

Nelly to headline Star Party at Myth

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.

"Country Grammar" is coming to the Twin Cities when hip-hop mega-star, Nelly hits town this coming Friday, May 17, performing at KDWB's (101.3 FM) Star Party.

With his latest single, the heavily pop sounding "Hey Porsche" in constant rotation, the St. Louis rapper has proven his staying power, remaining a fan favorite for more than a decade. The Grammy award-winning recording artist has shown he is willing to expand his musical horizons and is not afraid to take chances ... even if it may alienate some hip-hop purists.

"When people say I don't sound like I used to sound, well how did I use to sound," asked Nelly, who released his first album, "Country Grammar" in 2000. "'Country Grammar' (the single) doesn't sound like 'E.I.', 'Pimp Juice' doesn't sound like 'Dilemma.' 'Dilemma' doesn't sound like 'Over and Over' so when people say I don't sound the same, I never sound the same."

The international star said he never wants to be placed in a limited box.

"My goal when I got into this game was to be number one on every radio station, I don't care what format it is," said Nelly. "That's how I've been able to be in this game for seven albums and for 14 years. It's about keeping yourself relevant."

Undoubtedly, many female fans coming to Myth in Maplewood, are as taken with the rapper's handsome looks and chiseled body as they are with his music. The hip-hop icon said he's still not comfortable with his role as a sex symbol.

"I don't think you ever get used to something like that," said Nelly while laughing. "I definitely appreciate it. For me, 70 percent of my fans are female, so I definitely appreciate the love they show me."

Being easy on the eyes, transitioning to television and film seemed a natural progression for Nelly, who began rapping with his fellow St. Lunatics, Ali, Kyjuan, Murphy Lee and City Spud. The sing-style rapper has landed several acting gigs including starring in the remake of "The Longest Yard," a recurring role on "CSI: NY" and most recently on the BET reality show spoof, "Real Househusbands of Hollywood." Nelly said he just finished shooting a movie with Sylvester Stallone titled "Reach Me" and is working on the second season of "Real Househusbands."

With the most recent project, "M.O.," Nelly said fans can expect 100 percent pure Nelly.

"It's all about me and sharing me with the people. MO is the abbreviation for Missouri so I always represent where I'm from and most of my family and friends have always called me Mo," said Nelly.

The new project, slated for release later this year, features collaborations with T.I., Pharrell Williams, Wiz Khalifa, Trey Songs and the first Nelly and Nelly collaboration by having a song with Nelly Furtado.

One of the things that separated Nelly, born Cornell Hayes, from others in hip-hop is his keen business mind. The rapper/actor had two separate clothing lines – Vokal and Apple Bottoms,

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anchored by the company's provocative jeans that highlighted women's posteriors.

One current business venture has some calling Nelly "Dean Nelly." The entrepreneurial rapper has partnered with Vatterott College in St. Louis to create Extreme Institute by Nelly. The downtown St. Louis school offers degreed programs in entertainment and business management, recording and engineering, as well as courses in music production, song writing, dance, graphic design and more. The school also has world-class recording studios that have many Midwest artists flocking to St. Louis to record.

"That's something I'm really proud of," said Nelly, who said he partnered with Vatterott president Pam Bell to come up with the unique education concept. "What we did was took a trade school concept and applied it to entertainment and the arts."

Nelly said Extreme Institute is fully accredited in Missouri.

As many know, the entertainer lost his sister, Jackie Donahue to leukemia. When Donahue was diagnosed, Nelly formed the Just Us 4 Jackie foundation to encourage bone marrow and stem cell donation. He said the foundation is still active and he continues to encourage people to get registered to donate marrow and stem cells. He said he is also involved with the Make-A-Wish organization.

Along with Nelly, Star Party features Jason DeRulo, Cher Lloyd, Olly Murs, Hot Chelle Rea MKTO and Ariana Grande. Tickets are not available for the event, with the only way to get tickets being a contest winner through KDWB.