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Kanye West Surprises New York With Secret Black-Tie Show

John Legend joins Yeezy for glitzy, 90-minute performance held for select few recipients of late-night email invite.

By Shaheem Reid

NEW YORK -- The self-proclaimed "world's greatest entertainer," Doug E. Fresh long ago tagged his cohorts with the name the "Get Fresh Crew." The partygoers who came out to for Kanye West's secret/ super-late party at Rosewood in Manhattan could have easily been given that title too.

An e-mail went out to a select group late Thursday evening, alerting recipients that West and John Legend would be holding a function. If not quite a black-tie affair, the invite asked guests to be suited and booted. No exceptions. Also noted in the message was a phone number to call to learn the address of the venue, which was Manhattan's Chrystie Street club, the Box. The stage set-up was pretty simple: a baby grand piano at which Legend sat, two microphones (one just for Auto-Tune), an 808 beat machine and a keyboard.

With just a little more than 200 in attendance, seeing Kanye and Legend together in such an intimate setting conjured up memories of the 2001/2002 era when the two would gig at various underground clubs. Kanye was, in a word, dynamic. The Chicago MC has created three classic LPs (his rap-heavy first three) and amassed more than a dozen Grammy Awards in the decade or so since we first saw him at those clubs. West returned to the small stage on Thursday as if it were his alma mater. A great showman, Yeezy put on a genre-blurring, mesmerizing show.

It was technically Friday (August 13) morning already when West and Legend took the stage to begin performing (around 1:30 a.m.), at the function he dubbed "Rosewood." Although a Kanye show is typically well-thought out and carefully crafted, Kanye seemed to have no weight on his shoulders last night. He wasn't afraid to flub lines, nor to tell the audience when he did. He read lyrics from a sheet of paper for when he launched into a cover song. So what. It was 90 minutes of amazing.

Standing at the mic, Kanye kicked off his set with "Homecoming"; Legend sang the hook. Both performers were suited up, dressed in ensembles worthy of an awards show red carpet. West told John to take it back to old times and that led into "Heard 'Em Say." Later, Legend began slowly stroking the keys and singing "If This World Were Mine." This segued into the music speeding up before Kanye performed a verse from the song he produced for Teflon Don Rick Ross, "Live Fast, Die Young." After the rapping, 'Ye hopped on the on drum machine while John continued on piano, where a bottle of wine and a glass were set aside for Kanye.

There were brilliant moments of improv like when Kanye started performing his "Pinocchio Story," which hasn't been officially released, or when Legend started singing the Rihanna vocal riffs from "Run This Town."

Kanye has been making a series of surprise appearances recently. Where do you hope he'll turn up next? Tell us in the comments!

