

CYPRESS HILL'S

New Joint

Hip-hop's trichome triumvirate returns with *Rise Up*. By Justin Hampton • Photos by Steve Payne

Sen Dog is sprawled out on a couch watching ESPN on a flat-screen TV as we enter "The Temple," the multi-room recording studio that Cypress Hill share with Fear Factory. So far, he's the only guy here. "It's weird, because I'm usually the last to turn up to these things," he informs us. Covering the wall behind him are a series of platinum and gold LPs indicating the 20 million units that Cypress have sold worldwide during their two-decade-long career. And positioned prominently on a countertop near the entranceway as the rest of the band arrives are the foremost components to their identity and continued success: two turntables and a three-foot bong.

Here in the 21st century, b-boys and b-girls often forget the role that Cypress Hill have played in enshrining marijuana as a key element of the hip-hop lifestyle. Granted, pot has been a presence in hip-hop ever since the days of "cheeba cheeba, y'all," but Cypress took it a step further with their debut LP in 1991 by embracing weed as a part of their brand—as inseparable from the band's character as B-Real's nasal flow and DJ Muggs's forbidding, gothic production skills. Their second LP, *Black Sunday*, went double platinum and turned the band into international superstars; they also made forays into metal, salsa and reggae, further expanding their fan base. Now, as the first group signed by Snoop Dogg to the revived Priority Records, B-Real, Sen Dog and percussionist/live orchestrator Eric Bobo have resurfaced after a six-year hiatus with *Rise Up*, a diverse, sprawling sonic attack that features production and appearances by Mike Shinoda (Linkin Park), Jim Jonsin (Lil Wayne, J-Lo), Pete Rock, Tom Morello, Daron Malakian, Pitbull, Marc Anthony, and their DJ/producer emeritus, Muggs. As longtime veterans of the hip-hop and legalization scenes, Cypress Hill still have plenty of spit left in 'em, and as an old friend of the band, HIGH TIMES was privileged to get their special perspective on both. So let's do this:

Six years is a long time between albums. Was there any reason you made it now as opposed to earlier, or even a year later?

B-REAL: After our last record [*Till Death Do Us Part*], which was our last record with Sony Music, we decided to just take some time off from doing anything. Our whole career has been: put an album out, tour for a few years, come back, chill for a few months, and start recording again. At the end of that record, we didn't have an obligation to really go back and record an album at any particular time. So we all did our individual projects.

Throughout that time, we regrouped to figure out what we were gonna do when we brought the Cypress Hill camp back together to make the next record—because a lot of people thought we broke up. But really, we've been doing shows sporadically in Europe and here in the States and in between recording. So we've been active, but just not on a tour circuit. And we kept hush-hush about making the record because we weren't gonna go and get a record deal, then work on the record—we didn't want that pressure. We did it when we felt it as opposed to having to force it, and we felt really good about it in the end. So we said, "Okay,

it's time to really get serious and put another joint out there" ... because a rumor *can* come true if you sit on your ass too long.

With *Rise Up*, you've covered almost all facets of the Cypress Hill sound with the exception of reggae. Talk about that.

B-REAL: We didn't really hit the reggae too hard on this one, and I love reggae—but I felt like on this particular record, we needed to get a more raw sound on it; I didn't want it to be so laid-back. So that's sort of the direction that we went with all of the hip-hop stuff and the more aggressive songs with Tom Morello and Daron [Malakian]. We try to make everything a rollercoaster ride, but with this one, we tried to be more up-tempo. We focused on the more hip-hop and metal aspects of what Cypress Hill is, rather than the irie ... because we're always irie, man.

Is Muggs still a part of the group?

B-REAL: Yeah, he's still in the group.

It sounds like his role has changed, however.

B-REAL: Yeah, we still have been working a lot to-

gether. I've been on his Soul Assassins records; he and I are gonna work on something next year, one of his "versus" records. But the man's busy. He's constantly in the studio making beats, so he pretty much let us take reign over this album, and he took on a lesser role. And I feel good about the direction, because we stood within the realm of what Cypress Hill is, but we pushed it a little bit further.

Who is your audience nowadays? What works for them?

SEN DOG: In recent years, with the shows that we've done overseas, we've seen fans that now come to the gigs with their 10-, 11-year-old kids and have them right there in front of them, watching Cypress Hill get down. It's rare when you have a hip-hop band that has that kind of appeal. It's not one particular race, or two or three races—it's a universal thing. And that's one of the great things that I like about being in Cypress: You can touch down anywhere and, in any language, they know how to sing "I Wanna Get High" [laughs].

Obviously, marijuana can unite disparate groups of people, too. Your stance on marijuana hasn't changed, but a lot about marijuana has, especially here in California. How do you see the evolution of marijuana as an above-board industry?

B-REAL: The evolution has definitely been great. Obviously, people want more, but it's a step-by-step process: You can't have it all at once, because there's so many different things that you have to explore before you actually legalize it. Because it's going to affect many things, especially the economy—and that's the best part, because obviously it's in the shitter pretty much everywhere. So they definitely need to get it done. But California is the test model right now, because I think it's the closest state to legalization. Up in Northern California, they have a different kind of model when it comes to the collectives than we do here. [Los Angeles] is looking at their model because it's so much more advanced than what we have. So they're taking pieces of that model

Glass with class.



B-REAL: 'We were asking [Cheech & Chong] if they would host the Cypress Hill Smoke-Out. Chong was like, "Yeah, fuck, for sure I'll do it, on one condition: We get an ounce of B-Real's greenest weed."'

and applying it to a couple of the dispensaries here that have been running the longest—and if that works, you'll see all of the existing medical dispensaries doing what they're doing.

There are already 15 states that have medical-marijuana or decriminalization bills in place. I think if this new regulation works, you'll see a lot of states roll over. It'll turn from 15 to about 35 to 40, I think. The Southern states will be the last ones to roll over—but everywhere else, you'll start seeing everybody implement those bills, because it generates capital for the [state], and the federal tax will get theirs. It's always [a matter of] trying to convince the conservatives and the religious voters that it's the right thing to do—and I think if the test models work, it will be more convincing. But we're going in the right direction. I believe that California will be the first state to legalize marijuana, if it happens.

Here in LA, they've estimated the number of dispensaries at 1,000. The City Council wants to narrow it down to about 70.

B-REAL: I don't think that's gonna happen. They're going to have to doctor in more collectives, because that would be ridiculous—some people would have to drive 50 to 100 miles to come get medicine. You don't have to do that for

any other goddamn prescription drug; you can get them at a fucking Rite-Aid right down the street, or a CVS. They're cutting the revenue stream in half anyway if they do that. They just don't know how many collectives there actually are, and how much marijuana those collectives hold—so they're trying to get control of that, so that they know nobody's making money under the table.

It's like prostitution in Nevada: You have it legal in some places, but that doesn't stop a black market.

B-REAL: No, because people are paranoid: "I don't wanna be on a list, man, fuck that!" [laughs] But you gotta get out of that way of thinking. Look, we're born, we've got a Social Security number ERIC: You're *already* on a list.

B-REAL: You're on a list from the day you were brought in. *Fuck*.

On your YouTube page, B, you favorite some Alex Jones videos, and you also recommend William Cooper's *Behold a Pale Horse*—both infamous conspiracy theorists. They're known for inveighing against the system, yet we're asking the same system to legalize marijuana. What do you see when you look at the power structure? Do you agree with Jones and Cooper about it?

B-REAL: A lot of it's very possible; some of it's



B-Real puts his mola where his mouth is.

true, some of it's a little unbelievable. So you just kind of gotta weed through it yourself—no pun intended—and see if you can see any of this stuff that these guys are talking about. And I think people have seen some of these things that these people spoke about in their books and lectures. And I think that's why the movement is so much bigger than what it used to be. Now, on YouTube, there are so many conspiracy videos on there for everything, man—and some of it's far-fetched, but some of it is true. And I think that's why they let so much of it be out there, so you can say,