UPTOWN

Fall 2008

Listen Up

Tunes from hip-hop's brainiest producer turned artist and two who went back to the future.

RYAN LESLIE

Ryan Leslie *Ryan Leslie* (Universal Motown)

Boundless ambition plus impeccable credentials plus insane natural ability. It's the tried-and-true formula for next-generation leaders in any discipline (don't we know it, Mr. Obama?)—and so it is for 29-year-old Ryan Leslie, who *New York* magazine dubbed, "the Harvard hip-hop hustler." Leslie graduated from the Cambridge institution at just 19, and promptly went about his plan to seize the hip-hop/R&B impresario mantle from his mentors Sean "Diddy" Combs and Tommy Mottola. When he came out of nowhere with Cassie's hit, "Me & U," the strategy was in full effect. He recycles that track's smooth synthesized harp line for his own sexy single, "Addiction," which mixes in a verse off ex-M Dubwell Quinn's "I Can't Help It." Leslie drives harder

Raphael Saadiq *The Way I See It* (Columbia)

Saadiq's first studio effort in four years is more than just influenced by the music of the '60s and '70s, it really is that music, save for the new millennium release date. Its straight-out-of-Motown tambourine-shaking soul shines on the doo-woppin' "Sure Hope You Mean It" and the Stylistics/Delfonics musical doppelgänger "Oh Girl." But for all the old-school groovin', the standout is the album's most contemporary track, "Never Give You Up," buoyed by a breezy Stevie Wonder harmonica solo. (On sale September 16)

Another '60s-inspired release (what hath Joss Stone wrought?), this effort from B's baby is practically oozes sugar. But just try to keep from bopping to the feel-good earworm of a single "I Decided," written by Solange and Pharrell Williams and produced by The Neptunes. (On sale August 26)

—*C.E.W.*