

SPOTLIGHT



Sen Dog and B-Real

CYPRESS HILL

The hip-hop pioneers are back in business and ready to rock

CYPRESS HILL DIDN'T INTEND TO WAIT so long between albums, but the pioneering Los Angeles rap group had some business to attend to between 2004's *Till Death Do Us Part* and the new *Rise Up*. Among other things, the foursome toured abroad, worked on solo projects, changed management and switched record labels. "We revamped everything, and it took longer than we thought it would," says Sen Dog. "Luckily we came out the other side ready to release a new album and take on the world again."

Rise Up features an array of high-profile guests, including singer Marc Anthony and guitar heroes Slash and Tom Morello. "There's a lot of people, especially rock 'n' roll people, that want to get down with Cypress Hill," asserts Sen Dog (given name: Senen Reyes). He says that he, fellow MC B-Real and DJ Muggs have a long history with rock. "Before we were into hip-hop as kids, we were listening to rock 'n' roll and punk-funk and heavy metal," he says. "It all became part of Cypress."

The genre divide isn't the only boundary Cypress Hill has broken during its more than two decades together. It was the first rap act to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 albums chart, and the first Latino hip-hop act to sell

more than a million records. Its 1993 hit "Insane in the Brain" crossed over to the pop Top 20. Milestones like these have helped Cypress Hill make an indelible influence on hip-hop's new generation. "When other artists tell you, 'I started rhyming because of you,' or 'I started DJing because of you,' that's when it means something to me," Sen Dog says. "That's when I pay attention. That's when I think, 'OK, we have done something important.'"

On *Rise Up*, the band, which since 1994 has also included percussionist Eric Bobo, was more concerned with re-establishing itself as a musical force. The songs came easily—so easily, in fact, that it took the group by surprise. "There was no difficult stage, no writer's block, nothing like that," Sen Dog says. "We've had very stressful albums, where I didn't care to be in the studio making them. That was not the case with this."

There's no overarching narrative thread on the album, though Sen Dog says there is a theme. "This album is to signify that Cypress Hill is back," he explains. "We're back in a strong way, and we're not just back for one record. We're here for the foreseeable future."

—Eric R. Danton