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The Artist Previews His 'Joy Fantastic'

TODAY'S NEWS

DAILY MUSIC UPDATE
 THIS DAY IN MUSIC

FEATURES

- ALBUM REVIEWS
- ARTIST OF THE DAY
- HOT PRODUCT
- SITES + SOUNDS
- ASK BILLBOARD
- VOTING BOOTH
- RIAA CERTIFICATIONS

CHARTS

- BILLBOARD CHARTS
- CHART BEAT
- THE CHALLENGE

RESOURCES

- NEW RELEASES
- TOUR SEARCH
- CLASSIFIEDS
- INDUSTRY EVENTS
- BILLBOARD STORE
- ABOUT BILLBOARD



The Artist

"Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic," the forthcoming set by the Artist Formerly Known As Prince, mingles soul and funk with rumbling bass, frenetic beats, and ballsy rock. Or so was revealed yesterday, when the NPG album, which will be released Nov. 2 and distributed worldwide by Arista, was previewed at an invitation-only event in New York hosted by Arista president Clive Davis.

Multiple guests join the Artist on the 18-track, 70-minute set, including Chuck D. The Public Enemy front man contributes freestyle raps and shout-outs to "Undisputed," which Davis said referred to the Artist and Chuck D's belief that the other was "the undisputed greatest [performer] in the world."

No Doubt's Gwen Stefani duets with the Artist on "So Far, So Pleased," a guitar-driven rock number, while the Artist teams with Sheryl Crow on the barroom blues ditty "Baby Knows." The Artist also offers a cover of Crow's "Everyday Is A Winding Road" as an unlisted bonus track.

Ani DiFranco guests on acoustic ballad "I Love U, But I Don't Trust U Anymore," which chronicles an unraveling love affair. In a style uncharacteristic of the Artist, the tear-jerker is built on meandering piano phrases and features him and DiFranco singing in vibrato.

James Brown saxophonist Maceo Parker is the star of "Pretty Man," an old-school funk jam about a vain fellow who gets his comeuppance.

Other tracks on the set include the title cut, which the Artist wrote and recorded in 1988; it boasts an electro-funk rhythm that recalls his "Purple Rain"-era work. "The Sun, The Moon, & The Stars," which begins with the skittish drum'n'bass beats associated with Missy Elliott producer Timbaland, segues into reggae phrases toasted over by a MC.

Smooth R&B number "Man O' War" follows a relationship gone sour, while "Hot Wit You" is a bump'n'grind booty call.

Among the songs not played at the event were "Tangerine," "Strange But True," and "Silly Game."

The first single from "Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic" will be "The Greatest Romance Ever Sold." The love song, which features a string section and scratching, among other accoutrements, will be issued Sept. 28. Two takes of the track will be included on the set: the album version and a remix featuring Eve from Ruff Ryders.

The release of "Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic" will mark the first time since 1996 that the Artist has been associated with a major label. Prior to that, he had a short-lived deal with EMI following many years at Warner Bros. Records.

The Artist's arrangement with Arista specifies that he will retain ownership of his master tapes, a point of contention in the Artist's former major-label dealings.

The Artist's future plans call for him to re-create "New Master" editions of his entire 17-album Warner Bros. catalog, as well as perform at a New Year's event at an undisclosed location. He also is planning a world tour.