

GROUP 1 CREW ORDINARY DREAMERS

A self-professed entertainer, a pop diva, and a bona fide producer: that's the makeup of breakout urban sensation Group 1 Crew, three everyday Latinos who rose above their circumstances and the middle-of-the-road to become one of the most exciting aggregates in faith-based music.

Ordinary Dreamers, the trio's anticipated second album for Fervent Records, shatters any and all preconceptions created by their out-of-the-box, Dove-winning debut, *Group 1 Crew*, to position itself as one of the most *unordinary* offerings of the moment—an amalgam of rhythm and rhyme that takes the best of urban pop and hip-hop and turns them upside down.

Produced by Christopher Stevens and Andy Anderson, *Ordinary Dreamers* is a snapshot of three visionaries encouraging others to never be complacent with the status quo, but to continually press forward and propel themselves towards the next plateau in their lives.

Indeed, that's a posture that Group 1 Crew—members Manwell, Blanca, and Pablo—have upheld since they first came together for Bible studies several years ago, a path to spiritual growth that eventually evolved into a promising career in music and ministry.

“We're still ordinary people, but we're doing extraordinary things,” Manwell says. “That's an oxymoron, but it's made so that the dreamer mentality can be on typical people's minds. Nobody's born a rock star. Nobody's born famous. It's just normal people who've done amazing things and are now esteemed for those amazing things. We feel that's everyone. Everyone has that possibility.”

Granted, Group 1 Crew didn't always have it all together as far as their own dreams and aspirations.

Once a confused adolescent who'd much sooner get in trouble and roll with the wrong crowd than use his God-given gift to entertain, Manwell finally realized his potential when he gave Christ a shot.

“I put the mic down as soon as I got saved, and for a year I just studied my Word and got into the Bible,” says Manwell, a former seminarian. “I figured, ‘I've got to know what I'm talking about.’ I can't just be like a lot of artists who just regurgitate what they've heard.”

For her part, Blanca's sole desire growing up was to be the next Mariah or Whitney. Since she had the pipes, she tried out for every talent show imaginable—yes, even *American Idol*—only to hit brick walls and become plagued by thoughts of insecurity.

“A lot of the times I feared I wouldn't make it,” says Blanca, the group's soulful leading lady. “I got the feeling that I wasn't getting what I wanted, that I wasn't moving forward. Once I got saved it was a big difference because God just showed me that he had a plan from the beginning. Everything just came together as soon as I started singing for him.”

Meanwhile, Pablo's epiphany about a better tomorrow came, of all places, while working the cash register at his friendly neighborhood Wal-Mart. He was a musically inclined knob-turner since a young age, but he didn't quite know how to turn his gifting into a living.

“One day it hit me,” says Pablo, a one-time music production student at Full Sail. “I wondered, ‘What if I *do* end up in Wal-Mart for the rest of my life?’ For some reason, I just let doubt come in and I was

looking around at people who had been working there for 15-20 years. I was like, ‘I know that God has something more for me.’”

Today, on the verge of yet another breakthrough with *Ordinary Dreamers*, Group 1 Crew wants their combined testimonies and victories to be a catalyst for all the dreamers who happen upon the group’s music.

“It’s telling our fans, ‘There’s no difference between you and us,’” Blanca says.

From the disc’s first downbeat to the last lingering note, *Ordinary Dreamers* is the stuff dreams are made of. From a musical standpoint, Group 1 Crew and their collaborators spared no expense in making a spellbinding follow-up, a tightly produced party that finds the trio having the time of their lives, while carving a niche of their own in music—Christian, mainstream, or otherwise.

Top-notch beatmaking is the bedrock of such numbers as “Movin’” and “Gimme That Funk,” two dizzying, multi-layered romps that see Manwell, Blanca, and Pablo serving as masters of ceremonies to some of the biggest party-starters of 2008. The celebration continues with the horn-dabbed “Critical Emergency,” a song that wraps a serious message in a swath of disco, soul, pop/rock, and R&B.

Shifting gears, thick guitar riffs and a plodding vibe punctuate “Keys to the Kingdom,” an uplifting piece that encourages listeners to lift up their heads and wait for the day when the sons of glory will be revealed. Elsewhere, the soaring “Closer” gives Blanca a chance to strut her stuff and get in touch with her inner pop songstress, while the easygoing, guitar-laced “Tonight” is as comforting and reassuring as a pop tune can get.

Not ones to shy away from experimentation, Group 1 Crew try their hand at new things with “iContact,” “I See You,” and “Live Out Loud.” In its own way, each composition is an indication of how much the trio has matured—no matter if the choice dressing is electro-pop, jazz-inflected urban stylings, or synth-heavy techno funk.

But for all of its diversity and through-the-roof production values, *Ordinary Dreamers* is only a stepping stone for the threesome. From passion to passion, from glory to glory, Group 1 Crew hopes to continue to march onward and upward, seeking not earthly recognition but an even deeper understanding of what matters most.

“In the minute success that we have as a group, it’s never what you thought it’s going to be,” Manwell says. “So honestly I don’t think money is going to do it. I don’t think a Grammy is going to do it. I don’t think any of that is really going to hold water. It’s not like a pessimistic look. The reality in what I’ve seen is that true joy and fulfillment come when you’re on point with the Lord.”

Pablo adds, “Now that we’re all living in that dream that we’ve all wanted to achieve, now it’s just become an even bigger dream, a bigger passion to use music as a stepping stone to advance the Kingdom and empower the generation that’s coming up behind us.”

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