

DIDDY

Good hip-hop producers create hot beats, beats you can dance to, rhyme over, remember.

Great hip-hop producers, however, create a sound. They have a point of view.

If you didn't know that before, you will definitely know that now, once you catch any of the fourteen tracks that make up Press Play, Diddy's dazzling new Bad Boy/Atlantic Records release. As Diddy and guest stars Ciara and Big Boi intone on "Wanna Move", it's a CD that will get you high on music while you enjoy the vibe.

And it's a new vibe, indeed. Combining all the artistic influences that have defined him as a hip-hop fan, artist and producer over the years, Diddy has done something artists always tell you they intend to do, but rarely actually accomplish: He's taken it to the next level, creating a sound that might best be described as New Wave-meets-Hip-hop, sexy electro-pop with a urban street beat. Like hip-hop has always been, it's a riveting mix of the new and the old. But Diddy does something with the music cutting edge of musical forms; it sounds like nothing you've ever heard before, massaging the ear as passionately as it shakes the ass.

It's been five years since The Saga Continues. And the saga is indeed continuing. In the five years since that last release, Diddy has upped his moguldom to unprecedented levels, adding fragrance producer, Broadway actor, marathon runner, and television producer to his growing list of accomplishments. It would be easy for the man to rest on his laurels, to release a CD that plays on the same Diddy template that made him a global superstar. He's taken his years

of experience and created a sonic experience that breaks new ground while it sustains the Diddy mystique.

“I originally started producing records because I wanted to make people dance,” he says. “And I’ve been quietly working on this for the last two years, taking everything I’ve learned over the years, from growing up in the 70s, to being out in the streets in the 80s listening to hip-hop and watching how it affected my culture, to the 90s, working with Uptown and Bad Boy. Add to that all the experience I’ve had traveling and being exposed to all kinds of sounds, it was time to rekindle the thing I loved. I’ve achieved a great deal of success, but music is my passion.”

On its surface, Press Play is a love story, a sly romantic tale of two people who meet, seduce each other, fall in love, and then experience the inevitable pain of that love breaking. But underneath that, Press Play is the tale of a dreamer, a helpless romantic who’s balancing the dream-state of his passions with the passions of his dreams coming true. In other words, what happens when you have access to everything you ever wanted and yet you still want to grow? In its wide-reaching breadth of sounds and moods, deep in the sexy staccato of the keyboards and the snare of the blaring horns that heighten the grooves, you can hear the sound of a man on a mission to create something new.

Which is why Press Play might be the best possible name of Diddy’s new CD. Because what happens when you “press play”? Not only are you kicking in the beat, getting the party started—whether it’s in your basement or your SUV or your iPod—but you’re also refreshing the sound, starting from scratch, opening up new possibilities, allowing a man to fully express himself. And that’s part of Diddy’s aim this time around.

The tracks on Press Play span the realm of Diddy expressing himself. There a clutch of straight-up party records, like the sensuous single “Come to Me” and TRACK 3, which comes on like gangbusters, like the hottest soundtrack from the greatest blaxploitation hit never made. But some other tracks might surprise people with both the level of vulnerability and depth Diddy brings to his lyrical ruminations and the fiercely nuanced creativity of the sonic landscape. Check out TRACK 9, featuring Mary J. Blige, which is nothing less than a beautifully percussive hip-hop version of the Blues. TRACK 7, featuring Timbaland, mixes deep house cheekiness with a hip-

hop sensibility, creating a vibe that transcends both, sounding like it's of the 80s yet not from the 80s. The Future is almost a political statement, detailing aspects of what Diddy calls the Afro-American dream that's as uplifting and powerful as it is dazzlingly danceable. These are the themes currently close to the heart of a brotha who's black, rich and dangerous and yet still wants to make an impact and create a moment with the rhythms and rhymes that he sends out into the world like his children. Special Feeling is the best Prince track Prince hasn't made in years, a horny, corny slice of wry the percolates with jazzy freshness. TRACK 10, featuring a guest vocal by Brandy, plays like Coldplay or David Gray lost in a hip-hop funhouse of sorts.

Sounds like nothing you've ever heard of, right? Sounds like an impressively broad-based mélange, right? Something you need to experience? It is.

Mainly because Diddy is a man who grabs big chunks of life to create his own experiences, who yearns to share that experience with a world that, frankly, hasn't seen a great many Diddys in its midst. The best thing I could have done, he says, was to step away for a while. While I was away from making music, I was able to fall in love with a lot of other genres of music but still love hip-hop. What I'm bringing this time is a level of experience. The resume speaks for itself, but sometimes I think people actually forget that I've worked with everyone, from Sting to Aretha Franklin to Mariah Carey to Barry White to Ice Cube to Biggie to Snoop to Jay . Z. I got something outta that, it's not just poppin' shit. Imagine getting to work with all those incredible people, imagine touring all over the world. You gotta take something away from those experiences. I hang out in Harlem, I chill below 14th Street. I go to hip-hop clubs, techno clubs. All that is gonna go into you and if you're not producing music at that time it's living inside you, so when I decided to get back behind the board and produce a new record, it all felt fresh, it felt new, it felt exciting.+

Ultimately, says Diddy, Press Play is inspired by the movements of bodies in dark after-hours spots all over the world, those sexual, sensual places where the music is the beat but the vulnerability of meeting someone new and dancing with them for the first time offers up all kinds of possibilities. He knows how that sounds, that some folks might think he's going soft in his later days. But a brotha like Diddy's not concerned. Hip-hop, he admits, is so macho that it's rare

someone says they're gonna embrace the sensual side of the music or the romantic side or the provocative side; being completely vulnerable. But I'm embracing that and how it can be aggressive but it's almost romantic. That's life. And that's love. And Press Play reflects all that.+ He adds, "It's the perfect fusion of sophistication and gutter and that's who I am. We can do a waltz or I can smack the shit out of you. That's just real talk. I can make love to you or we can go into some S&M.+"

As long as it all makes you want to move. "You know how you feel when one of my records come on," Diddy declares. "You feel like you don't even need to know the latest dance, the record will just make you move to it. And you don't wanna dance by yourself either, you wanna move with a young lady or a guy, feel that vibe. You know what I'm sayin?+" We sure do. We most certainly do. Just Press Play.

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