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– Russell Simmons

The Re-DEFinition

• Russell Simmons Transcends Hip-Hop to Become a Multifaceted Entrepreneur

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Russell Simmons’ cell phone is blowing up, blipping and making all manner of noises during our interview. Fortunately he only takes one call, from Brett Ratner. “He wants me to meet him now at David’s Café, but I’m gonna stay right here with you,” he says with a smile. Simmons is in town for the first Art For Life Miami Beach, a star-studded benefit gala that raised more than \$575,000 through the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation.

“We underwrite art education opportunities for inner-city children. It gives them the chance to practice and appreciate art, which is critical,” Simmons explains. “I believe schools are like prisons if there is no chance to cultivate

creativity. It’s an essential part of education.”

Simmons’ foundation has helped many grassroots programs and he has personally seen the fruits of his efforts. “A lot of the kids say the arts are the only reason they have survived,” he says. In fact, Simmons is certain he wouldn’t be where he is today if he hadn’t had the chance to “practice and appreciate art,” as he says. The same is true of his brothers. “Reverend Run was not that great a student and Danny was struggling with all kinds of bad influences. The arts saved [Danny] — brought him back and made him a great contributor. Now he’s on the board of the Brooklyn Museum, runs two galleries and all kinds of things,” he

says proudly.

With an estimated worth of \$340 million, the hip-hop mogul is in a rare position to get his voice heard in all kinds of ways, and does so regularly. And society is better for it. His message is one of reason and kindness to your fellow man. He’s spoken openly about politics, and called for rap lyricists to remove racist and derogatory words from their songs, but he is best known for starting Def Jam records in the early ‘80s, launching Phat Farm clothing and its spin-off, Baby Phat, run by ex-wife Kimora Lee. Of course, Simmons’ private life draws a lot of attention, with the media currently fixing its long lens on beautiful girlfriend, model Porschla Coleman, who’s regularly seen at his side.

He has just launched Globalgrind.com, a Web content portal with a hip-hop point of view. “It’s a way of filtering the Web, from lifestyle to politics and urban hoopla, you know?” he says. It’s just one of Simmons’ many recent endeavors that include Argyle Culture, a new clothing line, that just had its Miami debut at FUNKTION in March, his book *Do You! 12 Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success*, and the Diamond Empowerment Fund, a nonprofit organization that sells cute beaded bracelets to raise money for communities in Africa where diamonds are mined. Notice the acronym (DEF). Clearly he’s got the secret of success down, as it’s not often that entrepreneurs can find it in so many different arenas.

All of these businesses and endeavors were built on Simmons’ triumph as a music producer. So, what does this music mogul think it takes to be a great entertainer? “Honesty. Honest expression is what makes an artist great. They can look deep inside and come up with great things,” he says. And how does he feel about rap today? “It’s the same, but the poets are better because they grew up doing it.”

See Simmons’ vision at www.rushphilanthropic.org