

STUDENT LIFE

Ja Rule lives to fight

By Jim Farber
New York Daily News
(KRT)

Don't cry for Ja Rule. Yes, the rapper has experienced the kind of year that could make Bill O'Reilly's look enviable. But he insists, "I wasn't out somewhere whining and crying. I just had to make sense of it all. I really didn't understand what came at me."

Especially since it came from so many different directions.

In 2003, this one-time hip-hop giant who racked up four multiplatinum albums between 1999 and 2002 found himself embroiled in the biggest beef this side of Peter Luger. In interviews, mix tapes and official releases, he battled it out with 50 Cent, then the top new rapper around.

And he was losing badly. In February 2003, 50 humiliated Rule on the fastest selling CD of the year, "Get Rich or Die Tryin'." It labeled Rule a fake gangsta who had imitated Tupac Shakur, and who sold out rap by turning it into pop. Powerful associates of 50, including Eminem, Dr. Dre and his G-Unit posse, also ripped into Rule.

At the same time federal agents began an ongoing investigation into Murder Inc., the record company that launched Rule. It accused the label of being funded by drug money.

Then rumors began to swirl that Rule was splitting with his wife. The two, who married four years ago, have known each other since high school in Hollis, Queens, when Rule was known as Jeffrey Atkins. They have three children, ages 1, 3 and 9.

He asserts it all came about because the fans

"were misled. They were told lies and they believed them."

Now Rule is trying to set the record straight and revive his badly wounded career with a new album, "R.U.L.E.," which hits stores Nov. 9.

On the CD, Rule, 28, deals with all his struggles. Rule issued "Blood" one day after giving a highly publicized interview with Minister Louis Farrakhan that was meant to deflate the escalating beef between him and 50. Fans heard only encouraging words from Rule in the interview, but the rapper says he did vent during it.

"They spliced it up," he explains. "In the minister's defense, they did that because he thought it was better for hip hop to show no negativity."

50 Cent didn't show up for his half of the pow-wow, which Rule says "was disrespectful to the minister, and to hip hop."

But many hip-hop fans wound up blaming Rule for participating in a peace talk one day, then putting out a war-mongering album the next. They called the whole Farrakhan talk a PR stunt.

As for his label's troubles, Rule says its workers have had a hard time dealing with them. Last year, the company changed its name from Murder Inc. to The Inc.

Rule claims the switch was not a reaction to the investigation.

Though The Inc. remained firmly on Rule's side behind the scenes, in public he toughed out his problems alone. Some loyal fans wondered why no other rappers came to his defense. Rule claims some wanted to, but he told them, "I'm going to do this as a lone soldier, to make an even stronger statement about myself."

Celani to perform in Bruno's

Rising pop sensation lets you hear 'them apples?'

By Teresa Nicolai
staff writer

Up and coming musician, Scott Celani, is scheduled to perform at Behrend this Saturday at 8:00 p.m. in the Reed building as part of his tour. His music is a smooth rock-pop mix that will guide listeners to a state of happiness and rhythm.

According to Celani's official website, all of his performances offer "a powerhouse of guitar, rhythm and melody" over which his listener's can melt. His show is likely to be presented in one of two ways: acoustic or with a full band.

Although Celani's musical career officially kicked off in 2002, he has been performing in the United States and Canada for quite some time. His music has earned air time on radio America and received a great deal of praise.

Celani has produced two albums so far in his career, however they are generally considered to be EP's. (An EP is a record that is either too long to be considered a single release or too short to be called an album.)

Celani's website recalls the release of his first solo debut, in conjunction with Toronto record producer, Brent Bodrug, of the B-Group Music, titled "Them Apples." The event, held in September of 2002 in Buffalo, brought in close to 600 people and convinced Celani to spend 2003 touring the Eastern United States to promote his record.

"Them Apples" was a starting point for Celani and his fame. That year, the song, "Where Did you Come From?" was played on some radio stations up to 40 times a week. His hard work and success

even landed him with the Award for Best Solo Acoustic Artist at the 2003 Western New York People's Choice Awards.

Those who heard his first EP have been anxiously waiting for more of Celani's fresh, smooth and pleasant-sounding vocals. Luckily, the artist has come through with his new record, "Saturday." Buzzle.com comments on the album's maturity in comparison with his first release. Dougless R. Esper of DomainCleveland.com tells fans that the themes of the songs circle around seasons, times, nature and other emotional ideas.

Still, Celani dazzles his audience with his classy, generally acoustic vocals. Buzzle compliments Celani saying, "He sings strongly with warmth, assurance, and a melodic pop sensibility that so many artists are lacking today."

The new album highlights Celani on lead and background vocals as well as guitar. His band includes six other musicians individually concentrating the areas of lead guitar, keyboards and programming, bass, drums and percussion. The mix of sounds gives the EP an "energetic burst" and is almost guaranteed to leave you wanting more.

The seven track CD clocks in at a mere 23 minutes and 35 seconds of listening pleasure.

DomainCleveland.com reviewers suggest that those who enjoy the sounds of pop-rock bands such as Vertical Horizon, Our Lady Peace, Guster and Jump Little Children are likely to enjoy the glossy, story-telling songs of "Saturday."

Those interested in finding out where Scott Celani will perform next or obtaining other information about him can visit his website at www.scottcelani.com.

Lay the Smack Down with 'WWE SmackDown vs. Raw'

By Nick Hammond
staff writer

THQ's wrestling games are always evolving and changing as it straddles the line between trying to satisfy die-hard wrestling fans and just trying to be a good fighting game. This year's PS2 game is a pretty big step in the right direction as a lot of the big features fans have been clamoring for are finally in the game.

The "SmackDown" series has always been known for its surprisingly fun, deep story mode - a pseudo-RPG with a WWE theme. This year's big change is honest-to-goodness voice work from pretty much every wrestler in the game, even Vince McMahon which adds a ton to the authenticity.

You're also able to more clearly define your role as a face, a good guy or heel a bad guy, and actively use your managers to your advantage during a match; for instance, having her grab a chair for you and distract the ref so you can properly use it. The game also lets you create custom championship belts, which can be transferred from memory card to memory card if you manage to beat the current holder in a match.

Nearly all of the gameplay changes made to this year's game are assorted ways to try to capture the proper flow of a real match. Nowhere is this more exemplified than in the little in-match minigames.

At the beginning of a match, you'll frequently find yourself faced with a stare-down contest, a test of strength, or a shoving match. These are all controlled by specifically timed button presses that ap

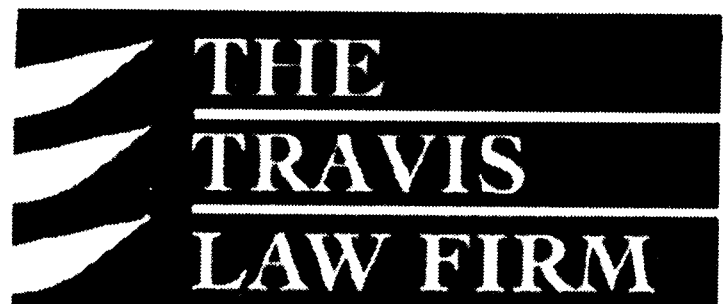
wn, you simply have to press X at the right time and you'll get the always important first strike. The meter swings upward to signify power for your shove, and then it swings back downward, challenging you to hit the X button at just the right time for maximum effectiveness.

There's also an exact copy of this meter for the ever-popular chop battles you tend to see during real matches, which have been translated here very nicely. You'll encounter a new spanking contest (strictly for the divas, of course).

These little games can be turned on or off in the game's options menu, but we didn't find them to be intrusive, and instead thought they added a little more flair to the matches. That flair meaning "style," not flair meaning Ric Flair. If you want to add a little more Ric Flair to your matches, yes, he is a notable character.

The next big thing is, of course, head-to-head online play, though you can't bring the belt online (yet). The fighting engine handles a lot like that of the last game with some tweaks to the grappling system, but the presentation and feature set is the best THQ has yet to offer.

Have a story idea?
Email the Behrend Beacon
behrendbeacon@aol.com



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Grant C. Travis, Esquire

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