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Various Artists

Urban Spotlight DVD-Zine: US West Coast World Premiere

(MVD)
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by **Chris Catania**

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Urban Spotlight's DVD-Zine production is the next installment in an experiment to combine two types of media, the DVD and the Zine, and get the word out about the current state of West Coast Rap. Delivered in a DVD format with the layout of a magazine, this ambitious combination showcases more than just the West Coast artist as it dips south to include southern rap stars as well as Latino artists. It boasts that it was the first Video-Magazine to appear on the shelves of all the top retail stores in the country and now this DVD-Zine is the first to appear on magazine racks worldwide.



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This edition of *Urban Spotlight* is anchored by gangster rap pioneer and Hollywood star Ice Cube. His featured interview, a quarter into the DVD, with an *Urban Spotlight* vixen journalist, is entertaining and humorous. Ice Cube appears happy to do the interview, but he seems a bit irritated as he fields questions that end up revealing everything that is wrong with gangster rap.

The DVD's first moments are with Snoop Dogg as he charismatically introduces himself and his new album the *Blue Carpet Treatment*. Snoop Dogg is never slow to entertain with his silky smooth pimp style flow, and *Urban Spotlight* made a solid choice to begin with him and also utilize a sleek side view portrait of him for the DVD's main menu selection screen.

Then the *Urban Spotlight* crew takes you to a backstage after party with Mobb Deep. It's not really about the music here as much as it is about being right there in the mix, among the screaming and lady-fan grabbing as Mobb Deep raps and eventually gives way to a surprise appearance by 50 Cent who for almost two minutes stands awkwardly looking around waiting for the right moment to begin his rap.

It wouldn't be a West Coast DVD without a spot for the Bay Area genre craze hyphy and its main promoter and self-proclaimed creator, E-40. His interview about his career and the legend of the sub-genre is also followed up by a performance, which like most of the performances on this DVD, are plagued by poor production that takes away from the music.

Besides Ice Cube's interview the other keepers are with legendary producer Too Short who offers his thoughts on West Coast rap's status quo and the candid introspective chat with Power 106 DJ Felli Fel. DJ Felli Fel is genuine and laid back as he openly talks about what it's like for him as a radio DJ and how he thinks the culture of the mixtape is evolving. Recently signed West Coast rapper Glasses Malone, following his chat, does a smooth and on the spot freestyle version of one of his songs off his debut release.

There's somewhat of a pattern with the layout, but other times it seems like the layout was just an afterthought. I should also mention that there are two ways you can watch this DVD. You can watch it from front to back. Snoop Dogg to the Credits. I don't suggest this, because at over 90 minutes it's a long and laborious ride, mainly because of the commercials and lack of planning on the flow of the layout. The other way to take it in is via the usual way you would read a magazine. Check out the table of contents and flip to what interests you. Taking this DVD-Zine in via the Special Segments sections, where you find the Concert Series Highlights, The Listening Party and G-Unit West, worked the best after I made the

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mistake trying the front to back route and gave up about half way through.

Ice Cube's concert was fiery from what I could see because like the other concert footage, it was difficult to watch due to the amateur filming that seemed to be filmed from the cheap seat in the far back of the house with a cell phone video camera. The experience was not at all what you'd expect from the usual DVD concert footage. Nonetheless you felt the energy as Ice Cube raged across the stage, spitting verses from his new album Laugh Now, Cry Later, amidst the chaotic clutter of waving hands the blocked most of the view.

Houston label and Screwed up music the SUC (Screwed Up Clique) are briefly featured as they sport their trademark sparkling grills and phat rides along the street of the H-towns ghetto in two videos featuring rappers Bun B and Spider Loc who both lead the way down the syrupy trail of screwed-up flow.

Aside from the Ice Cube, Glasses Malone and DJ Felli Fel and Too Short's chat nothing really jumped out as something I have to hear more of. I didn't feel anything exciting coming from upstarts Ladie G, Young Dre, or J-211. And I wish the Dirty South Screw Up Click would get to reinventing themselves soon because I wanted to be blown away by what new music is coming out of the gangster genre, an artist that doesn't feed into the easily dismissible cliché.

I wanted to be able to say that there is something worthwhile to listen to and that there is an up and coming rapper that can both captivate me with his/her style and stage charisma and challenge me with his/her lyrics and most of all add something positive and inspiring to hip hop that doesn't simultaneously contradict. But I didn't see it a whole lot of that on *Urban Spotlight*. What I did see, though, was an encouraging mixing in of Latin culture via an interview with comedian Carlos Sanchez, and a portion of his stand up show, also representing were border rapper Chingo Bling and trio Malaverde.

The interviewers did ask some decent questions. But even with the aforementioned discomforts put to Ice Cube, they never go in for the kill and ask the tough questions. With this installment, anyway, *Urban Spotlight's* mission doesn't appear to be to challenge their audience. Instead, in the end, this DVD-Zine seemed more like an expanded press release that made me feeling empty and sad that the genre is still falling into the same pit falls that confirm the stereotypes of non-hip hop fans and ultimately keep them from listening to hip hop at all.

It's an ambitious attempt that could benefit from deeper interviews and a few less commercials in-between the artist profiles. It obvious that one of the main goals is to reach the urban demographic to which gansta rap primarily speaks to and I don't fit. But I appreciate and respect the music and the artists who do, and who also want to push the genre forward and not shackle it with tons of bling clichés, pimped out rides, and shinning grills.

RATING: 1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

— 14 June 2007

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