

Pioneer Rap Mogul is Back in a Big Way

Written by Robert ID1161

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Although the 'official announcement' will be later today at a press conference scheduled for 11:00 a.m. in New York; it seems that Russell Simmons, the rap and hip-hop music mogul, has renewed his ties to the Island Def Jam music division of Vivendi Universal, which houses the pioneering hip-hop rap label he created two decades ago.

Mr. Simmons has struck a deal to start a new label, the Russell Simmons Music Group, as a joint venture in partnership with Island Def Jam, a New York-based arm of the Universal Music Group.

Mr. Simmons's employment contract with Island Def Jam, a leading rap label, ended several months ago, and there had been speculation he would exit, particularly after a change in the division's top ranks, reports the NY Times.

"I've got new speakers in my office and I'm excited," Mr. Simmons said in an interview. "I want to give them records that will sell."

Mr. Simmons disputed industry chatter and published reports suggesting that he doubted the rap pedigree of Island Def Jam's chairman, Antonio Reid. Mr. Reid, known as L.A., had been appointed to the job last year after the unexpected exit of Lyor Cohen, Mr. Simmons's longtime business partner. Mr. Simmons, a co-founder of the Def Jam rap label, sold it to Universal Music in 1999, but he has been particularly protective of its image because he runs an array of other business ventures, including mobile phones and a comedy series - under the Def Jam name.

"We never, ever, ever had a beef publicly or privately," Mr. Simmons said of Mr. Reid. "I only wanted that Def Jam would be a greater support system than all the others. I want to work for L.A. in whatever capacity he wants. I'm proud of what they're doing with it."

Since Mr. Reid took the reins, a series of longtime Def Jam executives have departed for a Universal rival, the privately held Warner Music Group, where Mr. Cohen is now chief of the domestic music division.

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Mr. Simmons said he decided not to follow them and house his new venture at Warner Music in part because he believed it would be easier to run his other Def Jam businesses while working in the Universal fold.

Under the three-year deal, Mr. Simmons expects to release several recordings he has had in the works, including a rock record from Reverend Run, who is Mr. Simmons's brother and a former member of the hip-hop rap act Run-DMC, and a record from a pop and R&B trio called Buddafly.

[Source](#)