

the alternative

There's more to life than Hip-Hop and R&B

Reporting by Anthony Q. Casasnovas

ALANA DAVIS

WHO: The talented daughter of jazz pianist Walter Davis, Jr. and jazz singer Anamari, Alana has come into her own as an equally talented musician with her very own identity.

WHAT: Though her parents were popular jazz musicians, Alana has carved out her own persona in the music business. This guitar strumming singer/songwriter makes heartfelt contemporary rock that's been compared to the likes of Ani DiFranco and has found itself on stage at the Lilith Fair.

WHEN: Though she's been playing guitar since she was 18, she dropped her debut album, *Blame It On Me*, in 1997 and was quickly put at the top of many critical lists naming her the most explosive thing since Pop Rocks and soda for that year. Since then she's taken four years between each release, with her sophomore effort *Fortune Cookies* hitting in 2001 and her latest opus, *Surrender Dorothy* hitting this year.

WHERE: This girl's reppin' the five-boroughs of New York City. She grew up in Greenwich Village and attended Hunter College Elementary and High School in Manhattan's upper East Side. She was teased by her wealthy classmates as the girl with the "wild and frizzy" hair, but never let that get her down.

WHY: Other than the fact that sometimes you just need to turn off the hip-hop/R&B and chill out to some sincere-sounding rock, you've got to respect the line-up Alana has formed for this release. Her backing band consists of musicians who've worked with the likes of Norah Jones, Joss Stone, Lenny Kravitz, John Mayer, Aimee Mann and Christina Aguilera. That's reason enough for you to surrender to Dorothy.



FATTY KOO

WHO: Fatty Koo is a group of six diverse and talented musicians who've formed to flip pop urban music upside down. Each member plays a different role: Valure is a soul singer; Eddie B and Ron do hip-hop and R&B; Marya is a cellist with a classical background and Latin vibe; Gabrielle is into pop and rock; and Josh Aaron Michael rocks the saxophone.

WHAT: Urban fusion. It's good party music all-the-way that mixes hip-hop and R&B with Latin, rock and funk rhythms. Also, if you haven't caught it yet, the band's evolution has been the center of a BET reality TV show. Eat your heart out Diddy.

WHEN: Though each of the artists involved have personally been doing their thing for years, they all came together on board the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, where they realized they had great musical chemistry together. Josh joined them in 2005 and their television series debuted in late April. 2005 promises to continue being a busy year for this up and coming group.

WHERE: Though they each hail from different parts of the world (Eddie was born in Detroit, Michigan and raised in San Antonio, Texas; Marya was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela; and Valure is from Newark, New Jersey) each member now calls Columbus, Ohio home.

WHY: Unlike Diddy's various experiments with creating bands on television, the young members of Fatty Koo naturally came together through their love for music. Their various backgrounds and skills also promise to make this group one of the more interesting and diverse projects in the current urban scene. Only time will tell if Fatty Koo really is Phatty Cool (ugh).



BEN HARPER

WHO: Pretty boy and acoustic slide guitar master Ben Harper has been known to jam with backing bands The Innocent Criminals and the Blind Boys of Alabama from time to time.

WHAT: Some critics have tagged his music with the blues revivalist label, but the truth is that this singer/songwriter's music is so much more. His tight acoustic grooves fuse funk, soul, folk, blues, rock and even a little jazz. At his live shows he's even been known to cover anything from Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix to the Verve and Marvin Gaye. His music is practically a sonic buffet — there's a little something there for everyone.

WHEN: Ben's been doing his thing for a while now. He grew up listening to blues, folk, soul, R&B and reggae and eventually started playing guitar as a child. As he

grew older he wound up with a fondness for the slide guitar. By the 1992

he had earned himself a local following that landed him a deal with Virgin records. Throughout the '90s he toured constantly, building his fan base and releasing album after album. He released his fifth studio album, *There Will Be a Light*, last year and recently dropped the CD and DVD release of his *Live at The Apollo* set.

WHERE: Mr. Harper was born in Pomona, California. He formed his music career along the west coast, building his name with countless performances in the Los Angeles music scene. He has since garnered worldwide appeal with his numerous international tours.

WHY: There are plenty of reasons to check out this talented musician. Namely, as plenty of critics have made abundantly clear, his music is excellent. Beyond that, however, is his appeal. He's shared the stage with the diverse likes of Radiohead, Pearl Jam, Dave Matthews Band and The Fugees, so if he was cool enough for those groups, then he's definitely cool enough for you.



VICTOR WOOTEN

WHO: Victor Lemonte Wooten is a loving husband; devoted father of four; youngest sibling of the Amazing Wooten Brothers; student in the martial art of Wing Chun; annual Bass & Nature camp teacher; master magician and... oh yeah, a composer, arranger, producer, vocalist, multi-instrumentalist solo artist who is also a member of the Grammy-winning supergroup, Béla Fleck & The Flecktones.

WHAT: Bass, bass, bass all up in your face. This man is a bass guitar master who's won plenty of awards to back up that claim. His debut on Vanguard Records, *Soul Circus*, has him playing something like eight-thousand different bass guitars (yes, that is a slight exaggeration) on an assortment of songs ranging from soul to funk to rock 'n roll. With songs inspired by the likes of Prince and Sly Stone, and cameos from the legendary Bootsy Collins and Arrested Development's Speech, it proves to be every low-end lover's dream.

WHEN: Apparently, top-notch musicians start *really* early. Vic was already slappin' the strings of his bass by age three after his brother taught him how to play. By age five he was performing in his siblings' band. Together they started touring with the likes of War and Mayfield and dropped their first album in 1985. By the end of the '80s Vic had joined the Flecktones and started his solo career in the '90s. He's continued working with the Flecktones and the Bass Extremes as he won Grammy nominations for his own solo work.

WHERE: Hailing from Hampton, Virginia, the Wootens took their show to Busch Gardens and Williamsburg. Vic would later make the move out to Nashville, Tennessee where he would win numerous accolades.

WHY: Remember what was said earlier: Bass, bass, bass all up in your face. If you want to hear some bass guitar work that'll blow your mind, look no further than Victor Wooten. While he's at it he'll also hit you with some solid soul and funk-rock too. **BB**

