

Rap Legend Murs Drops 'Murray's Revenge'

Written by Robert ID2388

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Hip-hop's living rap legend Murs is back with the sequel to 2004's critically acclaimed collabo with 9th Wonder, "3:16: The 9th Edition"

"Murray's Revenge" the latest from the hip-hop rap MC Murs, will be released 3/21/06. It features production ENTIRELY by 9th Wonder, of Little Brother fame

MURS is not your average hip-hop rap MC—he's your way-above-average MC. And he knows it. "I don't think anybody out there is rapping like I rap here," Murs says of his blazing new album, Murray's Revenge—his latest collaboration with superstar producer 9TH WONDER. Indeed, it's no idle boast—from Murray's Revenge's manifesto-like opener "Murs Day," the Los Angeles born and bred MC anoints himself "the one chosen to break up the ice that got the rap world frozen," and he doesn't disappoint. For one, after a staunch career in the indie trenches, Murray's Revenge is Murs' first release on LA based record label Record Collection (The Walkmen, John Frusciante) after two albums on the legendary "undie" label Def Jux; for another, he doesn't swear or use the n-word on the whole record—not that he doesn't address ill topics. "My thing is saying things that nobody else will say, and saying it well," says the rapper whose name may or not be an acronym for "Makin' Underground Raw Shit" or "Most Underground Rap Sucks." "I'm dying to say what no one will ever say."

Murray's Revenge follows the runaway acclaim of Murs' last album, 2004's instant classic 3:16—The 9th Edition (Def Jux). 3:16 was Murs' first collabo with studio supercat 9th Wonder, who first gained fame as beatmaster for revered North Carolina underground group Little Brother and then blew up with "Threat," his slammer off Jay-Z's The Black Album; since then, 9th has made his name with tracks for overground superstars (Mary J. Blige, Freeway, Memphis Bleek, M.O.P., Destiny's Child) and underground heroes (Buckshot, Jean Grae, Saigon). The combo of Murs' lyrical virtuosity and 9th's crate-digging, soul-sonic mastery put 3:16 on numerous year-end top 10 lists, including Urb's "Best of 2004," receiving rave reviews across the board.

"3:16 is how an album should be done," praised Complex; "A well-rounded LP, fueled with the synergy of good rhymes and dope beats. Rappers and A&Rs take note," XXL's review stated, putting the album at "XL" status; "Murs delivers a musical treasure that bridges hip hop's dissimilar subcultures," VIBE wrote; "An appreciation for the heart, humor and no-bullshit directness of the very best in hip hop is all that's required," said Alternative Press. Indeed, over 9th's packing-more-heat-than-the-oven-door tracks, Murs dropped immortal rhyme gems that would become some of hip-hop's most debated verses. 3:16 repped Murs' diverse verbals, from

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identity-questioning songs like “The Pain” (where Murs claimed he’s “more Coldplay than Ice-T”) to the controversial, racial-debating real talk of “...And This Is For” (“I feel I should have the same scans white rappers have”). Murs’ contradictory, Ice Cube-meets-“Daisy Age” flow always flips the script here: even 3:16’s talk-like-sex anthems “Bad Man” and “Freak These Tales,” like Murs’ hero Too Short, prove both nasty and lyrical.

“I’m not of the impression that 9th brought something out in me that wasn’t there,” Murs says of the pair’s electric chemistry on 3:16, reprised on Murray’s Revenge. “I don’t think I bring out something new in him either, but when he works with someone, he just brings out the best in them. Our bond is strong—we make a good match: he’s different from a lot of producers and I’m different from a lot of other rappers, so we make great music together. When a great musician gets to work with a great musician, it’s always going to be great.” Murray’s sequel to 3:16 almost didn’t happen: Murs was slated to delve deep into his West Coast origins on a G-funk based project with his friend, the L.A.-based producer 45, who worked with Murs memorably on the soundtrack to his Walk Like A Man DVD project. Then 45 passed suddenly, tragically, the victim of a drive-by shooting. “I didn’t know what I was going to do,” Murs says. “Then everybody started jumping on 9th’s dick.”

“I was the first underground rapper, other than Little Brother, where 9th produced their entire album,” Murs states today. “My album did really well critically, so people were like, ‘If I get 9th, my album will do the same thing...’ Murs even addresses the relentless post-3:16 “questioning 9th about chopping vocal samples” on Murray’s Revenge’s standout track “Murs Day,” claiming he’ll “chop you in the throat until you choke on the answer.” “Success is the best revenge,” Murs says, “so I thought ‘Let’s do it again.’ But when we got back into the studio I wasn’t trippin’ of the fact that everybody is trying to make a record with 9th.”

With two strong-headed artists determined not to repeat themselves, those arguments centered around the direction of Murray’s Revenge. Per a request from Murs’ mom, there are no cuss words on the album, evened out by a more measured attack. “Everything is all really slowed down—there’s no ‘Walk Like A Man’ on this album,” Murs says. “And there’s nothing dirty or explicit like ‘Freak These Tales.’” Instead, 9th and Murs worked together to make the best of both worlds, West Coast and South, merging their individual experiences like Voltron. “I wanted to make Death Certificate, but 9th wanted a more ATLiens vibe,” he explains. “I wanted to make something that was so angry and anti-establishment that it was both anti-white and anti-black, too. 9th, meanwhile, wanted to do something weird, but not too weird, and ATLiens was the perfect example. That album hit before OutKast went all the way left: it’s downtempo and mellow, but there’s a vibe about it. On Murray’s Revenge, we came out somewhere in the middle.”

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The middle is where Murs likes it: it's where the unexpected shit really goes down, and that's Murray's Revenge to a "T." Then again, Murs has always repped the unexpected, riding the line between, say, DJ Quik and Q-Tip, where Devin The Dude meets Def Jux; on the comfortably conflicted "Got Damned?" off Murs' 2003 album *The End of the Beginning*, he admits he's "too street for the sheltered underground fan, too intelligent for play on your FM band." CMJ once noted that "Murs is the unwaveringly determined, charmingly conflicted link between punk rock and Tupac," and it's not for nothing *The Source* once bigged him up for "having the gall to remake Tupac's "Ambitionz Az a Ridah" into an ode to skateboarding." Indeed, Murray's Revenge captures Murs transitions and ambitions as a writer; still, even though he quotes Sublime on "Yesterday, Today" on the new album, Murs states assuredly 'this is not 'Murs the punk rocker' record. But if my white fans can still feel Tupac and Anticon, they'll feel this album."

Indeed, for Murray's Revenge Murs found inspiration bugging out on the concept of old soul, both figurative and literal, black and white—a perfect complement to 9th's head-nodding vintage sampladelica. In advance of writing rhymes, Murs found himself absorbing the musical lessons of everyone from Johnny Cash to classic funk auteurs. "I try not to bump any rap when I'm writing," Murs says. "I always take just three or four records with me when I go to North Carolina to record with 9th: this time I had Marvin Gaye's *Live and What's Goin' On*, Curtis Mayfield's *Anthology* and a *Parliament-Funkadelic* album. I was bumping Curtis the whole time. Man, he just told it like it was! That's where I got the literary point of view."

In the past, Murs' rhymes have always been brutally honest about himself, revealing a past as a one-minute brother and a depressed pill-popper. Murray's Revenge, however, moves away from Murs' raw confessional style. Just as Tupac (2Pac) could flex split personalities, dropping both "Dear Mama" right next to "I Get Around," here Murs blurs documentary and fiction with new savoir-faire flair, displaying his greatest gifts yet as a storyteller. A kinda conscious joint like "Murray's Law" (where Murs notes "I'm done with the rifles, the Teks, the nines, the killers, the psychos/Now can we party, and I want a Shirley Temple because I don't drink Bacardi") up against the appropriately-titled chick rap "Sillygirl." And somehow it all makes sense. "'Pusherman' is not Curtis Mayfield's story, but he made it vivid," Murs says. "This album is more bluesy, more country and western—not in sound, but in narrative. Country and western people tell you about their day, but with a twist. Johnny Cash is the perfect example: his biggest song, 'Folsom Prison Blues,' is about being in jail for murder, but he never killed anybody; still, he makes you believe it. I can do that, because I've been in those situations."

Indeed, the album reps a complicated style Murs terms "post-G," like on the heartbreaking album centerpiece "Dreamchasers," where the lyrics depicts the everyday influences of hardcore ghetto life told from the perspective of Murs as a young boy. Elsewhere, on "Dark Skinned White Girl," Murs explores identity conflicts in our conflicted day and age (and

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manages to rhyme “Morrissey” with “Jodeci” to boot). “‘Dreamchasers’ is about all my different experiences, but I switch it around and add a ‘what if?’ at the end,” Murs explains. “‘Dark Skinned White Girl,’ meanwhile, has nothing to do with me, but it’s a situation I’ve observed closely, and I’m able to convince people I’ve been there.”

Murs’ “post-G” perspective represents a complex life lived in between two worlds, a black rapper with more white fans than brown, born in the ‘hood but not doomed to it. Most of all, “post-G” reflects the split personality of the beloved L.A. “Mid-City” hood that spawned him—a place that’s considered “Beverly Hills adjacent” when they’re trying to sell real estate, but South Central when a gang banger gets popped on the block. For Murs, it’s always a Mid-City state of mind. “To me I’ve making the same album my whole life,” he says. “I would love to beat your ass, but I don’t want to kill you. I have that anger and street energy, but I’m still educated. I wear Hurley and Chuck Taylors, but get my underwear from the Slauson swap meet. I used to sell weed, but I wouldn’t ever sell crack. I used to ride a skateboard and carry a gun. I’ll do graffiti, but I won’t gangbang. I have friends in jail, but I don’t want to do that. That’s me.”

On some level, Murs attributes the growth displayed on Murray’s Revenge to his role in the “undie” superstar collective Felt, alongside Minneapolis microphone fiend Slug and beatmaster Ant from the dynamic duo Atmosphere. “To me, Slug is one of the best rappers alive technically,” Murs explains, “His delivery and the way he studies rap, Slug actually taught me the ‘science’ of rap—how to count bars officially. He helped me to use negative space, to let the track breathe: now I’m playing with the beat and spacing out the lyrics more. When I came out of this last Felt album, I was like, ‘I can write my ass off now.’”

A rapper since 1993, Murs finds that each of his seven-odd albums finds him mastering a new principle in the rhyme spectrum: “My first album, F’Real, I mastered freestyling. I’m one of the best freestylers in the world; that album was me getting all my energy from battle raps out on a record. The next album Good Music was about writing lyrics hooks and songs; the next was about delivery, breathing and working on concepts. Murs Rules The World was like concepts mixed with structure. Varsity Blues was about putting emotion into my music, trying to leave L.A. and get off the block. End of the Beginning was like, okay, I’m going to work a bunch of different producers and show everything I can do: I started the album with a song that was 135 bpm, because nobody does 135 bpm songs, while the first single was 70 bpm, with two 24 bar verses and a hell of an eight-bar hook. That’s why I called it The End of the Beginning—because it was the end of me learning all I could do.”

Enter 9th Wonder, stage left. “3:16 was a magic record because it had an exceptional producer and I’m close to being an exceptional rapper,” Murs says. “I’ve been telling the same story, with

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the same candor; I've just never had the production that matched the quality of my lyricism. We're both really good at what we do, and our paths crossed at the right time in our careers, and that's what's magic about it." In fact, Murs connected with 9th before the producer caught his big break with Jiggaman himself. "Give me my credit—I planned to work with 9th before he hooked up with Jay-Z," he laughs. "In fact, 9th called me one day, like 'I just met Beyonce and Jay-Z. But I'm not giving your beats to Jay—don't worry.' I was like, 'Shit, give Jay all of my beats!'"

The 9th phase is just another milestone in the multifaceted career that's Murs' world. Since the dawn of his rap career, Murs has done it all. He's collaborated with everyone from Aesop Rock and Atmosphere to Shock G and Z-Trip; he's toured the world from America to Australia to Japan and back again (Murs performed over 200 shows in 2004 alone, and appeared on the Warped Tour as a guest of Atmosphere); on the activist tip, he and Danger Mouse collaborated on the Genocide in Sudan benefit CD, bringing in everyone from Jurassic 5, System of a Down, Yoko Ono, Jill Scott, Gorillaz, and X-ecutioners, among others. He got his start in the beloved underground collective Living Legends, and remains affiliated; he'd also spread his lyrical seed in renowned backpack crews like the 3MGs and Netherworlds.

After six-plus albums on the indie underground circuit, and two albums alone on the great Def Jux, Murs has signed to Record Collection—a typically iconoclastic move, as he's the only rapper on the label, home to the more typical likes of indie rockers the Walkmen and singer-songwriter Mt. Egypt. "I'd done the indie hip hop thing already—I've set the flag down on independent hip hop," Murs explains. "Now it's time for someone else. I was really into the whole indie idea of owning your own masters and controlling your destiny, but then I thought about it. Who owns Death Certificate? Who owns Straight Outta Compton? Does it matter? No—those albums still affected peoples lives. If I can get out there and affect more people's lives and have the benefit of owning seven albums beforehand... I've won."

Murs' move to Record Collection is not just about being an artist, but blowing up his role in the game, period. To that end, Record Collection has brought him on not only as an artist but as an A&R consultant for their growing urban music division. Murs' first release overseen as an A&R is the Atlanta based group Supreme. "They're two young black kids and one white kid from the South, but they don't sound like it—they're like Souls of Mischief with a lot of Jamaican influence," he explains. "All I want to do is be able to give dope musicians opportunity—and get paid for it."

And that's not the end of Murs' plans to take over the universe. Aside from the extensive touring and promotion of Murray's Revenge, Murs has contributed two songs to Madlib's next project,

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and appears on 9th Wonder's much anticipated, upcoming solo LP Dream Merchant; in da club, you might even hear him spit on a drum 'n bass remix or two. And music is just the end of his beginning. For one, there's an endorsement deal with the Hurley clothing company; as well, Murs helped produce and star in the 2005 independent film Walk Like A Man, based on the song of the same name from 3:16 (its DVD release would go on to sell over 10,000 copies). Of late, you can even catch him on TV as a host on the Al Gore-sponsored network Current TV, introducing viewer-created documentaries. Most of all, Murs wants to keep innovating. "I expanded the independent game, I've broken boundaries, set examples," he says. "I've shown you how to tour 200 days a year, I've shown you how to make your own movie with nothing and put it out. This is all part of me living out my dream. That's what's really behind the 'Murray's Revenge' concept: I get to say I'm an A&R, I get to wear the clothes I want to and get paid for it, and I still get to make whatever kind of record I want to. Now, finally, I get what I want."

Some times the good guys do win. As Murs himself says on "Murs Day," "Tell the 'hood that we're back and revenge never sounded so good."

So now you know some background and you know the success and talent that Murs put forth on "3:16: The 9th Edition", so what does Murs think of his Murray's Revenge?

Here is a track-by-track director's commentary through the album by Murs himself:

1. Murs Day

MURS:

"My mother always told me that when you write a paper, you should tell 'em upfront what the conclusion will be. 'Murs Day' is an overview, a personality track that says 'welcome': here, I explain everything that's going to be on this album... well, almost everything. I'm letting you know here that I'm still the same guy: we're not gonna be here yelling and screaming about ignorant shit, but I'm not gonna dis rappers with chains, either. I also had to let people know I was sick about hearing about 9th: since Kanye blew up, people were like 'the vocal style sample of rap is played out,' so before you listen to this album, I'm letting you know there's going to be vocal samples, so don't question and talk shit. I'm cutting off the Internet haters before they can start."

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2. Murray's Law

MURS:

"That's basically like a 3:16 song. It's letting you know I don't drink alcohol, I'm not a gangbanger, I'm not a hustler—I'm a rapper. But I'm not a sucker either—I know what street credit really is, and I still like girls, too. 'Murray's Law' is about defining myself by contrast, like, 'I'll beat you up, but I'm not about killing you.'"

3. Sillygirl (featuring Joe Scudda)

MURS:

"'Sillygirl' is kind of like a 'Bad Man, Part 2.' It's about being stalked. There's reality in there: being a Pisces, I've learned once you get a girl, you have a girl, and they won't leave you alone for at least a good year. Also, when 9th gave me the beat, it just sounded silly. 9th was like, 'I want you to rap a track about silly girls.' I was like, 'Oh, brother.... All right.' The hook is based on an old doo-wop song—I'm a huge early R&B fan, so it was perfect. Joe Scudda guests on the track, and that's my dog: when I first came to North Carolina, we kicked it. He smoked cigarettes, I smoked cigarettes; he likes girls, I like girls. Joe actually laid his verse about a girl who was in the studio at the time!"

4. Barbershop (featuring Big Pooh)

MURS:

"9th was like 'This is your song with Big Pooh'—he even dictated the guest appearances on my album! I never liked that beat; it was a track that really should've made Little Brother's album,

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and Pooh really wanted to rap on it. 9th and I would go to his barbershop every week in Raleigh, North Carolina, and they welcomed me into the family. They would just start talking shit—girls, shoes, sports, religion, food. When you leave the barbershop, you're feeling real cocky—like I feel as good as I rap. That was the concept.

5. Yesterday, Today

MURS:

“Yesterday, Today’ all about the struggle to redemption, the thug putting his past behind him. To me, I was doing a straight Kanye West there: no matter how I tried to rap on it, my flow sounded like Kanye. The hook is actually a quote from a Sublime song. There’s also a deep MC Eiht reference in there that I don’t think anyone’s ever gonna get; on my Kanye West song, I had to represent that I’m from L.A. I also quote “Round The Way Girl’ on there, because LL Cool J is my favorite rapper. LL and Ice Cube are the greatest rappers of all time, hands down—I’ll go to church on that.”

6. Dreamchasers

MURS:

“That’s my favorite—one of the best songs I’ve written. It’s the most autobiographical song on the album: it’s written from the perspective of me talking to you when I was nine years old. It’s about my life—the first verse is exactly how I grew up in the Compton-Lynnwood area. My mom had to move us out of the neighborhood because I was saying ‘cuz’ to her—it was ‘cuz’ everything. I wasn’t allowed to see Colors when I was growing up because I was already living it: I already had a friend who shot himself with a machine gun. We would always pick up twelve-gauge shells in the alley after our big brothers had a shoot out the night before. Most kids sneaked Playboys—we were sneaking issues of Guns & Ammo! That was us. The conclusion is about a friend of mine named Nightmare, who I saw become the ultimate gangsta as we grew up; all of these stories are his. He was chasing the dream, but it’s a dream you can’t maintain: in that lifestyle, death is gonna be your wake-up call.”

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7. L.A.

MURS:

“That’s the first single. I loved the beat but I didn’t know what to write to it, so I said ‘I’m just going to write my L.A. song here.’ No matter what happens to me, I’m from L.A.; shit, every rapper wants to be from L.A.—Dipset wants to be us, 50 Cent, too. I’ve tried to live a lot of places—Tucson, Minneapolis, New York—but whatever happens, L.A.’s my home. 9th loved it: he’s like, ‘You’ve made a true anthem.’”

8. Love & Appreciate

MURS:

“My mom asked me to do more love songs. Actually, when 9th gave me that beat, I wrote a ‘Dear Mama’ song to it, but he told me I can’t do that: he said I have to replace that with a relationship song. I was like, ‘It’s not gonna be true, because the only person I love and appreciate female-wise is my mother.’ He told me to just make something up, so I did. To him, it worked—he says people love it.”

9. Dark Skinned White Girls

MURS:

“The first verse is about white girls, the second verse is about black girls, and the third verse is about the mixed girls. That was supposed to be the ‘Freak These Tales’ of the album—the fucking joke song. I wanted to do it on a more uptempo, sexy beat: I saw it as a DJ Quik-meets-AMG-meets-Too Short-with-a-Will-Smith-comedy feel. 9th was like ‘Naw, you have to make it serious.’ I changed the words and tone around, and it turned into a deep meditation on race. It pisses the black girls off because I start with the white girl verse—they’re like ‘Fuck

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you! How can you stand up for those bitches!' I'm like, 'I'm not—I'm just saying it as it is.' Then the second verse is about the black girls that don't fit in. Doing the kind of music I do, I always meet the one black girl in the room who's into, like, the Cure and Atmosphere; she'll be really cute, and all the thug guys at her school wish she listened to Tupac (2Pac). The black girls that act white are still dark-skinned white girls, because they're white girls on the inside, and vice versa. That's America."

10. Murray's Revenge (The End)

MURS:

"9th made that beat all while I was holding and feeding his four-year-old. I told him I needed another beat for the record, so I held the baby while he made the beat in five minutes. I was like, 'What do you want me to do with this?' And he said, 'This is hot—just lay down the hardest rap you can.'"

Make sure you check this one out. Street release date of Murs & 9th Wonder - Murray's Revenge is March 21st 2006. Don't sleep on it.