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Section

Got that Mojoe

Texas R&B group mixes old school soul, hip hop and blues



PHOTO/THE BROOKES COMPANY

Easy Lee, Matthew Knowles and Tre are ready to work their MoJoe on the music industry. The group released their first album, "Classic. Ghetto. Soul," on September 12.

By Cheris F. Hodges

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When Matthew Knowles, father of Beyonce, heard the group MoJoe, he had one thing to say: Sign them up. Someone from Music World, Knowles' company, had gotten a hold of MoJoe's CD, liked what he heard and took the group to a Christmas party where Knowles was in attendance.

They performed and the rest is, as the cliché goes, history.

The group's first CD, "Classic. Ghetto. Soul," was released earlier this month and has been described as a mix of poetry, hip-hop, blues and

old school soul.

Tre and Easy Lee, the men who make up MoJoe, met in San Antonio, Texas, when they were teenagers. They say the group's name means "more than the average Joe."

"It means that the best of what we can do is the foot we put forward," said Easy Lee, also known as Charles Peters.

"We hope to bring some light to the fact that San Antonio has a rich blues history and not just a Tejano history," said Tre, also known as Treason Scipio.

The group has already caught the industry's attention by touring with

India Arie and The Dave Matthews Band. In doing their music for six years, Easy said, MoJoe knows what it takes to make a mark. It's an added bonus to have Knowles in their corner.

"(Knowles) said he was happy to link up with young brothers that were doing something different," Easy said.

Tre and Easy said that when they heard Gnarls Barkley's album "St. Elsewhere," they knew that the music world was ready for what they had to offer. They recorded with a live band and stayed away from the

Please see MOJOE/2D



Cosby shines on first NBC comedy

The Bill Cosby Show Season One
Bill Cosby, Bea Richards, Lee Weaver, Olga James
Shout! Factory
4-disc set



Way before Cliff Huxtable was TV's No. 1 dad or Fat Albert loomed large on Saturday mornings, Bill Cosby was still a real cool guy.

His name was Chet Kincaid and he was a gym teacher at an integrated high school in California. The show was called "The Bill Cosby Show" and it was one of the best things NBC had to offer.

Cosby had an Emmy under his belt when "I Spy" ended, so he could get what he wanted from a network, which was a comedy show that didn't use a laugh track and centered around everyday situations. Though set in the Civil Rights period, Cosby never went for race. The closest the series came to racism is when Kincaid wouldn't let a black kid tryout for his basketball team because he was too short. The kid eventually soundly defeated Kincaid. NBC relented and got some of the best TV of the period, but the series lasted only two years.

The show wasn't a stretch. Cosby's Kincaid was an average Joe with a big heart that kept getting him into trouble. Kincaid preferred telling stories and setting up situations rather than going for obvious one-liners - much like Cosby's standup.

Some episodes dealt with shoplifting, getting a driver's license and profanity. A lot of Kincaid's personal life was exposed as well, like borrowing a garbage truck to go on a date. But the real good stuff is in the A-list guest stars such as Cicely Tyson, Wally Cox, Henry Fonda, Mantan Moreland and Moms Mabley.

These episodes hold up after 40 years, which is a sign of great writing. "The Bill Cosby Show" is worth searching for at your local DVD vendor.



Deja Vu: Hip hop's old school veterans play Charlotte

By Cheris F. Hodges

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Old school hip-hop seems to be back in fashion (thank God).

But, does this mean I'm old? The artists who will be performing at the Blast From The Past concert on Saturday were some of my favorites.

The concert, which kicks off at 2 p.m. at Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre, will feature

Doug E Fresh, Slick Rick, Whodini, Dana Dane, Yo-Yo, Kurtis Blow, Sequence, Parish from EPMD, GrandMaster Melle Mel & Scorpio formerly of Furious Five, Jus K and Calvin Richardson.

And then Rakim is coming to town. On September 29, Rakim, arguably one of the greatest MCs ever and DJ Kid Capri will be rocking the house at Amos' South End.

Talking to some of the old

school rappers made me miss the days when hip-hop was about more than killing and sex. Obviously, a lot of other people yearn for it, too.

"People are starting to miss it," said Jalil Hutchins of Whodini. "It's just starting to materialize."

Hutchins said he just wishes record companies would realize that there is still a market for what's considered "old school" hip-hop.

"They've shut that door on us," he said.

But how is it that good music fell out of fashion? When I used to jam to Whodini, I could listen with my mother in the car. If I did listen to 50 Cent or the Ying Yang Twins, I'd be too embarrassed to play those songs around my mother or father.

All of the cursing and explicit sexual lyrics aren't what hip-hop's all about.

Hutchins said when he sees how people catch a vibe during a Whodini show, it makes him feel like it's the 1980s all over again.

"I wouldn't trade it for the world. It's like being born again," he said.

Hutchins said he and his Whodini mates would love to record another album, but "it's too awkward right now. Radio guys don't have a slot

See OLD SCHOOL/2D

THEATRE REVIEW

'Gridiron Gang' way too sugary for football flick

By Cheris F. Hodges

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"Gridiron Gang" is based on a true story, but I find it hard to believe one man can be that preachy.

The movie, which was number one at the box office, tells the story of a California juvenile detention camp probation officer, Sean Porter, (Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson), who along with officer Malcolm Moore (played brilliantly by rapper Xzibit), turn a group of hardened teen felons into a football team Mustang Football.

Of course, no one wants to



PHOTO/COLUMBIA PICTURES

The Rock stars as probation officer Sean Porter.

play the murderers, drug dealers and gang members. But in one of the best scenes in the movie, Moore talks Christian high schools into giving his players a chance.

In the next four weeks, Porter and Moore have to whip the boys into football shape and teach them how to spell Mustangs.

Of course, there are some life lessons taught along the way. Porter finds himself treating the kids the way his father treated him when he played football, which wasn't good.

Rival gang members are now teammates and they

have to put their historical hatred aside for the good of the team.

This movie was supposed to be gritty and powerful, but it was more sappy than anything else. Yes, it did make you feel good to see these guys change from hard core criminals to kids who wanted to do something with their lives and be known as winners. But how many times did you need to hear it over two-hours plus?

Much like "Friday Night Lights," the football action was good, but playing the race card was a little too much for my tastes. It seems like in

every football movie, some big white defensive player has to call a running back or wide receiver the "N" word. Is that really necessary? It seems very trite when it's done and I didn't like it.

As for the movie as a whole, I don't know if it was supposed to be as funny as it was, but there were several laugh out loud scenes that I don't think were supposed to be written that way. The Rock has a natural comedic ability that I think stems from his WWE days. I kept waiting for him to ask, "Can you smellllll what The Rock is cooking?"

Lionel Richie's 'Coming Home' - but he misses the mark



Lionel Richie
Coming Home
Various producers
Island/Def Jam Records

but in this century, it falls a bit flat.

"Coming Home" may signify his return to R&B - the lite version, not the stuff he did with the Commodores - but it pales in comparison to his mid-'90s "Louder Than Words." That CD was largely ignored and this one will be ignored, too.

It's not that Richie isn't trying hard. He's enlisted the help of a number of talented people to help - Chuckii Booker (he lives!), Jermaine Dupri, Raphael Saadiq, Rodney Jerkins and Dallas Austin. But even they can't hide the

fact that Richie is pushing 60 and these songs may be better served by a younger artist.

To his credit, Richie can still sing and handles all the material pretty well. He just doesn't sell the songs as well as he could, say 15 years ago. He is singing better songs than the stuff on his previous two CDs, but that wouldn't be much of a challenge.

There are some songs that make you glad Richie did this project. "I Call It Love" is the kind of song that made the man famous. Its hook is memorable and the overall tone is lovable. "Sweet Vacation" is

a bit more of a stretch, but is a finely-crafted tune by Saadiq and Richie.

Unfortunately, something like "Up All Night," quickly spoils the mood. No matter how much hair dye and makeup is used, the fact that Richie is waaaaay too old for a song like this can't be masked.

Richie's fan based will be pleased he's still a viable artist, but those wishing for "Just To Be Close To You," "Brick House" or even "All Night Long" will still wait. He hasn't come that close to home yet.



Ratings

Classic; ☆☆☆☆☆

Excellent; ☆☆☆☆☆

Good; ☆☆☆☆☆

Fair; ☆☆☆☆☆

Why? ☆☆☆☆☆

No stars - A mess

Lionel Richie's latest work would have been something special at the end of the '90s,