

# What The?

## Who Are These Imposters in the R&B Section?

### A Nightmare in Six Parts

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#### PART I: An Unpleasant Trip to the Record Store.

"Ah yes, nothing makes me more happy than a trip to the record store.

"I think I'll go check out some smooth rhythm and blues sounds. Yeah, Loose Ends is what I want. 'Hanging on a String,' 'Slow Down,' and 'Watching You'—man those songs bring back so many memories.

"Aw man, no more Loose Ends, well I'll just keep on looking. Let's see; George Michael? He doesn't belong in this section. Michel'le, Milli Vanilli? Man you've got to be kidding me! New Edition, New Kids on the Block? What the? Now I'm upset. All of these suckers in the R&B section...let me move on to rap.

Check out some Uncle L, yeah maybe some Marky Mark, Monie Love... Wait a minute. Marky Mark?! Now I know I'm not going home but I've got to get the hell outta here!"

#### PART II: A Case of Deja Vu

Has the above scenario ever happened to you? Let me tell you it's not a very pleasant feeling, and it's a reaction to a growing trend. I am tired of seeing how the music groups in the pop mainstream have taken from the likes of jazz, soul, and rap after years of ignoring the contributions these industries have had in influencing the styles and trends in music.

Jazz was the first of the aforementioned music styles to break onto the scene. Artists such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald, although large in the black community, never quite appealed to the cross-over crowd and received the respect they deserved.

#### PART III: Icons and Fakers Get Paid

Today, the same type of things go on but on a more subtle scale. Jazz musicians such as the tradi-

tionally-styled Wynton Marsalis and the contemporary stylist Earl Klugh have been overlooked, except by true fans of the art form.

To most people, jazz did not even exist until Kenny G. came out. Sure he's a great performer but we need to critically examine the music we hear and sometimes look beyond the media icons, abusers, sellouts and pawns. Support should be behind other deserving musicians still trying to make it to the top.

Rhythm and Blues has also been tainted by a similar process. Singers and groups who deserve to be making millions and winning the music awards don't even get a second look.

For instance, take the group Guy. They are big on the soul charts, and member Teddy Riley has arguably been the best producer/writer out in the past five years. Yet, he gets little recognition (outside of R&B circles) and Guy has never made a cross-over hit.

Then along comes a group like Milli Vanilli—who were suckers even before they were frauds—and they "sing" their way to a multi-platinum album. It just doesn't make sense.

#### PART IV: The Abusers of Hip-Hop

Out of the three industries mentioned earlier, rap has been most repeatedly abused by the mainstream crew has taken from hip-hop is probably the most disturbing. First of all, today it seems that nearly every up-tempo song on the pop charts features a rap before the bridge. That's kind of odd when the similar artists called it "jungle music" only a decade ago when Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash, and the Sugar Hill Gang were rockin' the set.

The sampling of beats also takes place in the direction of rap to pop. Madonna flat out uses Public Enemy's "Security of the First World" beat in her song "Justify My Love." But as PE's Flavor Flav himself said, "You can't copyright no beat." Lisa Lisa, with her hit "Let the Beat Hit 'Em," at least does a less obvious sampling of the bass line in

Main Source's "Looking at the Front Door." The point is, when mainstream takes from hip hop it is rarely to never mentioned, but when the reverse process takes place rap is criticized for stealing.

#### PART V: Selling Souls for Gold

There are two forms that the mainstream artist hides under. The first is the abuser/sellout. This is the performer who begins making meaningful music for a particular audience then totally abandons this style once cross-over dollars start rolling in.

Let's talk about Madonna. Remember when Shannon's "Let the Music Play" was number one on the R&B chart and Madonna's "Holiday" was right behind it, light-years before the pop audience ever

knew who she was. Madonna's entire first album was definitely on the soul tip.

The same can be said for Whitney Houston. When she began, her music was tailored to appeal to the R&B audience. And then she tasted cross-over success. She first made overt appeals to the commercial audience on her second album. How did she go from making songs like "All at Once" and "You Give Good Love" to "So Emotional" and "I Wanna Dance With Somebody?" I'm sorry "Nippy" that's just not gonna get it.

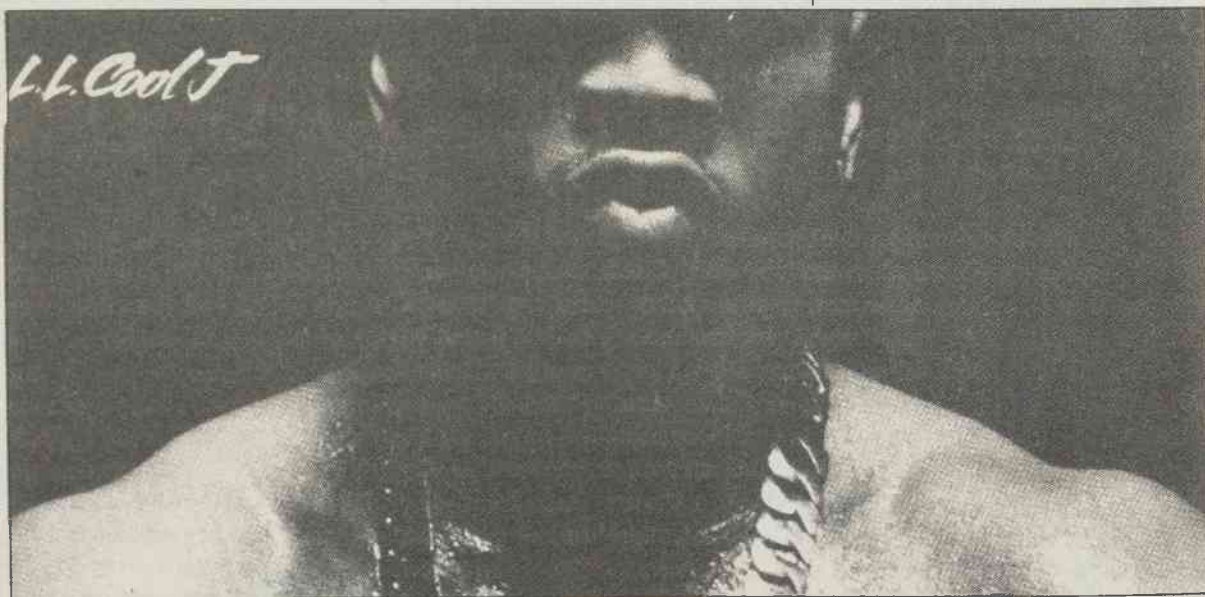
#### PART VI: The Manipulated

The second type of pop artist is the icon/pawn. These are the people that have been placed in the posi-

tions they hold not because of ability but because of the people they know in high places. These entertainers exercise little or no control over their own careers.

The prime example of this is Vanilla Ice. Blessed with no talent, he throws together a few nursery rhymes, uses a fraternity slogan, proclaim he's been raised on the street and now he's supposed to be a rapper. Third Bass, a legitimate non-black rap group, summed it up best when they said of Vanilla, "Hip hop got turned into hit pop the second your record went number one on the pop charts." Ice is viewed as

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Artists Like Uncle "L" and Marsalis Sometimes Lose Out to the Pop Scene

