

The Game More Imitator Than Trailblazer

Written by Robert ID804

Monday, 31 January 2005 23:57 -

For decades, hip-hop has been all about what's next. Innovation and personality have been the lifeblood of an art form that keeps evolving at a rate far faster than any other style of pop or rock music.

But the most hyped hip-hop album of the new year scraps that commitment to moving forward by looking back. In the space of eight lines on "The Documentary," the title song from his No. 1 debut album, West Coast rapper The Game alludes to albums by hip-hop stars The Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, Tupac Shakur and Nas.

When he isn't chasing easy money and easy women or bragging about his gangbanger past, The Game (a.k.a. Jayceon Taylor) offers the rap equivalent of the History Channel. "The Documentary" (interscope/aftermath) is the latest in a line of highly hyped hip-hop debuts, following in the Dr. Dre-produced, multimillion-selling footsteps of Eminem and 50 Cent, both of whom deliver cameos. The Game sees himself in that lineage, not only paying copious Alistair Cooke-like homage to his esteemed predecessors, but envisioning a bright future for himself: "I'm gonna be here for the next 10 summers."

The Game's self-confidence is never in question. But what he brings to hip-hop besides knowledge of its past remains in question. The production on "The Documentary" is impeccable, thanks to A-list sonic architects such as Dre, Kanye West and Timbaland. But the ostensible star of the show sounds like a B-level gangsta retreading the mean streets of his heroes, and name-checking their accomplishments when he runs out of rhymes.

Framing "Westside Story" as a veritable recruiting ad for his wayward lifestyle, The Game repeatedly references a near-fatal shooting in a drug deal as proof of his street credibility. Just as Chris Rock once turned 50 Cent's "shot nine times" litany into a comedy routine, The Game threatens to turn into a "shot-five-times" self-parody before his debut is even through.

Money, however, can buy even the most ordinary voice a hit, and few expenses were spared in turning "The Documentary" into a singles factory. West drapes "Dreams" in orchestral drama, and provides ironic context for The Game's golden-age reveries as he riffs off Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Vulnerability and a hint of innovation -- could this be the first hard-core rap track to reference Lamaze class? -- surfaces on "Like Father, Like Son," in which The Game documents the birth of his son with all the fervor he normally reserves for icing a

The Game More Imitator Than Trailblazer

Written by Robert ID804

Monday, 31 January 2005 23:57 -

thug. And the pop thrills bubble like champagne on "Hate It or Love It," with the radio-tested 50 Cent smoothing the way on the choruses.

For all the sizzle in the soundscapes, a distinctive identity never fully comes into focus. When Eminem guests on "We Ain't," The Game answers by emulating the rapper's rapid-fire delivery. Left on his own, his flat, impassive voice lacks the flair of hip-hop's finest MCs. One of the album's underlying themes is the return of the West Coast sound that ruled the charts in the early '90s, with rap artist like NWA, Cube, Snoop and Dre. But The Game can't do much with it other than express his indebtedness to "The Chronic" and hype his hardness. Right now he's more of an imitator than a trailblazer.

But The Game's advocates might say that he sounds soooo good reliving the past. Who knows? "The Documentary" may just do for gangsta rap what "Happy Days" did for the '50s, with The Game as the thug-life answer to The Fonz.

[Source](#)