

The 2005 Essence Music Festival have booked some of urban music's brightest new stars for Essence magazine's 11th annual "party with a purpose," set for July 1-3 in the Louisiana Superdome.

Joining Aretha Franklin on the main stage the first night will be contemporary R&B singer, songwriter and pianist, Alicia Keys; John Legend, the nouveau soul singer whose 2004 debut was among the most acclaimed R&B albums of the year; and "American Idol" crooner Ruben Studdard. Franklin returns for the first time since the festival's inaugural year in 1995.

On July 2, Destiny's Child returns for the first time since 2001. The trio will top a roster that also features hip-hop rap artist Kanye West, veteran R&B singer Teena Marie and Fantasia.

On July 3, Frankie Beverly and Maze will close out a night that includes 1980s hitmaker Lionel Richie, who's making his first Essence appearance; comedienne and actress Mo'Nique, and crooner Kem.

The 2005 festival will kick off a yearlong celebration of the 35th anniversary of Essence magazine, a lifestyle publication aimed at black women.

The event rarely features rap, and organizers have said the violence depicted in much gangsta rap is inappropriate for the Essence audience. But West's multimillion-selling CD tends toward spiritual discussions and more progressive outlook.

In the festival's "superlounges," a similar mix of old and new will be offered. The Roots, a Philadelphia hip-hop group, will make its Essence debut July 1. Also performing that night will be pioneering hip-hop duo Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh, soul singer Bobby Bland, vocalist Vivien Green and R&B singer-songwriter Lyfe.

The July 2 superlounge bill will include hip-hop duo Floetry, R&B group Mint Condition; veteran singer Jeffrey Osborne and bassist Me'shell Ndegeocello.

Essence Music Festival 2005

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On July 3, jazz trumpeter Terence Blanchard will showcase material from his "Flow" CD, scheduled for release June 7. Joining him will be singers Carl Thomas and Regina Belle, rap artist Talib Kweli and reggae group The Wailers.

In addition to the night concerts, Essence stages free daytime empowerment seminars at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

[Source](#)