

Hip-hop legends Cypress Hill are back with a new album, new collaborations and they're better than ever, writes **Sally Browne**

CYPRESS Hill's latest album *Rise Up* is a call to arms to their fans.

They may have been lying low of late but the hip-hop group who smoked their way to the top in the 1990s want everyone to know they're back - and that includes their Australian fans.

The crew, including founding members B-Real and Sen Dog, have been busy entertaining crowds on a North American tour, which has been as fun as the old days.

"We're keeping it in motion," says Sen Dog. "By the time we come down to Australia we'll be fine-tuned performing machines."

"The new stuff is going well. We're happy to be out with this new record and giving the fans a new look and letting them listen to the hard work that we put into this album."

"And they're recognising it - people are really feeling the collaborations that we've included on this album and it's something that kids are excited about it, and they're glad Cypress Hill is back and we're glad to be hitting them with a new record as well."



Boys in the hood rising up again

The record features a number of collaborations, such as Everlast, rap star Pitbull, Puerto Rican mega star Marc Anthony, Linkin Park's Mike Shinoda, System of a Down's Daron Malakian and Tom Morello, legendary guitarist of Rage Against the Machine. It was Morello's tune that became the title track *Rise Up*. He and Sen Dog traded ideas when on tour with Morello's politicised side project The Nightwatchman.

"He just asked me what Cypress Hill was up to one day and I told him we were making this album, and that's when he mentioned he had a track for us. And I was like 'yeah, let us get it'. I already knew it was going to be good or else he wouldn't have said anything. So I was, 'give it here, let us get it.'"

Another great song on the record is the catchy *Armada Latina*, which sings the praises of this Los Angeles

group's Latin roots. Pitbull and Marc Anthony guest star. It was Cypress Hill's producer hit-maker Jim Jonsin that arranged the collaborations.

"They're both Miami guys, Pitbull and Jim, so he gets Pitbull to come in. Then he talks about bringing in Marc Anthony, and I was like, 'OK, if you can pull that one off I'll wash your car', you know what I mean? Actually he knew Marc through working with Jennifer Lopez, and he happened to be in LA as well. It was one of those things that came together, like it was supposed to be like that. Marc Anthony came through. We didn't have to ask him twice."

The crew were impressed with the Puerto Rican singer-guitarist's knowledge of hip-hop.

"He grew up in the Bronx so that made it even more impressive," says Sen Dog. "A lot of his favourite stuff that he knew was hip-hop stuff. This dude's the real deal. When I first heard him sing on the chorus I was like, 'OK, this one's a hit, wrap it up, this one's gonna slam.'"

Sen Dog is proud of his Latin roots, but growing up a part-black, part-Hispanic in LA was a difficult road to navigate.

"It was kind of different for me, because I'm Latino but I'm also black, so it wasn't as easy navigating through the hood as if I were to be just a straight Latino person," he says.

"Every now and then I had beef with people because they just didn't like black people no matter what form they were, whether you were Spanish or not. So I kept my circle

tight, of my friends. I hung out with the same kids for the longest. We were a close-knit bunch - knuckleheads that, you know, we weren't really trying to find the trouble, trouble always seemed to find us. And somehow I didn't need to be in certain situations, I came from a good family, but I just wanted to be a street kid and got myself into a lot of situations where violence was definitely around at any time.

"But that's what gave me character, the kind of character that I portray or the kind of character that I am on my records or whatever. If I changed the way I grew up, I don't know if I'd be the same person now."

Since hanging tight with his mates in Cypress Hill, Sen Dog has carved out a path to success, delivering a unique style of hip-hop made famous with a string of hits such as *Insane in the Brain*, *Hits from the Bong*, *I Ain't Goin' Out Like That* and *(Rap/Rock) Superstar*.

In their latest guise, they've been signed to Priority Records, a subsidiary of EMI by none other than fellow rap star Snoop Dogg.

It's tempting to imagine Snoop Dogg, now "creative chairman" of Priority, as a record company magnate sitting behind a desk with a big sheet of paper, but that's not quite how it happened.

"We had a lot of our music made already and we had just started shopping this record for a record deal, when we heard about the EMI-Priority situation. Right as we were getting hip on that, Snoop Dogg was giving B-Real a call and letting him know that he was going to be part of that whole get down right there, that

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he really wanted Cypress Hill to be part of it.

"That made the best decision all the way around, especially when someone like Snoop Dogg wants to have you in their project, that's something very special. I think the fact that he was a California kid just like us, and grew up and was in a lot of the same, similar situations that we've experienced, so we know each other by just being men and what we both came across even though it wasn't together.

"I respect that a lot because we're all southern California kids and we know how crazy it is down here to become something."

Rise Up is out now. Cypress Hill play the Tivoli, Brisbane, on October 1.

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