

Hip-Hop Now Has Bad Boy Latino

Written by Keith ID1283

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Hip-hop entrepreneur Sean "P.Diddy" Combs is venturing into the Latin music world with Bad Boy Latino, a new label the famed producer has launched with Cuban-American Miami rap artist Pitbull.

The new venture took off Wednesday night with a party at Miami's Bongos Cuban Cafe. It was a hip-hop shot across the bow of the Latin music world, in Miami in force for the Billboard Latin Music Conference and tonight's Billboard Latin Music Awards.

"It's gonna focus on Latin artists and the fusion of what I do marketingwise . . . to embrace the movement and take it to the next level," Combs said. The producer said his label, with offices in Miami and New York, will be about half Latin rap artists, as well as Latin soul and tropical music.

Combs' involvement gives new legitimacy to the burgeoning success of Latin hip-hop, says Pitbull, whose debut album M.I.A.M.I.: Money Is A Major Issue, has been certified gold.

"With Puffy involved, it helps our movement," said Pitbull, who will be involved in signing artists, marketing and running the new label.

The company hasn't yet signed any artists.

"Whether people see it as him jumping on what's hot -- I see it as someone with vision who sees where music is going," Pitbull said.

Pitbull spoke Wednesday after the East Meets West panel at the conference, which brought together some of Latin hip-hop's biggest stars at the downtown Hotel InterContinental.

They included reggaeton artist Daddy Yankee, whose latest album has sold 800,000 copies,

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and best-selling urban regional duo Akwid, who jump-started a California movement mixing rap and Mexican regional music. They spoke to a packed room, emphasizing the excitement over a hot-selling genre that has taken many in the Latin music establishment by surprise.

""It's one of the fastest growing styles in the world -- it can't be ignored,"" Combs said. "The combination of what I do with hip-hop and [Hispanics"] reflection of what's going on in their lives . . . means we can make a lot of hit records together.""

Combs said growing up with Hispanics in the Bronx and living in Miami, where he has had a part-time home for a year and a half, had given him insight into Latin music and culture.

He'll be appearing on the Billboard Latin Music Awards tonight. ""I was always embraced by the Latin community and have been embraced by them,"" he said. ``It's a little more than a business opportunity.""

Combs' involvement could give a major boost to Latino rap, which has yet to be fully accepted by the broader hip-hop world.

""Combs is here to take it to the next level,"" Pitbull said.