

Rad - Ical

EAST BABE **RAD.** IS STILL CHASING THOSE MOMENTS OF MUSICAL NIRVANA. CHRIS WELLS MAKES EVERY SECOND COUNT.



Rose Ann Dimalanta, a.k.a. Rad. [with the dot, incidentally], is waiting in the lobby of a Camden hotel ahead of her Jazz Café show. She is accompanied by band member Eric Leeds [the sax player of Prince and Madhouse fame] and her husband/producer Michael Kirsch. Since it's only lunchtime and they're not due on stage until close to midnight, they have several hours to fill - very little of which they'll be spending in the hotel, since they have already checked out. After the gig they'll jump into the bus and head off for the ferry to France, and another gig the following night in Mannheim, Germany, followed throughout May by five more shows across Europe.

This is, of course, what it's like for most band leaders on the indie soul/funk circuit, albeit in this case one with a recently arrived daughter to look after too: she needs to get behind her new album, take her music to the people and hope to pull in enough support along the way to make it all work. Above all, she's still driven by the desire to be able to put herself in that adrenalin fuelled musical moment on sufficient occasions to feed her addiction. Rad. is also a band, after all, and it's the playing together, whether live or in-studio, that makes it worthwhile for all who participate.

Rad. has been a band since 1992, of course, and now has six albums and many thousands of road miles to prove it. *East Babe*, the superb latest CD, comes some six years after the last studio set *Make Every Second Count* and is, according to Rose, the one that reflects her Oakland upbringing the most.

"We have done concept records before, where there is a theme for the whole album, but on this one... well, we had traveled a lot, and this one was a little homage to my area. These days you can be in Istanbul and make a record that sounds like Diddy. So my husband and I wanted to make this record in our dialect, if you like. That's when I am in my element. This album has the strongest influence from back home. You can hear Tower Of Power, Sly... some people say Prince too, but that's not really in it for me."

Rose played with Prince's band from mid-'93 until the spring of '94, which is when she ran into Eric. The two discovered a mutual love for Latin jazz, and that's led to the saxophonist joining up with Rad. for a while.

He's an interesting guy, Eric, given to understated delivery of vast philosophical

"OK, I'm sure there is some music out there that I would find cool, but I'm not interested in chasing it. I spend more time looking back at, say, old Lester Young albums.

"So it's impossible for me to have any real objectivity. Music making is different now. For me, you chose an instrument and then learned how to play it. It's not like that now. Hip-hop, for example, is more about a person who has musical instincts, and then makes a record driven by other objectives. It's not a player's thing. For me it's about playing together with people in a room, for the moment."

Rad.'s first couple of albums, *Radified* and *Gotta Be*, were released on Soulciety Records, an indie in which Kirsch had an investment. Thereafter they formed their own label, 7 Bridges, and have run things pretty much by themselves. Those entering the Rad. story at this point might want to start, after falling in love with the funky, live feel of *East Babe*, as far back as '97's *Higher Plane*, recorded at the legendary Fantasy studios in Northern California, and 2001's *Make Every Second Count*, the latter commonly talked of [until now] as Rad.'s strongest all-round set. Every one of Rad.'s releases, however, comes equipped with that famous East Bay vibe - allowing the soul, funk, jazz, Latin and rock to blend and percolate as the mood changes. It isn't - and hasn't ever been - designed to hit urban radio. But it does inspire a dedicated following amongst those who put uninhibited musical fusion near the top of their wants lists. Acknowledges Rose:

"I don't have the largest audience, but I know

"We don't need another Mariah Carey..."

statements on the subject of music when the mood takes. For example, when I asked if 'real' musicians like those in Rad. felt the division between what they do and how the glossier, major-label end of the industry worked, he mused:

"I have to say that I have spent very little time with people who just push buttons in studios... so that right there may be the answer to your question! But I have to be honest with you here: at my age now I am not very interested in music any more. By which I mean, I think it has all been said: the entire vocabulary of music was finished by the late seventies/early eighties. I haven't had a radio on in 20 years. I don't follow pop music.

that those who do come have listened to Tower Of Power, Prince maybe, Sly Stone... those kind of people. I don't want to make music for the masses. I want to make music that challenges with musicians that challenge me.

"As an artist I'm fiercely independent. I hear advice all the time about what I should be doing, but I don't want people to craft the musical statements I want to make. It's not about making a track for the radio. On this new album we have a track that's 12 minutes long. That's what we wanna do. The people we reach are the kind of people who really want to find us. We don't need another Mariah Carey... talented as she is, of course."

Oh, of course. ●