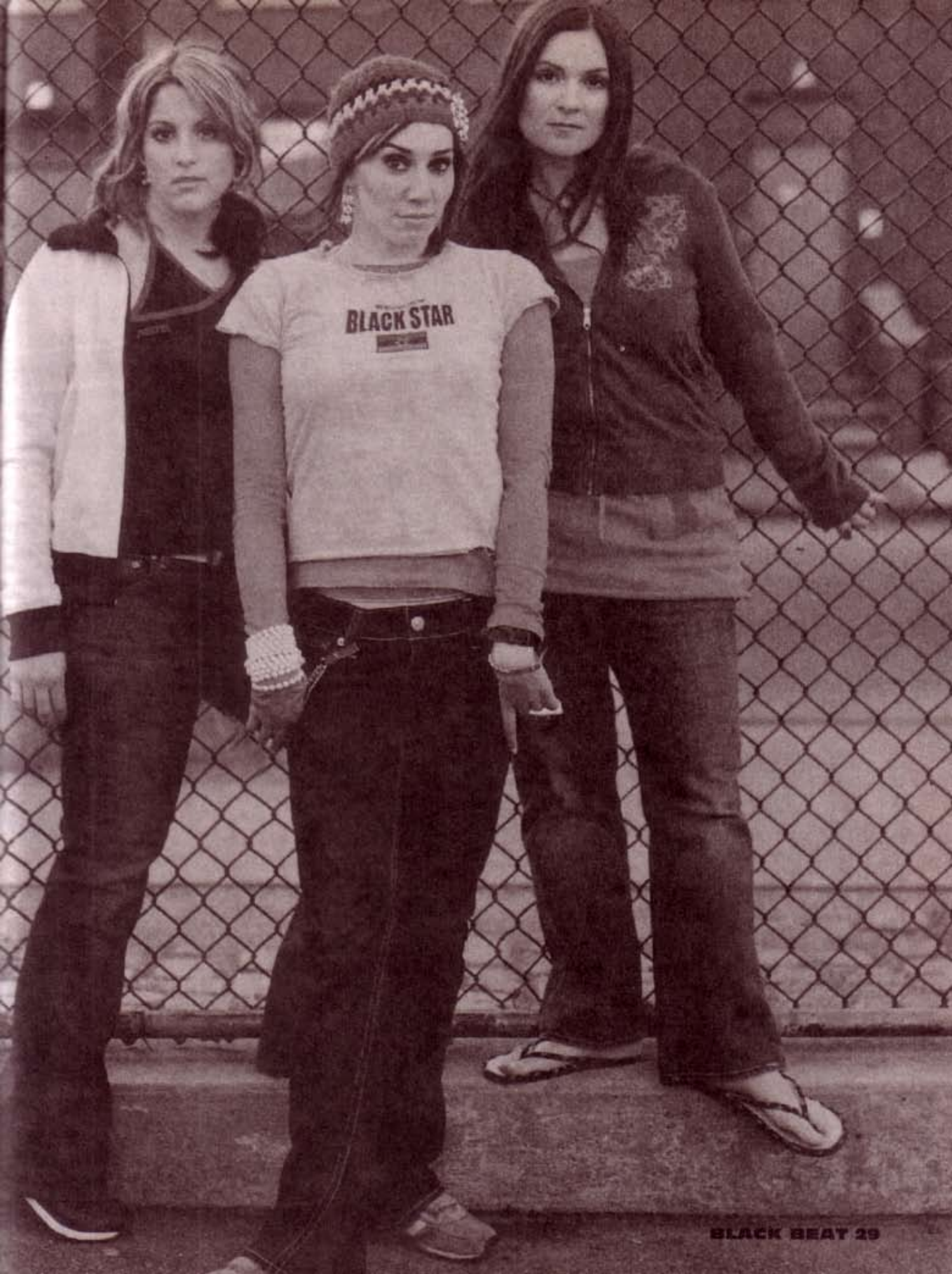
Sometimes it seems like it doesn't take much to succeed in hip-hop — which is why anybody and everybody seems to think they can make a quick buck off the game. The weakest flows and sloppiest beats have reached the top of the charts simply due to label support through promotion and paid-for radio spins. Fact is, image sells. With the right gimmick, you can be well on your way to platinum-plus sales and even your own clothing line! In the case of Northern State, they've got an image that has been both praised and absolutely skewered by music critics.

Northern State's image begins with their upbringing. The trio of Hesta Prynn, Sprout and Spero grew up deep in suburban Long Island — in Dix Hills, New York (to be specific). True, they're not exactly reppin' the streets, nor are they spittin' about the struggle minorities face with poverty and crime, but that doesn't mean that these three college-educated femcees are lackin' substantial lyrical content. The girls rhyme about everything from female empowerment and politics to partying. "We're obviously not a conventional hip-hop group," admits Spero. "We're left-of-center and our music has always been a fusion of all our influences." Having already dropped a couple of critically praised lo-fi indie EPs and opening for the likes of the X-ecutioners, The Roots and De La Soul, one has to begin to wonder if these girls are the real deal or simply just a novelty act. Critics have blasted their lack of *actual* hip-hop knowledge, though the girls claim to be huge fans. Other critics find the group to be a refreshing throwback, reminiscent of Paul's Boutique-era Beastie Boys. To their credit, they've landed quite the line-up for their major label debut, *All City*. Reputable hip-hop names like Pete Rock, High and Mighty, 2uest Love (The Roots) and Muggs (Cypress Hill) appearing all over their LP will surely make even the most hardcore hip-hopper's head turn. Only time will reveal whether or not these ladies are legitimate MCs, or if they're merely suburban white girls being used by a record label to make money via malls across the nation.

JARVIS —

If you want to hit it big in the business world, you head to Wall Street, New York. If you're down with technology, then Silicon Valley, California is the place for you. Seeking fame and fortune in the music industry? Then why not check out beautiful Atlanta, Georgia? With artists such as Usher, OutKast and Ludacris all bustin' out of the Atlanta scene, it would only be a matter of time before music industry hopefuls started storming the streets of *Hottlanta* seeking it's apparent wealth of opportunity. One of these optimistic artists who've chosen the state of "Wisdom, Justice and Moderation" over the likes of New York or California is up-and-coming teen pop/R&B crooner, Jarvis.

Actually born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, this 16 year-old high school junior relocated to Atlanta and within months jump-started his career in music. However, just because he's been blessed with good luck in the music industry doesn't mean that this was always his number one dream. "I'm still amazed each time I work in the studio; I really never thought music would be my reality," says the transplanted ATLien. "I mean, all I could ever think about as a kid was playing in the NBA!" Though he hasn't completely dropped his dreams of becoming a pro baller, he has made music his top priority. He's already traded in his jersey for his own independent record label, Tricycle Records and linked up with platinum hit maker Jermaine Dupri for his debut single, "Radio." Being touted as a pre-drama version of Bobby Brown, this smoothed-out youngster is already proving that Atlanta is still the current hot spot for urban music hopefuls.



BLACK STAR



MISSISSIPPI

It's no secret that the Deep South played a major role in the African-American struggle. Home to slavery and vicious racism, places like Mississippi made life a living hell for Blacks who wanted to peacefully live their lives like everybody else in the country. However, what may come as a shock to many is the fact that though slavery and segregation are things of the past, the struggle continues on. Racism and poverty run rampant, leading to lives riddled with crime and drugs. Soulful crooner Mississippi may deliberately misspell the name of his home state, but he knows exactly what goes down in its streets. However, he's walked a path of righteousness his entire life and wishes to share his enlightenment with the world through his music.

Having grown up in the church and toured with the Mississippi Mass Choir for two years, Mississippi knows just how important both faith and music can be in shaping one's life. "Gospel is what really influenced me. Through all of the hardships many African-Americans have suffered in the South, it's shaped a lot of great people who've turned their internal pains into words that make you want to scream and make you want to shout," he explains of his gospel upbringing. "That's what gospel music is all about: celebration, praise and victory." That's exactly what this up-and-coming vocalist wants the world to experience. He's had much to celebrate as a Mississippi boy who managed to overcome adversity and earn a BA in music from Texas Southern University. His debut disc, *Book Of Life*, is a mixture of gospel, R&B, funk and soul that recalls everything from Sam Cooke and New Edition, to Michael Jackson and Van Halen. Whether sticking to a mellow sound or hittin' it off with a club jam, Mississippi's message shines bright. And with the likes of the late, great Rick James making an appearance on his set, his voice is sure to spread beyond Mississippi.



DIA

Vincent Gallo isn't happy. Since his 1983 appearance as "Prince Vince" on the legendary hip-hop program *Graffiti Rock*, Mr. Gallo has been at the top of Buffalo's list of urban superstars. In the upcoming months, Prince Vince may be knocked from his plush and majestic pedestal as a new urban sensation works her way up the charts. Young, soulful and sexy Dia claims to be a master storyteller and only time will tell if she can rule her hometown of Buffalo, New York.

Known more for its snow, Canadian border and spicy chicken wings than it's awe-inspiring recording artists (unless you count the Goo Goo Dolls—which you won't), Buffalo isn't the easiest place to hail from if you wanted to break into this unpredictable music business. Dia began to throw her talent in the face of all naysayers as early as 13 years-old. She began performing and recording at this very young age and hasn't let up since. Inspired by and taking after her father, a pianist and percussionist, Dia has always been musically inclined and motivated. With her natural talent at her disposal, she turned to the reality of the streets for lyrical inspiration for her hard-hitting mix of hip-hop and soul singing. In 1999, she teamed up with Tracy Lee and producer D-Dot Angelettie to record the single "We Like." She also provided the hook for DMX's "Bloodline Anthem." She continued recording a few tracks here and there and took to acting in 2001's *Urban Massacre* alongside Guru, Capone and MTV's own Lala. When 2003 hit, she took power into her own hands and recorded her own self-titled, independent LP featuring Jagged Edge and Jazze Pha. Now, with her debut single, "Oh Yeah!" getting airtime and poised to blow up in the Buffalo scene, Prince Vince better grip his funky-fresh crown as tight as he can.