

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

# Ice-T's message defies big-label logic

**Ice-T**  
O.G. — Original Gangster  
Warner Bros.

Black.  
Black and big.  
It used to be "right on," but now it's "fly" and "dope."  
One of the most timely recordings by a black performer was released this summer. It thrusts rap further, employing conscientious, provoking messages delivered in up-to-date lingo on top of meticulous samples, killer grooves and house-crunchin' beats. Pardon the jargon, but ya better get used to it — it's part of the revolution taking place in black music, particularly rap.  
Knowledge reigns supreme.  
Not everybody understands the implications, but everyone in an evolving set of "thinking rappers" (including Brand Nubian, Public Enemy and Paris) knows how to say it. They may differ in the catch-phrase used to express it, but it's the notion that counts.

Similarly, the different genres of this school of rap thinking teach and preach for the black man as equal, or as superior, or as different, or as divergent — but always, as a contender.

Take two, De La Soul and Ice-T. The former are witty and sly, subtle and smooth. They don't overbear, impressing with iambic pentameter, obscure yet hip samples and trademark beats.

Ice-T, whose core is as hard as the inside of a golf ball — and seemingly as complex — comes from a different 'hood. And it's hard to believe he's not for real. His music is state-of-the-art and makes you feel like he really wants to kick your ass just for listening to it.

But Ice-T is not about vulgarity. He's about the truest rendition capitalist-consumer society can provide to portray the most vivid grit-blood-violence-poverty-cruelty-blasphemy-mental-hysterectomy images it's been dealt, and for good measure, mass-marketed like hell.

Ice-T's fourth LP, "O.G. — Original Gangster," defies most logic found in the big-label industry these days. It has 24 tracks, most of which repeatedly use the words "fuck" and "shit," in various contexts. He would probably be considered vulgar and repulsive by almost anyone. Does he care?

See for yourself: "Fuck the police, fuck the CIA, fuck the FBI, fuck Tipper Gore, fuck Bush and his crippled bitch. I told ya, ya shoulda killed me last year," he wincos on the last track.

Can you say "freedom of speech?" That was part of the title of Ice-T's third LP, released in 1989. But "Original Gangster" is tougher. It bites into flesh like an Uzi. That's the effect Ice-T wants. He's very calculated in all the outrageous no-holds-barred language and attitude he smears in your face.

He's a smart man, and a rich man, and a nice person, and an ex-convict, and well-endowed and angry. No, he and I didn't have lunch last week — but all this and more he candidly reveals on the album.

The chemistry of Ice-T and his production unit Rhyme Syndicate is ground breaking. Tracks like "Mind Over Matter," "Straight Up Nigga," "Midnight" (yet another cop of "When the Levee Breaks") and "Escape from the Killing Fields" combine Ice's most intense lyrics and deliveries with the LP's most sophisticated and danceable beats.

On "Escape..." Ice-T scoffs at and blames the black man for thinking his place is in poverty in the ghetto. "Shut up, do you know/ How dumb you sound?/ That mentality/ What keeps my people down./ No one wants to/ Live in an urban war./ You live there 'cause/ Your parents were poor./ They live there because/ theirs were also./ Get yourself together/ Hit the gates, bro!"

Ice isn't dissin' his own race. But he's not giving the benefit of the doubt just because someone's black if they're not willing to try making things better.

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● — wait for the video  
●● — go to the dollar theater  
●●● — only pay matinee price  
●●●● — pay full price  
●●●●● — take your sister, too



Ice-T in 'Original Gangster' mode

## Layton Croft Music

The special ingredient to Ice-T is the (supposed) fact that he's been to hell — and now he's back (making millions) to tell us it's right in our own backyards.

If not in our own backyards, in his. In south central Los Angeles.

"Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous" is indicative of Ice's lack of pretentiousness. He gives a day-in-the-life scenario of a star, saying it's hard, but he wouldn't trade it for the world. He also says he's rich as shit and loves to have money. This theme also ties in on "Straight Up Nigga," where Ice boasts

being a "Nigga," a term in his dictionary of distinguished pride.

"Nigga," to Ice-T, encompasses labels deemed more suitable by society, like "African-American," "black" and "colored," in one word. He aligns with fellow "niggas" for the sake of race.

But then the Ice-T twist.

He justifies the stereotypes of a black person from the area he's from — thief and criminal — saying that stealing was exemplified by white settlers, who snatched everything away from Native Americans.

He's got a point. Ice-T is flamboyant, disgruntling, explosive, compassionate, focused and pissed the fuck off — all in his own right.

Believe the hype.

# Connells score a victory at amphitheater

"And if it crumbles all around us, then we'll wait and see."

Despite the ever-present, doom-filled prophecies of their most unmerciful critics, things haven't come close to crumbling for the Connells. On the contrary, the Fourth of July proved to be the group's biggest concert ever, as it headlined the opening night of the Hardee's Pavilion at Walnut Creek Amphitheatre in Raleigh.

In many ways, it was a dream concert for the Connells. Rarely do champions of college pop music, despite their inspiring and often exhausting sound, get the chance to perform at 20,000-seat outdoor arenas on starry holiday nights.

But on July 4, the Connells got the chance to play the role of the all-American, center-stage band. No matter how out-of-place the group may have looked playing on the mammoth stage (people with lawn tickets could barely make out the players), you couldn't help but be excited for the members — and wish that all successful bands trapped between prime-time MTV and the underground could have the same chance. It's a bit of dream that's usually shattered by the myth, money and excess of "popular music." But on this night, North Carolina decided to give something back to its favorite next-door-neighbor band. The Connells got to play the Rolling Stones, as thousands of giddy teenagers danced in the aisles and young adults piled onto the grass seats carrying blankets and beers.

As the lights went out, giant TV screens showed the members walking single file from the dressing room onto the stage. As they faced the thou-

## Charles Marshall Concert

sands, they seemed undaunted, opening their set with the glorious tunes "All Sinks In" and "Speak to Me," from their *One Simple Word* LP.

But after the opening riffs, there were what seemed to be traces of nervousness. Missed or muffled guitar phrases were briefly apparent, and Doug MacMillan's vocals were a bit restrained and began cracking earlier than usual, although this could have been due to the normal live grit displayed by pop's preppiest punk child rather than by big-stage jitters. But despite minor imperfections in transferring club anthems to center stage, the Connells' set was consistent, tough and, to say the least, bold.

One would expect a band in the Connells' shoes to adapt its set to a new bigger-than-life environment by playing some of its most popular material first to earn an early stamp of approval. But "Scotty's Lament," and "Hats Off," (which were left off entirely) were replaced by "Set the Stage," "Over There" and "Upside Down." The band was almost seven songs into the set before the members finally let their guard down, playing *Boylan Heights'* quaint charmer, "Choose A Side," only a moderately huge anthem of sorts.

MacMillan also didn't lose his down-home spontaneity. Between songs, he didn't hesitate to entertain the crowd with his trademark a cappella samples of '70s pop hits. And during a brief solo, he broke a string on his seldom-used acoustic guitar. Without skipping a beat,

he stopped the song, abandoned the guitar, apologized and jump-started the band back into its set.

Guitarist George Huntley got to sing some of his flattering melodies, like "What Do You Want," and "Sal." "Motel" was a nice surprise as an encore, but his best songs to date, "The Joke" and the perilous "Home Today," were sorely missed.

Also sorely missed were some of *One Simple Word's* most enlightening tracks, like "Too Gone" and "Another Souvenir." While the big stage gave the Connells the chance to test the sheer stadium strength of rock anthems like "Something To Say," and "Stone Cold Yesterday," (which ignited blazes of energy and frenzied the crowd), some of the most moving and poignant numbers proved to be the quietest, like the mellow acoustic version of "Hey Wow" and the country-punch combo of "Get a Gun."

The band's well-deserved encore closed with "Sat Nite USA," the fierce rock song whose sweating chorus had to be written for live performances on nights like these. But whatever rush the band had worked by the closing ended abruptly. The lights turned on quickly and the fireworks went off.

But it was a victory on both sides. The Connells were given a big chance to show off a brief history of an enormous pop talent for a rather large audience and a gorgeous new amphitheater. And North Carolina responded with 11,238 delighted fans who danced, drank and sang along. A courageous and uninhibited presentation — the only flaws were a few missing songs and seats that allowed some to see less than they would at the Cradle.

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