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## X:144 & SPS M.E.

Nonsense Records; 2006



Let's not kid ourselves; hip hop owes just as much of its success to its image as it does to the caliber of its musical output in 2006. Hence, we have product endorsements galore, a minimum of three aliases per artist's moniker, and a veritable army of those who equate "keeping it real" to "keeping it familiar," rehashing the same old that we've been hearing for years now. If there is any resistance to such thinking left in music today, it makes sense that it would be found in the self-affirming mission statement of an album title as simple as *M.E.*

Based out of Orlando, emcee/producer X:144 and turntablist/DMC champion SPS tackle such weighty issues on their debut, making for a listening experience that is at once claustrophobic yet thought-provoking. The ever-fluctuating production throughout the album is a producer's wet dream, characterized by hard drums and murky synth/keyboard lines, coupled with the occasional dark guitar riff. SPS's approach to Djing showcases a refreshing musicality that's sadly absent in most popular hip hop today, treating the turntables as an actual instrument and not just a backdrop for the emcee.

X:144 is the type of emcee that often tends to squeeze excessive amounts of syllables into the space he's given, but his words are delivered with a sense of passion and drive that convey a sense of urgency and staunch awareness of identity. Whether addressing the divergence of morality versus success in a corrupt industry on the scratch-driven "What If?" or declaring his hip hop mission statement on the funky stomp of "3 Degrees of Ventilation," X proves himself to be an accomplished emcee with impeccable breath control and charisma that holds the attention of the listener. For less apocalyptic content, the jazzy bounce of "Almost" deals with an impaired relationship, while the uplifting determination of self-expression delivered in the key-heavy "Last Voice" provide a welcome change of pace.

In the end, X:144 and SPS have crafted an album that is based wholly on love- love for the essence of hip hop culture,

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love for creative expression and the truth that stems from it, and love for music. In doing so, they have created a unique and explosive piece of art, a rarity in today's current climate. *M.E.* is driven by an indisputable energy; the content may not always be immediately digestible, but the package that contains it infectiously demands repeated listening.

&8211; Sean Kantrowitz

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