

SPECIAL SPRING FASHION ISSUE: LENNY KRAVITZ DRESSED TO THRILL

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DOWN WITH THE KING

While most rappers would rather bow to the almighty dollar and shine with ice, a growing number of MCs are glowing with the light of the Lord. *By Marc Weingarten*

Imagine this scene, if you will: A man in vestments behind a pulpit in a church, arms raised in supplication toward the heavens, invokes the good words that will uplift his congregation: "Yo, we too blessed to be stressed, dog / Recognize I'm pro Christ, I'm fo' Christ / Yo, recognize my dome is full of wise things." No, it's not Whoopi Goldberg in *Sister Act*; it's a line from B.B.Jay's "His Love." This is the new face of Christian hip hop, other-



B.B.Jay

wise known as Fat Gospel and Holy Hip Hop, a sanctified variation on secular rap that attempts to proselytize to unsaved minds using a spiritually and rhythmically charged message of salvation. "We're holy hustlers," says B.B.Jay, one of the genre's emerging stars. "I'm just a fat apostle for the millennium."

Like traditional hip hop, Christian rap has its own star system, media organs, record labels, touring circuit, and stylistic sub-genres. But it's a parallel universe, with acts that mimic the styles of secular rappers, while at the same time attempting to save souls. "There's a need for this kind of music," says Danny Wilson, who runs a Web site devoted to Christian rap called *HolyHipHop.com*. "We're not trying to replace hip hop, but there are some people who are tired of hearing about bitches and hos all the time."

In some ways, the pairing of religion with rap creates vexing contradictions. How does a genre that currently thrives on transgression and the triumph of the garish reinvent itself as a vehicle for salvation? And how do religious rappers reach out and touch mainstream audiences without coming off like pious do-gooders?

"Why do I need to preach to the choir?" says L.A.-based artist Lakita Garth. "There's no point in doing what I do if new audiences don't hear it."