

the alternative

There's more to life than Hip-Hop and R&B

Reporting by Anthony Q. Casasnovas

MELENI SMITH

WHO: A genre-blending multi-skilled musician and her "dopest band in the world" consisting of Josh Valleau (keyboards), Nate Jones (bass), Jason Patterson (drums), Eliguitar Menezes (guitar) and Junior Jazz (guitar).

WHAT: We're still not too sure *what* her music is. Some of it is pop, some of it is punk, some of it is reggae and all of it is quite danceable. Meleni has a knack for being sexual one moment (with songs like "Meet Me In The Bathroom" and "Pop the Cherry") to being introspective the next ("God" and "Mr. Smith" being perfect examples). Just like the artist who created it, the music is quite eclectic.

WHEN: She was born on May 5th, 1979 and by age 6 she was infected by music. "My siblings and I were bitten with the bug of music through my 'aunt,' my uncle's girlfriend's sister," Meleni fondly recalls. "She got us harmonizing, doing routines and entered us in local talent shows." Since then she's graduated college and released a few singles — one of which ("Happy") was featured in the Will Smith comedy hit, *Hitch*. Her full-length debut, *Some Kind of Urban* drops this fall.

WHERE: Meleni was born in Flint, Michigan — a town once full of prosperity from automobile production, that later turned into a poverty stricken 'hood. She didn't spend much time in Flint as her family fled to Milwaukee. Following high school she attended college at New York City's Columbia University. Across the river in a Jersey City studio is where she would begin recording her music.

WHY: The reason Meleni Smith started creating music was to sort out and "articulate all the craziness" in her head. Then again, she stresses that at the end of the day, she's just a simple girl. Regardless of whether she's complex, simple or straight-up looney, the reason why you should check out her music is to experience a sound that is difficult to pin-



MELLO-D & THE RADOS

WHO: Darnley "Mello-D" Hodge is a backpack rapper with a slammin' band consisting of Olugbenga on drums; G.B. on keys and Jesse on bass.

WHAT: Remember Stetsasonic? The first self-proclaimed hip-hop band that spawned the career of Prince Paul (see this month's Rap Round-Up for more on Paul)? Well, they started a trend in hip-hop that has yet to *really* take off — the live backing band. Sure, there's a handful of excellent groups out there proving that hip-hop doesn't need to solely be an emcee and DJ (even though, the DJ aspect seems to be missing from many mainstream performances), but the fact is that the only hip-hop band people seem to know are The Roots. Mello-D & The Rados are here to put their similar-styled music on the map.

WHEN: As it turns out, though you're only probably hearing about this group for the first time now, they've been around for nearly a decade. For the eight complete years they've been on the grind, this group has released three full-lengths (*Backsliding*, *The Ultimate Truth*, and their latest, *Antitainment*) and have actually reached the tops of college charts.

WHERE: Mello-D and his crew hail from the Washington DC/Virginia area. But this hasn't kept them from expanding their popularity worldwide. In addition to playing in the states, they've also toured in Europe and South America — actually garnering a following in Brazil where they've aired videos on MTV.

WHY: For starters, more hip-hop bands need the fame and glory that The Roots have (though, they're still not as *major* as they'd probably like to be). The Rados are doin' their dang thing and Mello-D is an intelligent rapper who's dedicated to the ways of the Native Tongues — comin' smooth with hip-hop that's free of all the nonsense you see on MTV. That's probably why they've shared stages with the likes of KRS-One, the Cocoa Brovaz, Jill Scott and many, many more. "It's an appeal to the consciousness and humor of the listener without being silly, preachy or redundant," says Mello. "This is relevant music." **BB**

