

## STREET SCENE



Celebrating release: Kid Rock will play songs off his latest album "Early Mornin' Stoned Pimp" during his show at the State Theatre in Detroit on Friday, Dec. 29. Kid Rock's talent has earned him a spot in the Walk of Fame at the Metro Music Cafe in Royal Oak.

## Rapper Kid Rock wants to do it all

BY TODD WICKS

**SPECIAL WATERS**  
Just like Deion Sanders in the Pizza Hut commercials, Detroit rap 'n' roller Kid Rock wants it all.

A local superstar whose notorious debut "Grits Sandwiches for Breakfast" (Jive) and the single "Yodanis in the Valley" became underground classics in 1990, Rock also fronts heavy redneck rockers Twisted Brown Trucker, and is determined to make both careers succeed.

"I've had offers from every label," said Rock recently, "and they're all like, 'Which one do you want to do?' I say, 'I'm gonna do 'em both. I wanna do a Kid Rock album and then do a Twisted Brown Trucker album, and I'll tour wherever the markets are right and promote 'em both.'"

"They say, 'You can't. It's not gonna work.' But I'll do both, cause I know it's gonna work. And if it doesn't, it'll be on my shoulders, and I won't be wondering if it would have worked."

The determined Rock, no Bob Ritchie, has dealt with his share of restrictive record labels. Signed to Jive fresh out of high school for "Grits," he moved to Continuum for the more schizophrenic "The Polyfux Method," but found the atmosphere similarly repressive for his genre-hopping style.

Rock now owns his own label, Top Dog, and finds his new freedom (and the 500 percent markup he makes on albums) better than any major label deal.

"Labels just want you to be one type of thing," he said. "If you're gonna do 'Yodanis in the Valley,' they want you to do 12 'Yodanis in the Valley'-type songs, and I can't do that. My background is too diverse. Growing up, I loved every (kind of) music."

If he didn't use his influences, he said, he wouldn't be making the music he likes, he said.

Rock's influences are diverse, to say the least. Artists he has sampled or covered range from the Smiths and the Rolling Stones to Jim Croce and Hank Williams Jr.

"(Labels) think I'll alienate kids by doing a country song and making it really heavy, even though I'm doing it just for myself. They say, 'You're gonna alienate all the rap kids who are into you, they're not gonna understand.' Well, they don't need to be into it if they won't understand it. I can't open their minds up a little bit."

"Early Mornin' Stoned Pimp" (Top Dog), Rock's new release, combines with the eclectic rap 'n'

roll favor of "Polyfux" and his "Fire It Up" EP. Featuring local blues artists the Howling Diablos and Thoretta Davis, along with hardcore rapper Esham, songs like "Classic Rock," "Detroit Thang," and the title track have the beats to satisfy old-school "Grits" fans and the guitars for alternative metal fans who latched onto the popular "Bullgod" single awhile back.

Rock hopes local radio will give "Stoned Pimp" a shot, especially after passing on his earlier rock-based material before the alternative wave hit.

"I had always played around with guitar, bass and drums. I can play a little bit of everything," Rock said. "For 'Polyfux,' I got some players to come in and did a little more of that rap 'n' roll thing before a lot of people were doing it. The Beatles did it on their first album and then kind of got away from it. Then all of this 'Judgment Night' (soundtrack featuring songs recorded by rappers and rockers) stuff started, after I'd already done that and been doing it for two years, which baffled me."

"When I came out with 'Fire It Up' at a lot of stations wouldn't play it at all... then, a year later, they were playing 'Rage Against the Machine,' and now (rock station 98.7) WLZZ is playing the Beatles, which... it kind of sucked," he laughed.

"I was like, 'Man, I should've waited and put it out a year later.'"

But Rock doesn't have the greatest track record with radio stations. In 1993, a New York college radio station played his explicit "Yodanis" late at night and received a \$23,750 fine from the FCC — reportedly the largest college radio fine in history. Rock was quoted at the time saying, "Let people decide what they want to hear. I'd rather have kids a little twisted than sheltered."

Now that "Stoned Pimp" is out and Twisted Brown Trucker is on the back burner, Rock is focused on the business end of things releasing the album locally first. Rock and Top Dog plan on a national release and publicity blitz in January.

"We just signed a national distribution deal. We've got a full-blown thing going with this independent label. We've got a lot of plans — doing some touring in February, releasing the new Howling Diablos record. I'm helping (local bluesman) Robert Bradley mix his new album for RCA... I've got my hands in a lot of people's stuff," Rock said.

BY MARK GALLIO

SPECIAL WRITER

When one thinks of an independent recording studio, it's often visions of a garage or a converted storefront that come to mind.

For Larry Santos, one of the most familiar voices in America via his enormously successful career as a commercial singer, it began with the construction of a home recording studio, one which quickly overtook his basement a decade ago.

According to his son and chief engineer, Scott Santos, the current home of what has grown to be Overture Music was built with the future — and the past — in mind.

"We started at the house, with a studio in the basement. I remember when it was just 2 track," he said of the family-owned business's auspicious beginnings. "This facility (however), was built to be a recording studio and office."

An imposing and impressive structure, the 2500-square-foot tri-level building in Novi is at once beautiful and functional. A grand piano, cathedral ceiling and fireplace dominate the recording area, with the engineering booth overlooking through a glass partition a floor above.

The art department occupies a tucked into a roomy back office, and the reception area, occupying much of the ground floor, is a stunningly appointed grouping of fireplace and plush sofa and chairs, with a small bar to one side and sliding glass doors to another, and the whole of it is surrounded by deep, serene woods. To call it merely beautiful doesn't do it justice.

According to Linda Wilson, director of media promotions, "They decided to build the studio so they would have a home-base to do (Larry Santos's) productions for national spots to have a place for (talent) to come in, without him having to constantly fly to New York and L.A."

Larry Santos's is a voice that you've heard many times over the years singing the jingles of such major-league clients as Budweiser and Bud Lite, GM Truck, Farmer Jack and A&P. He's worked on TV, as well, most notably on "Hot Fudge," but the commercial spots have always been the bread and butter.

Wilson boasts that "the studio was so competitive, equipment-wise," she says, "that nobody had any reason to go anywhere else. That's kind of how it started."

Although Larry Santos released a couple of "Hot Fudge" albums and it was a vehicle for the Oriental Spas, a band fronted by Scott Santos and his sister Laura Ruby, that the record label came to life.

Wilson calls the lineup "pretty eclectic. It's from Professor Longhair, who is in the blues category, to the real hardcore scene with Universal Stomp. We try to get a little bit of everything. As long as it's good, we're interested."

Among the label's current roster are Mary Stuart, formerly of the aforementioned Oriental Spas, who Wilson describes as "psychedelic Americana"; and recently signed Mike Finnegan, a well-regarded, L.A.-based rocker who has worked with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Santana, and who will probably be joined on his upcoming sessions by the likes of Elly James, Robben Ford and Crosby, Stills and Nash pianist/R&B vocalist Scott Stern; and Ann Arbor rockers, Solid Frog.

Detroit-based underground rockers Universal Stomp, who re-

cently released their full-length debut, "Full Swing," for the label have brought the most national attention to the label so far.

A few months ago Wilson said about Universal Stomp's album, "It's gonna be top 10 within two weeks on the hardcore charts. That's my prediction." Her prediction came true. In fact, the band was No. 1 most added on a couple of indie trade charts. Next month, Universal Stomp is set to tour Europe with hardcore upstarts Credo of Thorns.

While Overture handles licensing and promotion of other projects — most notably the John Sinclair-produced "Piano Night At Tipitina's 1994," on which a celebrated panel of pianists convene for the sixth such tribute to the legendary New Orleans master — their collective heart lies in the cultivation of local talent.

"We definitely keep our eyes on the Midwest because that's where we're," Wilson said. "We want to present bands from our home. There's just so much talent in Detroit alone. We really don't have to look too far. A lot of our signings are going to be Detroit signings, because we can work with the artists to develop them here. We can showcase them here. We don't close our doors to anyone, but there's enough here to keep us busy."

Detroit remains an internationally recognized music town, even all these years after the prime of Bob Seger and Motown. Given the recent signings of The Verve Pipe (RCA) and Robert Bradley (Elektra) and the continued success of Sponge, the talent in Detroit re-

mains a national treasure.

"I think that in L.A. and New York is such a pool, such a soup of so many different acts, I think desperation takes a toll, and you do whatever you need to do to get there. I think that there's a lot of pressure to conform. I'm not saying that New York bands and L.A. bands do. I'm just saying that I can imagine that because of the pool of talent, the pressure to conform in order to be whatever is the 'flavor-of-the-month' — that pressure's got to be overwhelming where in the Midwest, I think that as a band you can dream. You can develop your own style and you can make a name for yourself. There isn't that pressure. That's my own philosophy. That isn't necessarily an Overture Records philosophy."

That sounds like the same philosophy that has helped guide the Detroit rock 'n' roll community through 30 years of gritty individualism, yielding the likes of MC5, Big Chief, Iggy Pop, and so many other influential bands over the years. It's a noble tradition based on having style, rather than following fashion. It's about attitude. Overture Records is poised to take that attitude into the future.

Said Wilson, "I'd love to get involved in record promotion and radio promotion, via the Internet."

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