

hot spot

SEAN-GEMINI

“I want to take R&B, hip-hop and even pop to another level,” says Gemini, “so I can achieve what every artist ultimately wants — longevity.” If longevity is what this crooner wants, then he’s already got it — albeit without the platinum-coated success he probably really wants. Sean’s career began in 1990 as a rapper. During these early years the New York-born/Los Angeles-residing artist got to perform alongside the likes of Ice Cube. His group, The What, would later score a moderate hit with their single, “Turn It Up,” which actually reached #39 on the Billboard Charts and landed them on stage with the legendary Run DMC and Wu-Tang Clan. What’s the next step in this rapper’s long-lasting career? R&B.

Surprisingly, the jump from rapping to singing has worked out well — thus far. With creative influences such as Sam Cooke, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye guiding the direction of his vocals, the 6’3” Gemini went on to record a six-song EP which he released independently, selling over an impressive 100,000 copies. This success inspired him to record more songs and turn the EP into his full-length debut. The resulting *Inner Me/Gemini* is a massive 30 track double album released through his very own Parthinie Entertainment/Lightyear record label. Immense sexuality, romanticism, spirituality and political consciousness appear on every moment of this debut. “Every track reflects my thoughts, loves, hates and beliefs,” says Sean. “Every subject is fair game.”

EMMA

Remember the Spice Girls? You know, those five bubbly girls from the United Kingdom who came overseas, made a huge splash and became the group that everybody loved to hate (but secretly loved)? Still haven’t jogged your memory? Well, their first CD had major chart toppers such as “Wannabe” and “2 Become 1” but almost as quickly as the group rose to the top of the American music scene, they seemed to overstay their welcome and fade into “where are they now?” territory. As all die-hard Spice Girl fans (you know who you are) know, some of the members went on to get married, divorced and even had a hit solo single along the way, but until now Emma Lea Bunton, who went by the name Baby Spice, had yet to record her own solo debut.

Simply going by the name Emma, she’s on a mission to prove that she’s no longer a “Baby” in the business with her debut set, *Free Me*. “I’ve had a chance to grow up and find out who the real Emma Bunton is,” she explains. “This album shows me learning how I am and being able to open up.” Co-writing 11 of the 12 songs, she’s moved away from the gurl pop that made her group so popular and opted for a sound that’s a bit more retro and mature. “I was brought up with Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye. And, just like in the ‘60s, we brought musicians into the studio to play live,” says the former Spice Girl. “I’ve just become so much more comfortable recording. I was in there going, ‘Turn the bass up! Where are the strings?’” With an album that touches on the pop kitsch sound of the ‘60s with a bit of Latin flavor thrown into the mix, the evolution of Baby into Emma may finally be complete.





BLACK BEAT 65



3 ON 3

When your pops is former Harlem Globetrotter Mugsy Leggett, you just know your life will be plagued with constant allusions to basketball from practically everyone you meet. So why not just flip the script and get on the offensive instead of playing defense (yes, that was another lame reference to basketball)? That's exactly what brothers Anthony (age 18), Shawn (16) and Maleek (12) did when they decided to name their hip-hop flavored R&B group 3

On 3. Their name also stems from the fact that these young performers were — thanks to their daddy's genes — pretty hot ballers, regularly dominating the courts at their local boys club. Yet, as fate would have it, these Bronx-born brothers were destined to have a career in music.

"The boys club was always looking for kids to sing with Kenny Rogers at the Westbury, NY, Music Fair every Christmas, and each one of us eventually joined in." They'd each start singing in their school choirs and in 1994

Anthony successfully auditioned for Michael Jackson's HBO special. Initially the brothers had never thought about performing together.

Anthony — a performing arts student — figured he'd eventually sing with a group of friends, until his father suggested he start his career with his brothers. They started doing well-received shows around the Bronx — shows that got them into a couple of failed production deals. It was when they hooked up with the legendary Funkmaster Flex that they got the chance to audition for Wyclef's new Clef Records. At the audition, Wyclef thought the boys were going to be rappers, but signed them on the strength of their smooth R&B act. Now that 3 On 3 have been signed and are working on their debut, *A Record Deal*, they better start practicing their crossovers and fade-aways (another basketball metaphor!), because as we all know, this industry is nothing but a game.



T SOUL REBELS

Typically, when a person thinks hip-hop, they imagine something along the lines of two turntables and a microphone. Of course, things *have* changed over time. Recently there's been more of a focus on producer-driven tracks rather than DJ work, and with the influence The Roots have had on the genre, more and more hip-hop acts have started to include live instrumentation. Thing is, when you go to see a hip-hop group live, you're still expecting turntables and a mic, not a nine-piece brass band. The Soul Rebels wish to welcome you to hip-hop, New Orleans style.

This college-trained group of musicians rightfully earned their name from the one and only Cyril Neville of the Neville Brothers who once told them, "Hey, you're a brass band, but ya'll got funk and soul. Ya'll are like soul rebels." They've traveled the world to show off their blaring brand of blaring brass-driven, jazz, R&B, Latin, reggae and funk-flavored hip-hop. It's loud get-up-and-dance street music with a ghetto conscious. "That's why people have called us the missing link between Louis Armstrong and Public Enemy," says vocalist Lamar LeBlanc. Their third and latest release, *Rebellion*, finds these rebels doin' what they do best: taking music and mixin' it up like a steaming pot of good ol' N'awlins gumbo.

