



Photo by Christopher Jim Smith

FOR THE RECORD

By Beth Phaner

World Famous **V.I.P. Records** has been bringing the beats for more than 30 years

"No matter where I would travel in the world, people would always know two things about Long Beach: the Queen Mary and V.I.P. Records," says Kelvin Anderson Sr., the affable owner of the legendary record store located at the intersection of Pacific Coast Highway and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue.

Born and raised in Mississippi, Anderson moved to the West Coast in 1972, where he immediately went to work for his older brother Cletus, the founder and original owner of

V.I.P. and several other L.A.-area record stores. After seven years working with his brother, Anderson bought V.I.P. Records in January 1979, and his life has been dedicated to the business ever since. Anderson considers his early years of working with Cletus as his schooling in the industry.

"I learned A-Z of the business from my brother," he says.

Anderson's independent music store is known all over the world for its involvement with the infamous West Coast

hip-hop scene of the '80s and '90s. It was during that time that Anderson invested in some recording equipment—most memorably, an SP-1200 drum machine for \$2,500—and let a few local guys record a demo tape in the back of V.I.P.

That little demo tape would go down in Long Beach music history.

Though they're all household names now, back then Snoop Dogg, Warren G and the late Nate Dogg were simply a rap trio called 213 (named after the area code) when Anderson recorded the demo. Seeing potential, he then shopped it around to various labels, but it was turned down by everyone he approached. It was only after Warren G told Dr. Dre about 213 and played their tape at a party that the music got the attention it deserved. Both Snoop and Nate Dogg were then invited to record some tracks on Dre's 1992 solo debut, *The Chronic*, and their careers exploded

from there. Snoop's own solo debut followed within a year and portions of his first music video for "Who Am I (What's My Name)?" show him rapping from V.I.P.'s roof. The iconic rapper later used the store for two other music videos.

As a longtime community-gathering place, and especially as an epicenter for urban music culture, Anderson estimates that 40 percent of V.I.P.'s business comes from tourists, and music fans still show up at the store wanting to get their photo taken at the Long Beach landmark.

During the past decade, however, it has been harder for brick-and-mortar record stores to stay afloat. The shift towards digital music has hurt V.I.P.'s old school ways—"You've got a whole generation that thinks music is free," says Anderson—and the store has been forced to diversify its products by offering a DJ service, next-day printing, a special order program for hard-to-find music as well as cassette tape to CD (and vinyl to CD) transfers.

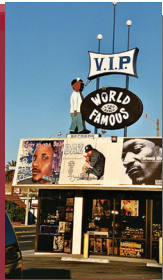
Anderson's son, Kelvin Anderson Jr., works as the store's manager, in addition to also running his own printing/graphic design business.

"Trust me, I need him because I don't know the younger music," Anderson Sr. says with a laugh.

Due to the rapidly changing nature of technology and its effect on the music industry, the future of V.I.P.'s physical store remains uncertain, and Anderson admits that the business could transform into more of an online-only entity down the road. Whatever the future may hold, though, one thing is guaranteed—the legacy of World Famous V.I.P. Records, fueled by one man's heartfelt devotion to the music biz, will continue to live on.

RAISE THE ROOF

World Famous V.I.P. owner Kelvin Anderson Sr. has had so many tourists interested in getting up on the roof of his business to take pictures that he had to build a special area in the store—a small raised stage with black leather couches and the V.I.P. logo prominently displayed in the background—just so there would be a safe place for photo ops.



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