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ISSUE 13 / 2008

THE RING LEADER

T-PAIN TAKES CHARGE OF HIS CAREER
AND TAKES ON HIS CRITICS

PLUS

THE GAME | CHILLI | ROBIN THICKE | RAY LAVENDER | RYAN LESLIE |
DIPSKATE | PLIES | DAME GREASE | CHE'NELLE | AZ | ISAAC HAYES |
PRETTY RICKY | PARIS WELLS | KERRY BROTHERS | DJ K-SALAAM |

Method

Presents



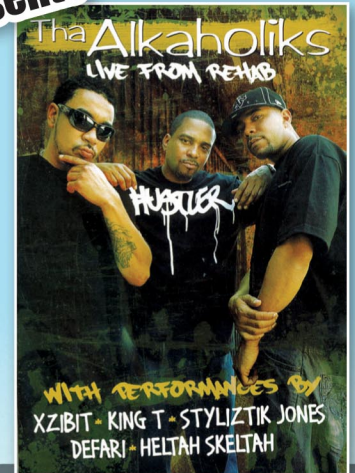
SKILLZ
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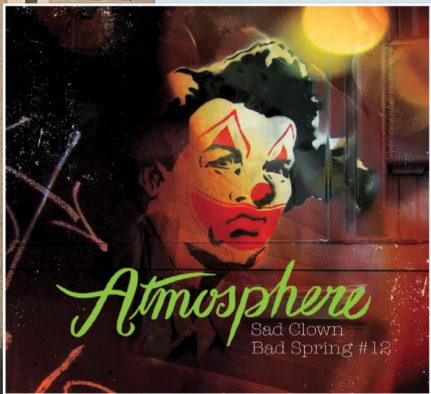
RZA AS BOBBY DIGITAL
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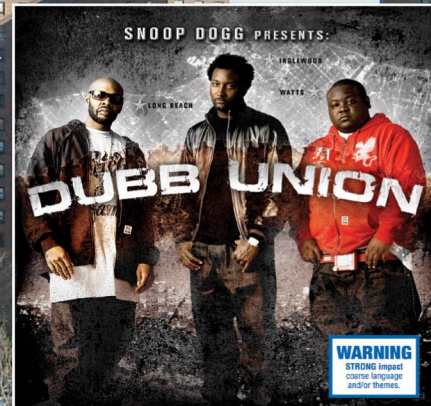
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Dominic Di Francesco
+61 (0)415 331 257
dominic@rhymeandreason.com.au

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Contributing Writers

LISA D'ANDREA, THA DIVA, THE JOURNALISTA, TRAC MAJIC, SARAH RYAN, SOULEO, BRIAN "Z" ZISOOK

BARCODE RECORDS A.B.N. 18 567 199 873
60 Smart Street, Fairfield, New South Wales 2165 Australia
Phone: +61 (0)415 331 257 Fax: +61 (0)2 9724 1062
Email: info@barcodecs.com

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EDITOR'S LETTER:

IT'S LIKE A JUNGLE SOMETIMES...

I went to the zoo yesterday for the first time in 20 years, but not to get up close and personal with some exotic Asian species ... that's Saturday nights at Martin Place Bar. The purpose of this zoo trip was to meet with a touring US Hip-Hop star for an interview and photo opportunity. The zoo visit was actually suggested by the artist's tour promoter, and it was a refreshing suggestion from the usual strip club requests. But as it turns out, the zoo isn't so different from a strip club; they each have naked mammals, it costs extra to touch, and both leave you broke and with nothing to show for it except the desire to shower.

Arriving at the zoo with a few mates in tow, I received a call from the tour promoter to delay our meeting - as the rapper was still asleep in his hotel room. Fast forward a few hours: rapper man is still asleep and our zoo meeting has been postponed indefinitely. Sensing this inevitable outcome, we had already made the most out of our zoo trip, although it was early on that I noticed a theme to the day.

What did we find when we rocked up to the bear enclosure? A sleeping bear. The tigers? Asleep. The lions? Asleep. The fish cats? Asleep. Perhaps they had all been hanging out with a certain US rapper the night before. I don't know. And just for the record, none of these creatures are nocturnal except for the one in fur with the chain around its neck. The rapper, that is.

Back to my point; if I really wanted to buy a ticket to watch something lay face-down on the floor, I would have gone to the Jodeci reunion concert. [Note: In Jo-Jo's defence, I also find it difficult to remain conscious during "All My Life".] And as it turns out, Taronga Zoo doesn't offer refunds either.

P.S. I hope you enjoy this deluxe online-only edition of Rhyme & Reason. We will be back in print next issue.

Dominic Di Francesco
Editor-In-Chief
Ph: +61 (0)415 331 257
E: dominic@rhymeandreason.com.au



WIN OUTLAWZ CONCERT TIX!

The Outlawz are heading back to our shores to celebrate the anniversary of Tupac's passing with the *2Pac Still Breathing Tour*. To win a double-pass to one of the below shows, email dominic@rhymeandreason.com.au with your feedback on this issue of the mag [include postal address].

- SYDNEY: Saturday September 13th - Big Top Luna Park
- MELBOURNE: Thursday September 18th - The Forum
- ADELAIDE: Friday September 19th - Thebarton Theatre
- BRISBANE: Sunday September 21st - The Arena

AUSTRALIA GETS SMOKED

Tour promoter Andrew McManus Presents has announced that Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube and Bone Thugs-N-Harmony are heading down under this October/November for the ‘Smoked Out Australia Tour’.

The announcement marks a personal victory for Snoop Dogg, who was denied a visa to enter Australia in 2007.

A Department of Immigration spokesperson has confirmed the good news for fans of the Doggfather; “A visa will be granted to enable a 17-day visit from October 21. His application has been approved on character grounds.”

The ‘Smoked Out Australia Tour’ will hit Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, with festivities kicking off on October 29th in Brisbane.

D-O-double-G’s co-headliner, Ice Cube, will return to our shores on the heels of his latest album release, *Raw Footage*, due in stores locally on 20th September [through Inertia]. Cube’s eighth solo album recently debuted at #1 on the US ‘Rap & R&B’ album sales chart and #5 on the ‘Top 200’ album sales chart.



UMA DOUBLE SIGNING

Universal Music Australia have been busy snapping up local talent with the addition of two Melbourne acts to their artist roster. 90’s boy band CDB and female urban DJ Havana Brown recently inked with the music giant, each with albums scheduled to drop in the coming months.

ARIA award-winning R&B group CDB have reformed more than a decade after the release of their last album to offer fans *The Funk Sessions* this October.

Group member Andrew De Silva had the following to say about the group’s reformation; “We have rediscovered the reasons why we first formed the band. The chemistry between us and the combined skills just amaze me. During our time apart we’ve acquired new skills and ideas that we bring back to the band. We have rediscovered CDB but this time with greater experience and promise. We are so excited to be back in the studio recording songs from our favourite funk artists. *The Funk Sessions* is CDB’s tribute to the spirit of funk – edgy, wild but always a good time.”

Representing for the ladies and hoping to follow in the footsteps of DJ Nino Brown is Universal’s other Melbourne signing, DJ Havana Brown. Havana is looking to replicate the success of Nino’s *Blazin’* mixtapes with her own scheduled mixtape series currently in the works.

An exciting live performer, Havana’s resume includes roles on television soap *Neighbours* and, during a stint in the UK, as Kanye West’s in-house DJ for his official London party. Nominated in the ‘Best DJ’ category at the 2007 Australia & New Zealand Urban Music Awards, Brown maintains a hectic performance schedule with upcoming shows across Australia and Asia.



PARIS WELLS: FINISH MY SENTENCE...

If you have frequented Melbourne’s dingy club scene over the past few years, chances are you might have caught the magic of Paris Wells live behind the microphone. Then again, if you took in Justin Timberlake’s *FutureSex / Love-Sounds* tour, you would have witnessed the soul diva on a much grander scale as Timberlake’s opening act. Or perhaps you heard Wells’ latest single “Grace Baby” during shopping giant Myers’ latest television campaign. However, if Ms. Wells has somehow eluded you thus far, let us introduce you to the soul sensation as she finishes our sentences....

I first realised my vocal abilities... when my friend busted me singing in my room on school camp. I was 14 and she said, “Oh my God, you sound exactly like the song!”. I think that was a good thing.

When people listen to my music... I want them to dance and cry - preferably at the same time.

Recording my debut album *Keep It was...* one of the most strenuous/rewarding experiences both creatively and emotionally. I feel like I can put my early twenties at rest now and look forward to a new journey of self expression.

Before music became my career... I studied a marketing degree and worked in advertising.

The most common misconception about me is... that I’m an overnight success. This has been a long and hard nine year journey. The last three years I performed on average three club shows a week while also working full time.

Touring with Justin Timberlake was... “freaky and I liked it.” HOT DAMN!

Most people wouldn’t believe it, but Justin is... really good at golf.



PHINESSING SUCCESS

Another Melbourne act who have had an impressive run in 2008 are R&B/Rap duo Phinisse. Fresh off a performance on MTV’s Snow Jam alongside the likes of Lil Jon [with the show airing in over 20 countries internationally], the Phinisse boys are also still reeling from their experience as the support act for 50 Cent and G-Unit’s Australasian tour earlier in the year. “The tour was absolutely crazy! We rocked all three states: Melbourne, Sydney and Auckland. It was such an

unbelievable experience and it was a great feeling to have 50 Cent and G-Unit really embrace what we are doing. They were so impressed with our performances that they were interested in signing one of us. To have somebody such as 50 Cent to help breakdown the industry to us was a blessing.”

Phinisse are set to capitalise on their new industry connections with a planned collaborative song with 50 Cent for their debut album.



PLAY

NEWS & STUFF



RON BROWZ

While Ron Browz might not demand the limelight of a Dr Dre or DJ Premier, there is no denying the Harlem native's pivotal contributions to Hip-Hop with his production on Big-L's "Ebonics" and the Jay-Z-seeking missile that was Nas' "Ether". Going on to bless projects for the likes of Ludacris ["Blow It Out"], Snoop Dogg ["Oh No"] and G-Unit ["Straight Outta Southside" and "Money Make The World Go Round"], Ron is now lending his musical magic to Amerie's upcoming Def Jam debut and going for self with his own buzz single "Pop Champagne". www.myspace.com/ronbrowz

Preferred cologne? Marc Jacobs. **Favourite web site?** Thisis50.com. **First album you bought?** Wu-Tang's *36 Chambers*. **Drink of choice?** A Harlem drink called 911 [absolut, hpnotiQ, cranberry juice]. **Favourite fashion brand?** I don't have a favourite. It varies. **Your worst fashion faux pas?** Over-sized clothes that were three-times my size. Now I know how funny it looked. **Best dressed celebrity?** I think today's fashion is hot. I like what everybody's wearing. **Worst dressed celebrity?** Any celebrity that's stuck in 1996. **You'd spend your last \$10 on?** On some old records, because I might find a hot sample to make a beat worth thousands. **You have one day to live. How do you spend your last 24 hours?** Record a song and tell everyone how I really feel. **If you were elected President of the US, what would be your first move?** Stop the wars. People are dying for no reason. **If you could invite any 3 people to dinner, who would they be?** My mother, father, and Big L. **What would you trade-in your success for?** Family happiness. **Favourite pick-up line?** Never used a pick-up line, just a smile. **Favourite clothing item on the opposite sex?** Business attire on a female is sexy. **R&R**

SCRILLA LOVES THE KIDS



videos from which will be edited and released as the official music clip for "Chasing Ghosts". Snob Scrilla recently released his debut EP *The Day Before* [Blindfaith/Ivy League] and has been hitting the promo trail with a live performance on *The Footy Show* [NRL] and upcoming spots at the Parklife and Homebake festivals.

No news is good news ... and good news is even better news. Warming the cockles of our heart this month was the good news that Sydney Hip-Hop act Snob Scrilla forfeited filming a flashy film clip for his latest single ["Chasing Ghosts"] to donate the video's budget to the *Hip-Hop for Youth off the Streets* fundraiser, subsequently reviving the event after it had been cancelled due to a lack of funding. Instead, Snob enlisted friends to film his performance at the Macquarie Fields Outreach BBQ fundraiser - the

ARTIST WATCH: LIENA

Australian R&B has remained noticeably static in recent years, with first round draft picks such as Daniel Merriweather, Samantha Jade and Adrian Hood migrating to the US to concentrate on their international careers. Hoping to reignite interest in local R&B is 19 year-old Sydney-sider Liena. The diminutive singer surprises with superbly controlled, powerful and crisp vocals on "End of the Road" and her promotional [and unashamedly 'pop'] single "Go Crazy". To preview music and learn more about Liena, visit her MySpace page at <http://www.myspace.com/lienaonline>



ONLINE FIND

GRINDIN

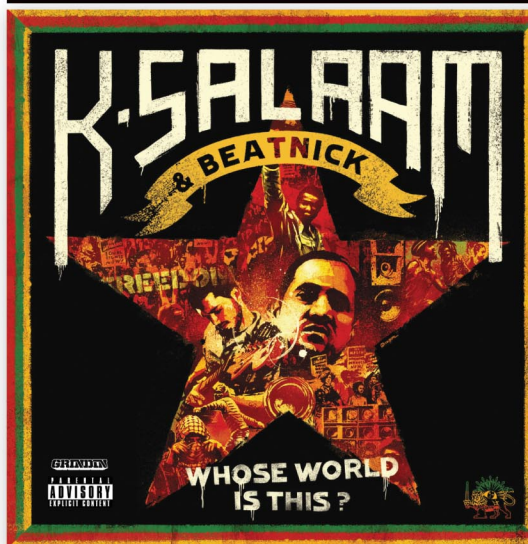
OUT NOW

VARIOUS ARTISTS
GRINDIN REMIXED BY M-PHAZES
OUT NOW



M-Phazes is the perfect example of a diamond in the rough. Born and raised in the Gold Coast of Australia and relatively isolated from Hip Hop culture, M-Phazes has carved a place for himself among Australia's Hip Hop elite and is putting Australia on the global Hip Hop map. This album sees M-Phazes showcasing his broad range of production skills with artists such as OC, Jeh7, P-Money Feat Scribe, Move meant, Mjstro feat Daniel Merriweather and more. This project will only help further the M-Phazes brand on a bigger global scale. The future looks bright for this down under beatsmith... and it's only getting brighter.

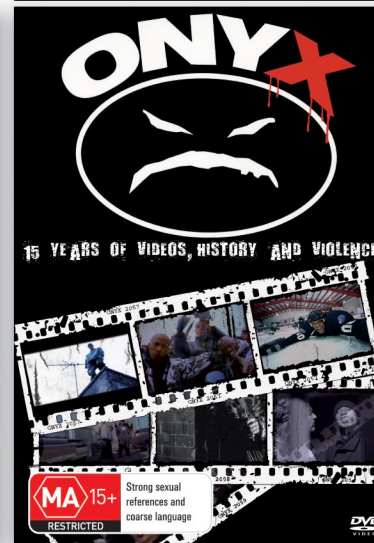
K SALAAM + BEATNICK
WHOSE WORLD IS THIS?
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The worlds of Hip Hop and Reggae music collide to bring you this concept album. Featuring Trey Songz, Talib Kweli, Papoose, Dead Prez, Saigon, Outlawz, Kardinal Offishall, Bobbito Garcia & Rakaa From Dilated Peoples alongside Reggae legends Buju Banton, Sizzla, Capleton, Anthony B, Luciano and Richie Spice.

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VARIOUS ARTISTS
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WHO SHOT YA?



SUBJECTS: Chopper & Bukkcity
LOCATION: Potts Point, Sydney
OCCASION: "Come Get It" Single Launch
PHOTOGRAPHER: Sarah Ryan

Mark Brandon "Chopper" Read is one of Australia's most infamous criminal figures, his public profile sky-rocketing after the semi-autobiographical film *Chopper* hit silver screens in 2001 with Hollywood superstar Eric Bana portraying the jagged-eared convict in disturbing detail.

While renouncing his shady past ["I haven't shot anybody since 1992, and even then I didn't do it."] to parlay his odd celebrity into entrepreneurial success as an author, painter and budding beer baron, 2008 has seen Chopper revert back to making hits ... this time of the musical variety.

Teaming up with 18 year-old Sydney producer Ace Wonder and Canberra-born rapper Bukkcity to record "Come Get It", Chopper celebrated the digital release of the single at nightspot Favela in Potts Point and Rhyme & Reason was on hand to capture it ... meat cleavers and all. **R&R**



REAL TALK

PLIES

WORDS BY THE JOURNALISTA

Plies is a walking contradiction. For all the thugged-out imagery surrounding the ski-mask wearing rapper, it is his knack for knocking out silky records for the ladies that has proven to be his bread-and-butter.

Propelling Plies' sophomore album, *The Definition of Real*, up the charts is yet another smooth, although not particularly romantic single - "Bust It Baby, Part 2".

And even with a swelling teenage female fan base, guess for which audience the Floridian is most excited about planning a series of concerts? Prison inmates. This is the anomaly that is Plies and, quite possibly, the definition of real.

How does it feel to be back on top with "Bust It Baby"?
It's cool. Delivering great records is something I take pride in. I'd like to thank Ne-Yo for blessing me with such a powerful hook and record.

What is Plies' definition of real?

A person that's responsible; a stand up ni**a. At the end of the day, my definition of real might be a little different. A lot of times the streets want you to believe you got to be broke to be real. A lot of people want you to believe you got to go to prison two or three times to be real. My definition is being not only the most responsible, but the most true person I can be to myself. I tell cats all the time that snitching started from someone who wasn't willing to accept their punishment.

Many industry heads have acknowledged you as being one of the most articulate and sharp artists in Hip-Hop. What do you attribute that to?

Having the opportunity to conduct interviews and deal with corporate America on a day to day basis is so important. That picture of Uncle Sam pointing at you reminds me that this industry wants as many dumb artists as they can get. The least you understand, the better [the record labels] are. They give you media training at a lot of labels to make sure you don't embarrass their logo, but they don't give you any business training to make sure they don't rob you of your money. I try to get as much knowledge and information as I can. Sometimes the streets have you believe the more ignorant and dumb you are, the more you're perceived as being real. I just don't feel that way. I think any time you don't plan, you find yourself in uncomfortable situations.

You highlight your devotion to prison inmates throughout your music. Is it true you're planning a prison tour?

Yeah, we actually got into a couple facilities, then we had a couple bumps in the road. About four institutions we had confirmed backed out, so we're trying to re-route it and get a couple more institutions in line. The most important one for me is where my brother is - Coleman Correctional Facility in Florida. For whatever reason, they're playing hardball with me. So we're still trying to fight that situation. **R&R**



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GRINDIN

ARTISTS MAKING MAJOR MOVES



WORDS BY THA DIVA

KRUCIAL INGREDIENT

KERRY BROTHERS

Behind every great man is a great woman. Likewise, behind every great woman is a great man ... well, at least in the case of Alicia Keys. As the R&B superstar's production partner [and personal companion], 37 year-old Kerry 'Krucial' Brothers has helped craft each of Keys' acclaimed albums - which have sold in excess of 20 million copies.

Lending a Hip-Hop edge to Alicia's soulful stylings, Brothers credits the likes of The Bomb Squad, Rick Rubin and DJ Premier as his influences. Krucial sat down with Rhyme & Reason for a quick chat about his partnership with Ms. Keys and the honour of their Grammy successes.

I understand your production partnership with Alicia Keys almost never came to fruition. What was the reason for not wanting to team-up with Alicia?

It wasn't a fact of not wanting to work with her, it was more of a question of 'could I?'. Having come from a Hip-Hop background and her presenting me with the opportunity to work with her on her first album, on a major label, it was a little intimidating. I didn't really know much in that style of music, as far as R&B, but I really believed in her talent and what she had. She believed in my talent and I took the challenge and I was willing to help. The rest is history.

It certainly is. The partnership has brought you a great many accolades, most notably two Grammy Awards. How

does that sort of recognition sit with you?

I mean, it is a great feeling. That is the highest honour you can get in music and it is judged by your peers, a lot of the greats. You feel much better to know that people who you have admired over the years respect your work enough to nominate you.

Having worked with everyone from Rakim to Angie Stone to Keyshia Cole, who are you still angling to collaborate with?

Stevie Wonder. I would like to work with Stevie Wonder. I mean, there is a whole long list as far as MCs; Styles P from The Lox, and the list goes on and on. That is what I am doing this year, producing more and more artists that I wanted to work with but never had time in my schedule. You know, Anthony Hamilton, Brandy, Robert Randolph, and other people who I have always admired and [wanted to] get into the studio and make some music with.

Your production work is anchored in Hip-Hop and R&B, but what music do you listen to in your own time?

Right now I am listening to classical rock. I mean, a lot of Hip-Hop heads have already sampled that stuff but [I'm] just going in a different direction and discovering a lot of different classic rock records - a lot of overseas work, stuff from Europe and more into the classical. You know, just stretching what you would hear on the airwaves on any given day. **R&R**

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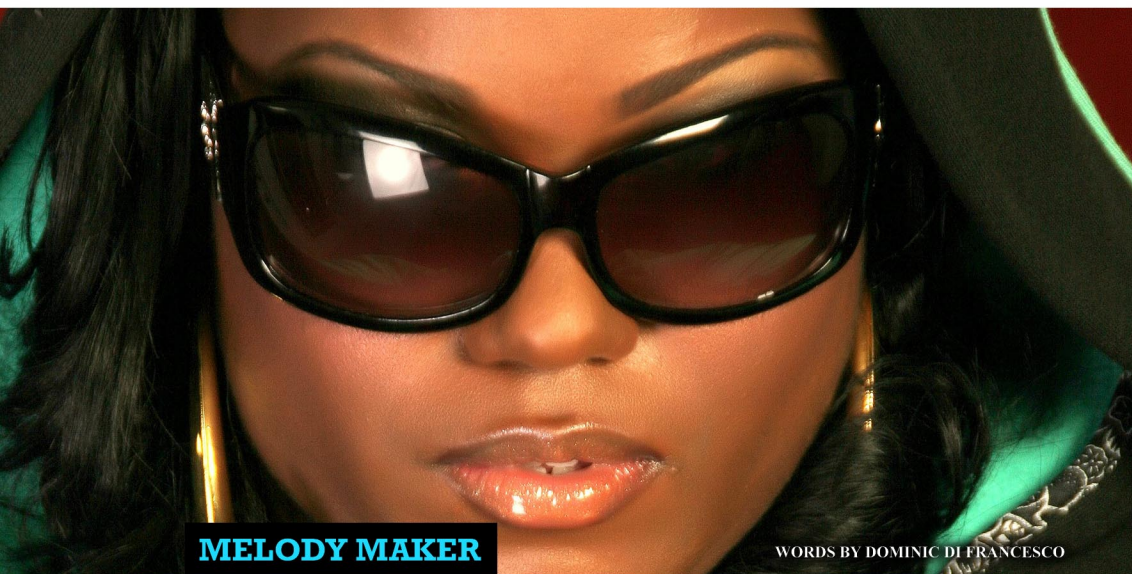


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GRINDIN

ARTISTS MAKING MAJOR MOVES



MELODY MAKER

WORDS BY DOMINIC DI FRANCESCO

CRIS\$TYLE 'THE INK' JOHNSON

With the might of Jermaine Dupri in her corner, Cris\$Tyle 'The Ink' Johnson has seemingly sprung out of anonymity to write her way into the upper-echelons of Pop music in less than 12 months. Signed to Dupri's Dieniahar Publishing, the 24 year-old songwriter has penned hits for Jennifer Lopez and Janet Jackson, while also inking Mariah's singles "Touch My Body" and "I'll Be Lovin' U Long Time", Chilli's "Dumb, Dumb, Dumb", along with forthcoming contributions to albums from Beyonce and Brandy.

You forged a strong relationship with Mariah during the creation of E=MC2. However, there must be instances where you don't connect with your collaborator on a personal level. How does that affect the creative process?

Every time I work with an artist, I try to become them for that moment; that way I can write the song as if I am that person, going through whatever they may be going through. So as far as the music is concerned, I channel the artist whether there is a connection or not. But it was a lot more fun workin' with MC because of the friendship that was developed. A lot more laughs than usual. [Laughing]

I've heard a few songwriters explain their creative process as a divine experience. How do you describe it?

Mine is more of an out-of-body experience. [Laughing] I feel like when I'm creating, my creativity is going somewhere that my mind can't follow. And when that happens I have to just

close my eyes and trust my talent enough to guide me to a great record. Music isn't mental to me, it's very emotional. When I have a good vibe, I say a little prayer and let the music take me over - almost like a transformation.

You've quickly established a reputation as a hit-maker. What do you consider the secret ingredient to a hit song?

I actually think there are a few "secret ingredients" to a hit song. I think that it's important to have a track that keeps your head moving, a melody that feels fresh and new, but also slightly familiar to your ears, so that when you hear it once you feel like you can sing along. And [you also need] lyrics that you or somebody you know can relate to. Real life situations always win big in music because art imitates life. So that's what I think is the butter, salt, and oregano! [Laughing]

You're currently working with Beyonce. What can you tell us about the direction of your work with B?

I'm actually headed to NY to go in with Beyonce this week. The great thing about Beyonce is that she's not afraid to push the envelope, so to speak. She's always reinventing herself as an artist. So without giving out too much of the goods [laughing], I can say that she's coming really BIG this time.

What other projects are you currently working on?

Right now I have a few singles out with some different artist; Tiffany Evans "I'm Grown", Teyanna Taylor "Google Me", Chilli "Dumb Dumb Dumb". I just did a song for LeToya Luckett and I'm working on some stuff for Brandy. **R&R**

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DUTTY DANCING

SURGEON GENERAL

Dancehall culture may be as Australian as the Eiffel Tower, but with the diligent efforts of Surgeon General [DJ K Note and Nick Toth] to promote Dancehall throughout our wide brown land, the great cultural divide between Jamaica and Australia is shrinking by the day. The DJ tandem's latest project is the Dancehall Queen Australia contest [with heats currently in progress in your nearest capital city], along with an accompanying CD, *Dancehall Queen Australia 2008* [out now]. Rhyme & Reason caught up with Nick Toth to learn exactly what it takes to become a Dancehall Queen.

What is a 'Dancehall Queen'?

An outstanding female dancer in attitude, style, originality and dancing ability - a phenomenon borne from the Dancehall Reggae culture of Jamaica that has spread all across the globe. DHQ contests take place in cities like Chicago, London, Berlin to Tokyo. Every July at the International DHQ finals in Montego Bay, Jamaica, dancers from over 10 countries compete for the crown of the world's #1 Dancehall Queen. We are working to establish a DHQ movement in Australia that can produce world-class dancers to compete on an international level. Our aim is to send an Australian representative to Jamaica by 2010.

How would you describe the genre's dance style? And what are DHQ contest judges looking for?

It's an ever-evolving fusion of Afro-Caribbean and contemporary dance styles with new moves [dances] emerging on a weekly basis. Some of the elements can be traced back to traditional African and South American genres, whereas other influences could come from as far as belly-dancing, Hip-Hop and pole-dancing. Judges at a DHQ contest look for personality, style, originality, range and overall presentation / entertainment value. This is NOT just a booty-shaking comp!

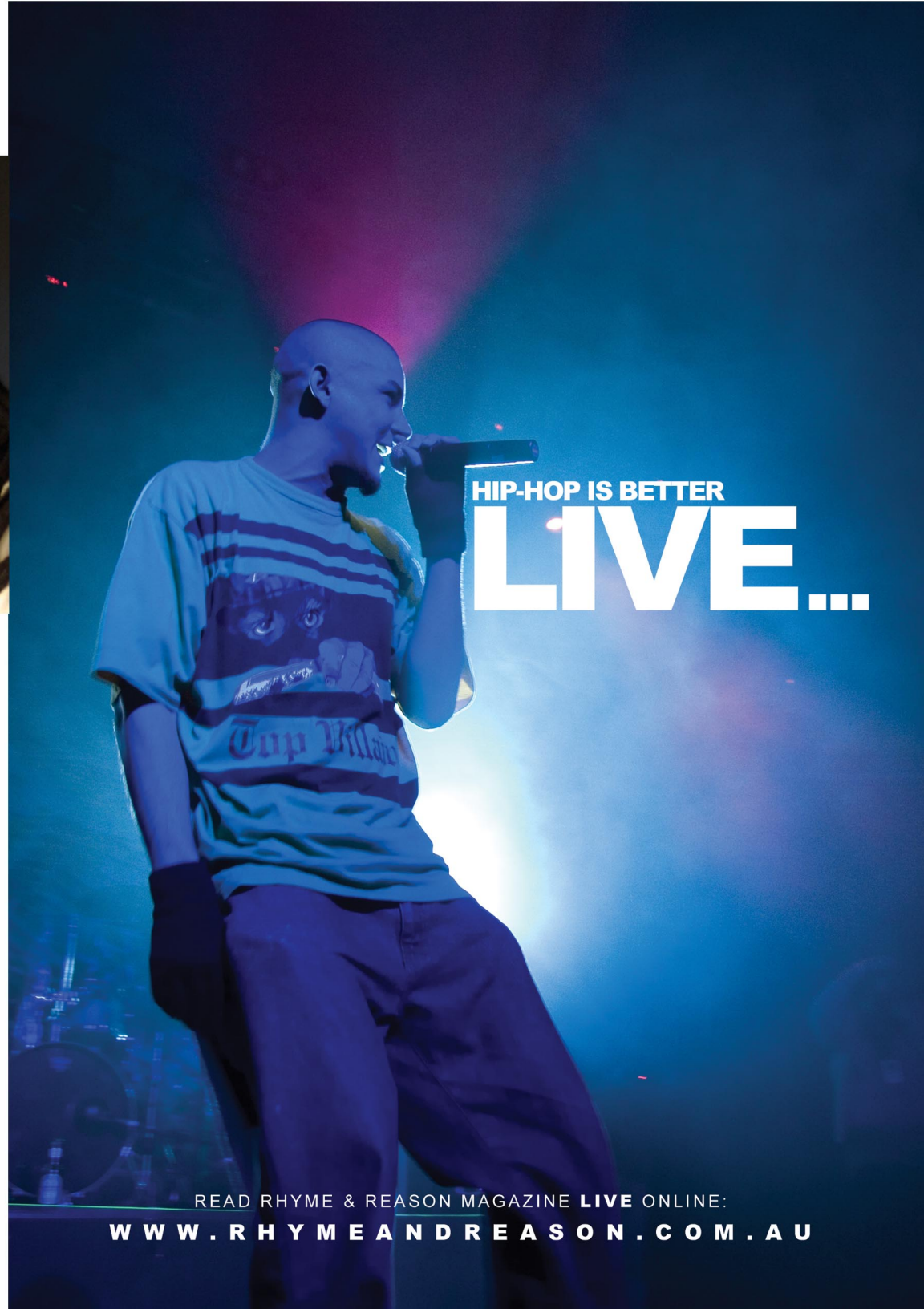
You held the first Dancehall Queen Australia competition last year. How would you rate our local talent?

I think that there are a lot of talented dancers in Australia and we've already seen a massive improvement in standards compared to a few years ago. As Dancehall music and culture gains more mainstream recognition, more ladies will get involved and will step up their game!

Obviously, music is key to any dance competition. What was your criteria for selecting tracks for the *Dancehall Queen Australia 2008* CD?

We wanted to present a cross-section of big dancing tunes - past, present and future. The tracks and artists we selected for *DHQ Australia 2008* you can hear at Dancehall sessions around the world. Elephant Man, Tony Matterhorn, Sean Paul, Lady Saw, Mr Vegas, Busy Signal, Erupt are some of the biggest names in Reggae and all feature on our album.

www.ozdancehallqueen.com **R&R**



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INSERT BATTERIES

BATTERY 5

Take five talented up-and-coming producers, pool together their creative talent, place them under the tutelage of the most successful songwriting/production house of 2007/08, and what do you get? Battery 5. The Atlanta based production team, comprised of team members HeadROC, Skape, Mello, Looke, and Gregory "GStakz" Smith, are already applying their knowledge learnt at RedZone Entertainment [Tricky Stewart, The Dream] having scored "Dumb, Dumb, Dumb" - the lead single from Chilli's [TLC] forthcoming solo album. Rhyme & Reason recently caught up with Battery 5's manager, GStakz, to discuss the team's sonic assaults.

Is it difficult having five individuals, perhaps with five different opinions, involved in the creative process?

When you work along a group of eclectically sound individuals there will be times of difficulty. Learning, appreciating and respecting each other personally and creatively makes the ride easier. We're a unit, a family. We love and "hate" each other, laugh and console each other, and work both individually and collectively. We all understand our positions and remain in our designated lanes.

Tell us about your partnership with RedZone.

It has definitely been an interesting journey. Our duties at DaZone consist of serving as the junior production team to Tricky Stewart. We have [worked] alongside artists such as The Dream, Chris Brown, Usher, Mary J. Blige, Celine Dion,

and The Gym Class Heroes, to name a few. The RedZone family have embraced us and taught us the fundamentals of putting together a hit song/record in contrast to making 'beats'. At the end of the day, the music speaks for itself and the sky is the limit as far as career advancement is concerned. **Nowadays, producers seem to share as much of the spotlight as recording artists. Is that a factor you guys are happy to embrace?**

In this day and age, if you're not seen, you're not heard. Originally, the guys were not conducive to being 'poster boys' for the music industry. When they came to an understanding that being visual would play a major factor in the progression of the team, it was embraced with no hesitation. We are working on an endorsement deal with Wrigley [chewing gum] and as spokesmen for EZdrummer [drum kits].

Word is that you guys have been in the studio with Missy Elliott...

We were blessed to get in the studio with Missy Elliott a few months ago to submit some tracks for her upcoming project. With new producers, you aren't always notified if a track gets selected until the album hits, but it was a great experience for the guys. As a producer/writer and artist, Missy Elliott has always been ahead of her time, so just having the opportunity to submit records for her was a blessing. She was extremely gracious and we're looking forward to working with her in the future. **R&R**

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SILENT SYMPHONY

WORDS BY DOMINIC DI FRANCESCO

TWICE AS NICE

2008 has developed into somewhat of a renaissance period for Australian Hip-Hop talent, and Twice As Nice have been quietly fuelling the movement from behind the boards. The production duo, comprised of Melbourne natives Unknown and Lewis One, joined forces in 2007 after experiencing success [individually] producing for the likes of Scribe, Deceptikonz, DJ Muggs & GZA.

Attracting US-based management in the form of Senior Vice President of A&R at Slip-N-Slide Records, Jullian Boothe, Twice As Nice have fast-tracked their international production careers by landing official remixes with Trina and Plies, while working on the debut album of Slip-N-Slide's great R&B hope, Qwote.

Introducing Twice As Nice ...

What are your respective musical backgrounds?

Unknown: I never had any formal training; I always just had a love for good music. I got into music production really by accident and stuck with it.

Lewis: I've been around music pretty much my entire life. I began playing violin at the age of six and by seventeen I was playing at an AMUS level [second highest level] and leading and performing with a variety of different orchestras. Through that time I also learnt and played drums - playing in different funk, rock, metal and jazz bands. As well as that, I played to

tuned percussion, piano and viola in different groups as well as DJing R&B and Hip-Hop. I can easily say that the classical training that I received has become central to my production style. I wouldn't be doing this without it.

There has been a boom of local urban producers/artists making an impact overseas this past year. Why do you think we are drawing such international attention at this point in time?

Lewis: Yep, in my opinion, the only thing that draws attention is great music and a good work ethic. Although being from Australia may be more distinctive, ultimately the music speaks for itself. With advances in the Internet, national music markets aren't restricted to producers living in that vicinity. In the past few years there has been a huge increase in international producers playing major roles in the US music industry, teams like Stargate and Bloodshy & Avant. Ultimately, I don't think that anything draws people to non-US producers besides good music - and it's just that there's a lot of that in Australia at the moment.

How did Jullian Boothe come to be your US manager?

Unknown: About two years ago, a friend of mine got a bunch of US [record industry] contacts and Jullian just happened to be one of them. At the time of reaching out to him I didn't know exactly who he was. I just took a chance, reached out to him and told him who we were and what we were trying to

do. He was impressed with our stuff and, over the past two years, we just kept him in the loop with what we were doing. More recently, he was in a position where he wanted to make it official and start pushing our stuff hard [in the US].

How has Jullian's counsel advanced your opportunities in the US market?

Lewis: As Senior Vice President of A&R at Slip-N-Slide Records, Jullian has a direct in-road to all Slip-N-Slide artists - artists [who are] signed to nearly all of the major labels. Julian has strong ties with many artists and labels equaling solid opportunities to place tracks. Julian also provides legal and business advice for opportunities and ideas that we set up ourselves.

One of the major label acts you're working with is Qwote. What other major projects are currently in the pipeline?

Unknown: Yep, we've got a couple joints with Qwote for his album, *Qwote-Un-Qwote*. We just did the official remix to the new Plies single, "Please Excuse My Hands" which features Jamie Foxx, The Dream and Qwote.

The main project we're working on right now is a new artist from Boston by the name of Masspike Miles. He is a R&B singer and is the latest signing to Rick Ross' Maybach Music imprint. We currently have four tracks done with him for his debut album including two possible singles. And the fact that the boss himself, Rick Ross, is now behind the project in a major way, things are looking good.

We're also working with another artist out of Boston called Smoke Bulga. We got a couple joints with the New York underground legends Brooklyn Academy, who are about to drop an album this September on EMI. Outside of those projects, locally we have a track on the upcoming Smashproof album, *The Weekend*. Our track is titled "Back To Work" and has live horns, bass and a full choir. It is definitely one to keep an eye out for!

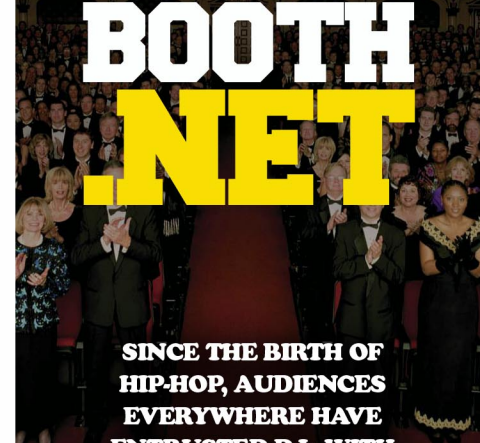
Is it a challenge to maintain relationships and develop opportunities internationally given Australia's isolation?

Lewis: It definitely is. However, these days it is manageable whereas ten years ago it wouldn't have been possible. We are in daily contact with our team members either by phone, email or instant messaging. The major issue is not being able to work in the studio with our songwriters or artists, which is something that unfortunately can't be overcome.

Collectively, the two of you have produced for the majority of Australia and New Zealand's relevant Hip-Hop artists. Is there a specific peice of work you've produced that you're particularly proud of?

Unknown: For me, it has to be the first song I ever placed, which was in turn my first ever single. The song "Don't F*** With Me / Don't Front On Me" by New Zealand's Deceptikonz. Along with that, I think the fact that I was the first ever Australian producer to work with all three New Zealand powerhouse labels [Dawn Raid, Dirty, MTC] on their own sh*t was a big thing that can never be done again. So I'm pretty proud of that. **R&R**

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GLOBAL WARMING

WORDS BY DOMINIC DI FRANCESCO

K-SALAAM & BEATNICK

K-Salaam is testament to the fact that Hip-Hop has grown well beyond any of its well worn stereotypes. The Iranian-American Hip-Hop DJ/producer from middle-class Minneapolis is as much the face of modern Hip-Hop as any African-American MC coming out of NY's PJs. Staying true to Hip-Hop's essence, Salaam and his production partner Beatnick are out to return the art to it's revolutionary best with their album *Whose World Is This?*, dedicated to the empowerment of victims of social injustice. And they've brought along an eclectic representation of the urban music world [Young Buck, Talib Kweli, Buju Banton] to carry their message.

The subjects explored on the album are certainly socially charged. What inspired you to take that direction?
My family is heavily involved in activism so it's a part of me. That, combined with the fact that we are of Middle-Eastern decent, forces me to speak out on the struggle. I don't have the luxury to live in a bubble. My family has been through a lot and if I don't do anything about the current situation in the world then it affects me directly. So I have really no choice but to speak out.

How effective do you think music is as a medium for affecting social change?
Extremely important. The fact that Hip-Hop has almost completely lost that revolutionary element is really sad and somewhat pathetic. But I feel like there is a change coming about.

Me and Beatnick are definitely a part of that change. **You've been quoted saying, "We all have a choice of whose side we can be on. The time is now for us to choose a side. We are either part of the problem, or a part of the solution." At this point in time, do you feel Hip-Hop is part of the problem or a part of the solution?**
Definitely a part of the problem. It started as a solution, but that all got changed up and twisted.
The Hip-Hop crowd is fickle. Was it a challenge to construct a socially charged album that wouldn't scare off the average Hip-Hop listener? After all, a message has no value if nobody hears it.

Very good question and I like the comment, "a message has no value if nobody hears it." First of all, I wouldn't say that the Hip-Hop crowd is fickle. Additionally, I really think that if you listen to the album, the "social message", if you will, is pretty subtle and does not come off as preachy. Yeah, on the inside of the album there is something that I wrote that explains why the album was created, but the listener is not forced to read that. That does not interfere with the music at all. The music is still music. But it wasn't a 'balance act' for me or Beatnick. The music and everything came together very naturally. I believe that one should be honest when creating something, that is what makes it pure and real. If me and Nick made an album about shaking your butt in the club, it would be fake, 'cause we don't really go to clubs like that. **R&R**



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THE ISAAC HAYES EFFECT



EVEN WITH THE PASSING OF ISAAC LEE HAYES, JR. ON AUGUST 10TH, 2008, HIS MUSIC CONTINUES TO REMAIN RELEVANT AS HIP-HOP REINVENTS HIS EXPANSIVE CATALOGUE FOR NEW GENERATIONS OF MUSIC LOVERS.

WHAT BETTER WAY TO MEASURE THE TRUE GENIUS OF AN ARTIST THAN TO OBSERVE THEIR INFLUENCE OVER THEIR PEERS? AMONGST THE MOST SAMPLED ARTISTS IN HIP-HOP, ISAAC HAYES HAS PROVIDED THE INSPIRATION FOR CLASSIC RECORDS BY PUBLIC ENEMY, THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G., JAY-Z, AND COUNTLESS OTHERS. RHYME & REASON MAGAZINE HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF HIP-HOP'S MOST MEMORABLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THIS BAD MOTHER'S MUSIC.

ISAAC HAYES - "THE LOOK OF LOVE"

SAMPLED ON:

"Can I Live" - Jay-Z
"G'z Up, Hoes Down" - Snoop Dogg
"Look Of A Thug" - Young Jeezy
"Rain On Me" - Ashanti
"Rain On Me (Remix)" - Ashanti feat. Capone N Noreaga

ISAAC HAYES - "GOING IN CIRCLES"

SAMPLED ON:

"Malcolm" - Ghostface Killah

ISAAC HAYES - "WALK ON BY"

SAMPLED ON:

"Warning" - The Notorious B.I.G.
"Me Against The World" - 2Pac
"I Can't Go To Sleep" - Wu-Tang Clan feat. Isaac Hayes
"Walk On" - Method Man feat. Redman
"No Other Love" - Faith Evans

ISAAC HAYES - "DO YOUR THING"

SAMPLED ON:

"Smooth Operator" - Big Daddy Kane
"Stranded On Death Row" - Dr. Dre

ISAAC HAYES - "HUNG UP ON MY BABY"

SAMPLED ON:

"My Mind's Playing Tricks On Me" - Geto Boys

ISAAC HAYES - "HYPERBOLICSYLLABIC-SESQUEDALYMISTIC"

SAMPLED ON:

"Black Steel In The Hour of Chaos" - Public Enemy
"Remedy" - The Game
"I Gotta Say What Up" - Ice Cube
"Born & Raised In Compton" - DJ Quik

ISAAC HAYES - "IKE'S MOOD"

SAMPLED ON:

"Grand Groove" - Tragedy Khadafi
"Gangster, Gangster" - Styles P feat. Jadakiss & Sheek
"Make The Music With Your Mouth, Biz" - Biz Markie
"I Love You (Remix)" - Mary J Blige feat. Smif N Wessun
"Still Got Love For You" - Beanie Sigel feat. Jay-Z
"Beautiful Mind" - Cormega
"6 Minutes Of Pleasure" - LL Cool J
"Letter To The Firm" - Foxy Brown
"Jealousy" - Fat Joe
"Bitches From Eastwick" - The Lox
"Streetz Iz A Mutha" - Kurupt

ISAAC HAYES - "THEME FROM SHAFT"

SAMPLED ON:

"Reservoir Dogs" - Jay-Z feat. The Lox, Sauce Money & Beanie Sigel
"Caught, Can We Get A Witness?" - Public Enemy

ISAAC HAYES - "JOY"

SAMPLED ON:

"Trouble Man" - Inspectah Deck

ISAAC HAYES - "ONE WOMAN"

SAMPLED ON:

"Supa Star" - Group Home

ISAAC HAYES - "MAN'S TEMPTATION"

SAMPLED ON:

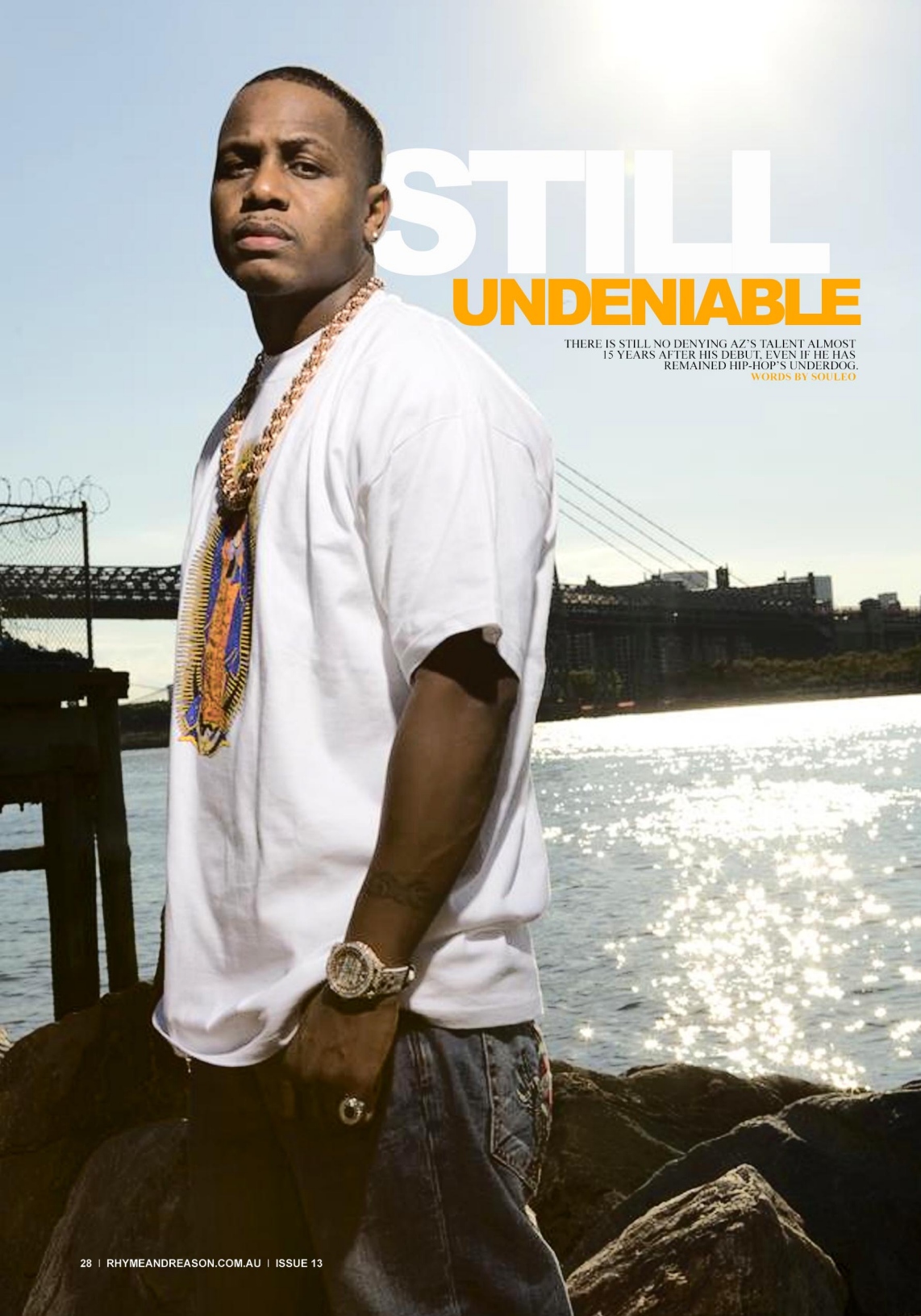
"Animal Planet" - GZA

ISAAC HAYES - "A FEW MORE KISSES TO GO"

SAMPLED ON:

"Da Bump" - Redman

** List compiled by Hip 2 Da Game*



STILL UNDENIABLE

THERE IS STILL NO DENYING AZ'S TALENT ALMOST 15 YEARS AFTER HIS DEBUT. EVEN IF HE HAS REMAINED HIP-HOP'S UNDERDOG.
WORDS BY SOULEO

F

Few things are as undeniable as an intelligent and smoothly delivered rhyme, and veteran rapper AZ has been supplying Hip-Hop heads with just that for over a decade. Ever since his noteworthy guest appearance on Nas' "Life's a Bitch" from the classic *Illmatic*, AZ has kept the lyrical integrity of Hip-Hop alive with his expansive vocabulary, multi-syllabic rhyme schemes and memorable high-profile collaborations with everyone from DJ Premier to Dr. Dre.

With a string of critically acclaimed releases under his belt, AZ continues on a winning streak with his latest album, *Undeniable*. AZ took the time to speak with Rhyme & Reason about why he and Nas no longer stay in contact, growing up without his father, his pre-Hip-Hop struggle, and the state of the New York rap scene.

How does it feel to have survived over ten years on the Hip-Hop scene?

Excellent! You can only do that with passion. You can't do that with nothing else but passion.

You were the only guest MC on Nas' "Life's a Bitch" off his debut album *Illmatic*. What's your relationship like with Nas now?

I mean, like I always said, there's no bad blood. He's just doing him and I'm just doing me. We're grown now so I just feel like that magic is gone on my part. I don't know how he feels or his fans feel, but when you're not in touch or in tune that magic slips away.

So you don't really keep in touch that much?

Not at all.

You've previously stated that you and Nas will probably never do a collaborative album since you're both on different journeys. What do you think the main differences are in your respective journeys?

Well I know that he got married and he's got a whole different perspective. We come from the bottom so I'm always gonna speak to the bottom. He's speaking to the bottom also, but in another way.

I read that you were raised by older street cats. What was that experience like?

It's like a kid being raised by wolves and adapting to the jungle. The older guys took a liking to me and wanted to pass on their jewels that got them where they went. They were hoping that I could take it further than what they did.

Were your parents in your life at that time?

My mum was there but when you're growing up, a woman can't really raise a man. So you go through your own trials and tribulations trying to figure out what the world has got to offer you. That's what every young male goes through. Some get caught up and some give up. My pop's never was around,

so I wanted to be the man of the house at the end of the day.

Have you been in-touch with your father?

No, not at all. Not really. Periodically, but nothing to converse about.

Do you think that his absence made you look at these older cats to fill that void of having a father figure?

Not necessarily. I was looking toward them because the things that they were saying sounded good to me. I'm just a sucker for knowledge. So it was just the food for thought that I appreciated. I got a big family. I got like forty cousins and eight uncles. So it's not necessarily that I was looking for anything. I had it around me.

Did you get caught up in the lifestyle of these older cats?

Yeah, I was caught up and I was going downhill just like everybody else. I think that once I ran into Nas and that "Life's a Bitch" came out everything just switched up.

When you were going downhill what was the lowest point?

When I was facing a 2-4 [year bid] sitting in the Supreme Court like an idiot and mum cried. We're chameleons so we can adapt to anything, but my thing was that I like money. I don't like sitting behind no bars. I ain't trying to prove nothing to nobody. That wasn't my thing right there.

Do you ever wish for the mainstream recognition of other artists that have been in the game as long as you?

Nah. Listen, I ain't where I want to be but I'm far from where I was. So I appreciate a lot of things right now. I don't wish for anything. Everything that's gonna come is gonna come. This was said to me one time; "Anything that hits you won't miss you and anything that misses you wasn't meant to hit you." So it was meant for me to play this part for whatever reason. It's not over.

You're African-American and Dominican. What are your thoughts on the Latin Hip-Hop scene, being that many Latin Hip-Hoppers are underrated or marginalised due to their race?

It's a good thing that they're starting to get notoriety and do their thing. My whole focus wasn't a race thing. My thing is just reaching the people.

What are your thoughts on the current state of the NY rap scene?

In New York we're rebels and everybody is trying to go for a crown that doesn't exist. It's in our blood and it's in our nature. So New York is going through a storm, but we'll get out of it.

Why do you say that crown does not exist?

The crown doesn't exist because everybody is a king in their own mind. There's no such thing as a king. Everybody's gonna do them at the end of the day. It's a hustle now - nobody cares. **R&R**



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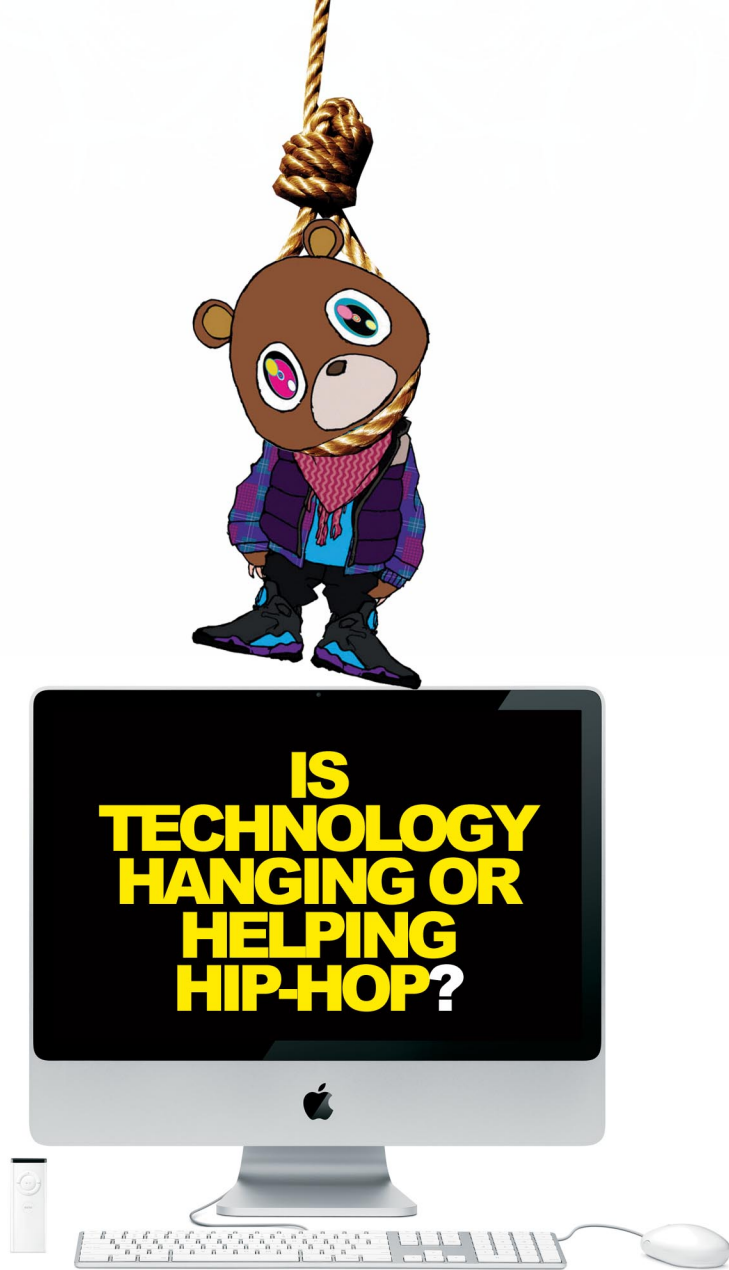
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WHEREVER POPULAR ART IS CONCERNED, THERE HAS ALWAYS EXISTED A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN THE COMMERCIAL AND ARTISTIC WORLDS. THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IS NO EXCEPTION. FOR DECADES, MUSICIANS HAVE SUBMITTED THEMSELVES TO THE MERCY OF A FEW MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANIES WHO HAVE CONTROLLED THE FLOW OF MUSIC TO THE MASSES. THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION HAS CHANGED ALL THIS. THE AFFORDABILITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND AVAILABILITY OF DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS HAVE ALLOWED MUSICIANS RECLAMATION OVER THEIR ART - FROM MAKING AND SHARING MUSIC TO FILMING AND SHARING MUSIC VIDEOS. BUT WITH RECORD SALES FALLING AND THE INDUSTRY'S TRADITIONAL REVENUE STREAMS RUNNING DRY, WHAT DOES THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION ULTIMATELY HOLD IN STORE FOR THE MUSIC INDUSTRY? RHYME & REASON OPENS UP THE TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION WITH A FEW INDUSTRY INSIDERS.

WORDS BY DOMINIC DI FRANCESCO

As both a technical evangelist for Microsoft and a life-long Hip-Hop head, Arif Gursel understands the marriage between technology and entertainment more intimately than most. Gursel's day job has him working to develop strategies for Microsoft across all media and entertainment platforms, while having worked on the Xbox gaming system, Windows Vista, Zune, and on CODECS that enabled the streaming of music online. Coupled with his post as CEO of music company Invisible Man Entertainment, Gursel offers a prime vantage point on the opportunities technology has to offer the music industry and the forward steps artists and record labels need to take in order to benefit from, and survive through, the digital revolution.



ARIF GURSEL
TECHNICAL EVANGELIST [MICROSOFT]

I think the challenge for artists and labels is to stay abreast of technology, and that is a challenge for any industry, whether that is financial or manufacturing. Technology is just a tool. I think the media and the music and entertainment industry, specifically, are in a catch-up phase to understand the new convergence of technology. We have moved from the CD and the tape to this boom of where we are looking at worlds of software services and digital distributions and online collaborations and things that are coming into the market. The goal for any label or artist should be an understanding of what is out there this month and what was out there last month and how they can use it.

I think CDs are already pretty much faded to black. I think labels are not the bully on the block anymore and I think they really have to start looking at new forms of partnerships; where as before, labels owned the content and they could bully around it wherever they needed a placement, or whatever they needed to do, and however they wanted to do things. They pretty much owned their supply chain from distribution to manufacturing. When you own anything there is a certain amount of confidence and arrogance that comes along with it.

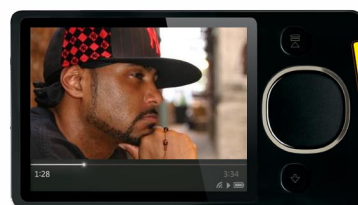
What couldn't be foreseen is the whole digital realm and the labels didn't own any aspect of that side. I think the only label that is pretty well positioned to take advantage of some of the technology is Sony, and that is the only property that

you see that is pretty diversified across entertainment and not just on label aspects, but on the software and hardware sides of things [too]. They are deeply rooted in all these different areas like the Playstation. Digital distribution, when you look at iTunes as the number two or number one seller of music, is definitely the way forward when you start looking at things like Zunes and iPods.

Software services are now the future and labels have to align themselves with software and hardware companies. The things that they can't do anymore is bully people around - and I think you see that with the iTunes/Universal situation. Artists are realising that the less time labels are spending in developing, and the business side of developing what it takes to be an artist in the industry, artists are taking back the controls and the power over the content that they create. I think what you are starting to see is software companies that don't care about the traditional business model of what has been for the last 50 years. What they care about is the future of technology and that content is King. I don't care who I have to go do a partnership with if I need the content. The content is what is selling my devices and selling my software and whether the artist or the label owns it, I couldn't care less.

Labels need to be concerned about developing artists. To come back to the table with them you have to work at creating strong business partnerships, as opposed to signing people to slave contracts again.

Donny Goines is leading a new generation of Hip-Hop artists realising their career aspirations independently through the power of technology. Combining video blogging, social network marketing, download-able mixtapes, and other online initiatives, Goines has rooted himself within the online Hip-Hop community by supplying audiences with a constant flow of content in every available format/medium. With a network of Hip-Hop bloggers syndicating his material to millions worldwide, Goines' buzz has even begun to leak outside the digital realm and into more traditional media. And with the personal motto, "If you don't know my name I'm not working hard enough", Goines understands what it takes to be successful in the digital age.



DONNY GOINES
INDEPENDENT HIP-HOP ARTIST

It's amazing what technology has done for this industry. Truthfully, you don't need a major label nowadays. You can build your career by yourself, which is exactly what I am doing. With the power of the Internet, the playing field has evened out in favour of the independent artist. You don't need a label to service you with an A&R, distributor, publicist, etc, to reach the masses. If you are talented and driven you can find most of these people and resources on your own.

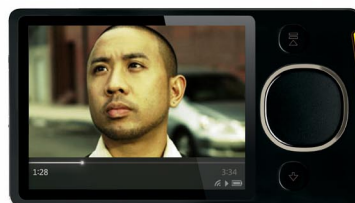
Technology has changed everything dramatically. It is advancing so rapidly and the costs are coming down. In the past, you would have had to pay expensive studio [costs] to do what I do. Another benefit is the fact that you don't actually have to be in the studio physically in order to work with other artists. I've worked with several artists and producers worldwide [M-Phazes is a good example of this] and I

haven't even shaken their hand.

I am comfortable with the idea of not making money from [music] sales. Most artists never make money off album sales anyway, they usually generate the bulk of their income from touring, merchandising, endorsements, etc. That was something I knew coming into the game. [Digital downloads] allow people to listen to your music and, really, that should be the main objective for any artist. If they like you they will support you regardless.

There really is no downside to technology in my opinion. The only negative aspect I see is the over-saturation [of artists] due to the cost of technology being so affordable now. EVERYONE thinks they can be a musician. I will say this though, it takes more than a MySpace page and a couple of MP3s to become a true artist.

Celebrated new school director Rik Cordero and his guerilla video production firm, Three/21 Films, are responsible for a burgeoning list of Hip-Hop music videos that are shifting the focus from expensive visual effects to effective visual concepts. Working with innovative ideas, modest budgets and the affordable convenience of modern filming and editing equipment, Cordero has made professional music videos an option for smaller independent artists and major label acts alike. The New Yorker's creations are renowned for spreading like wildfire across the Internet and creating invaluable buzz for his clients [Snoop Dogg, Jay-Z, Joell Ortiz] without the million dollar price-tags or support of MTV.



RIK CORDERO
VIDEO DIRECTOR [THREE/21 MEDIA]

I think when true broadband becomes a reality there will be no separation of Internet video and network video. It will just be video content that is simultaneously released on multiple outlets and wherever you view it will depend on your lifestyle. It's in the artists' and labels' best interest to embrace the technology because what we do at the end of the day is sell records. We did it with The Roots who were in the 'Top 10 Hip-Hop Albums' on Soundscan for a few weeks based on our four online videos, as well as Nas' latest album. We are trying to perfect our balance of speed, quality and marketing in order to be prepared for the revolution. My goal is to be the fastest and most independent production group, period.

We're ready to challenge the entire industry on how artists can create visual art. My dissatisfaction with the mainstream music video scene comes from the stranglehold that technology has in the 35mm, studio based music video business. The status of the cranes and cameras, the armada of trailers and

trucks and all the managers and producers whose sense of self importance taint everyone involved with pretentiousness. Filmmaking is an art form that's less than 100 years old. Music and painting are older and have been around since cavemen could sing or write on walls. This is an art form and we're ready to blur that budget line. Do you think a producer needs a \$50,000 drum machine to make a beat? Does a writer need a \$100,000 piece of paper to tell a story?

The online community has embraced us because of our supply of content whose distribution isn't dictated by middle men. It's great for the artists because now they have the ability to visualise songs in their catalogue that wouldn't be considered commercially viable. We respect our audience as well as the fans, so we'll continue to explore this new digital technology with open hearts and minds and challenge the system every step of the way. You can't stop raw talent and due diligence.

Quincy 'QD3' Jones, III, is the son of legendary music producer Quincy Jones and founder of leading independent urban multi-platform media and entertainment company QD3 Entertainment. Earning his stripes as a music producer working with greats including Dr Dre, Tupac, Snoop Dogg and LL Cool J, QD3 diversified his hustle for the new millennium and, via his film production company, has redefined the Hip-Hop DVD market with acclaimed documentaries such as Tupac's *Thug Angel* and the *BEEF* series. As with recording artists and labels, QD3 faces the challenges presented by technology and recognises the opportunities it offers innovative Hip-Hop artists to take back control of their careers from the corporate giants.



QUINCY 'QD3' JONES, III
FILM PRODUCER [QD3 ENT]

Just a few years ago when music artists and filmmakers would come into our office to pitch projects, their main selling point was "Man, I just sold 20K units out of my trunk in North Carolina; I'd love to partner with you to take it to the next level." Today, the criteria have changed — the new pitch is, "Man, I just got 400K views on YouTube, and I have over 100K friends on MySpace; what can we do together?" The entrepreneurial "hustle" spirit that Hip-Hop is so well known for is rapidly moving from the streets onto the Internet, where distribution and creative marketing is free and available to anyone with a broadband connection.

The general energy surrounding the Internet very much reminds me of the "freshness" and innovation that Hip-Hop had in its early days. The same opportunity that Hip-Hop represented to inner-city communities back in the 80s in way of exposure and revenue is now multiplied by the Web. Internet

digital media is the new Hip Hop!

I can see artists figuring out a way to go direct to consumer, creating sites and virtual worlds where they can present their undiluted vision to their audience [with user input of course]. Upon building a nice-sized audience, they may possibly have their albums and videos underwritten by brands that feel their products are aligned with the creative direction of the artists.

The one thing I am certain of is none of us can afford to miss the opportunity that digital media currently represents. While the big corporations are trying to figure out how to bridge their traditional legacy with all the new opportunities that the Internet represents, smaller, more nimble companies currently have a nice window of opportunity to move faster in trying to create new models.

<http://www.qd3.com/blog/R&R>



T-PAIN ON DIGITAL DOWNLOADS AND HIS NEW DIGITAL RECORD LABEL:

"[Technology] is great. People can get to music faster and it cuts out a lot of entities in the industry that have held artists back from doing the music that they want to. If I make a track tonight it can be out tomorrow, without any consent. I don't have to talk to my label about that. It's my label and I can put it out. It's a great new way."



THE RING LEADER

THE HARDEST WORKING MAN IN R&B CONFRONTS HIS CRITICS,
EXPLAINS THE TOP HATS, AND REVEALS HIS DJ ASPIRATIONS. **WORDS BY THIA DIVA**

T

Twenty-three is an age at which most people are scrambling to find their feet in both their personal and professional lives. For Faheem Najim, better known to millions across the world as R&B crooner T-Pain, twenty-three sees him married with children and on the cusp of releasing his third album, *Thr33 Ringz*. In short, he has well found his feet ... and he managed it with a Grammy to spare.

It is no doubt his tireless work ethic that has allowed him to achieve such success at such a young age. It is this same work ethic that has seen him graduate from under Akon's wing to become the most sought after side-artist of the past twelve months - save for a certain dread-locked rapper with a penchant for promethazine - with whom Pain just happens to be teaming up with for a collaborative album.

The John Stockton of the R&B world, T-Pain has assisted everyone from Chris Brown ["Kiss Kiss"] to Flo Rida ["Low"] to Kanye West ["Good Life"] in topping the charts this past year, thanks in no small part to his infectious hooks.

And it seems that with each new hit he architects, Pain grows ever more animated, ever more himself. Over the span of three albums, the Tallahassee singer/producer/song-writer/DJ/drummer/etc has morphed from a subdued, seemingly reluctant star into the top hat wearing, tail coat donning character now ricocheting across our TV screens.

Thr33 Ringz signifies the arrival of T-Pain in all his unfiltered glory. Even with superstar guest spots from the likes of Kanye West, Ludacris and Chris Brown, *Thr33 Ringz* is produced entirely by Pain and exclusively representative of his own vision - bearded hoes and all. He is now the ringleader.

In this exclusive interview with Rhyme & Reason Magazine, T-Pain explains his transformation from modest man to mad hatter, his rekindled love for the turntables, Auto-Tune jock riders, and not receiving his deserved props.

On your first album you came across as a low-key, almost reserved kind of guy. Fast-forward two albums and you're wearing outlandish top hats and running around with circus midgets. What brought about this transformation?

I think this is the way I have always been. I put out those other albums and it sounded like I was a mellow guy because I thought that was what everyone wanted me to be. So now that I am being free with myself, I am letting everyone know that this is my personality - hoping that it's not too late to show [it]. **The title and imagery of your new album, *Thr33 Ringz*, revolves around a circus theme. What's the significance of these circus references?**

Well, the [music] industry is a circus. The way you have the circus acts, the artists [in] the music industry are like, you know, the strongman and the tattoo people and midgets, all kinds of stuff. Everyone has a significance and to get into the industry, like the circus, you got to do something really phenomenal. It's pretty much the same thing. The only thing that the industry doesn't have that the circus has is the ringleader, and that is what I'm going to be.

You've described *Thr33 Ringz* as the album that will either make or break you. With two successful albums already to your credit, why do you feel this third album carries so much weight?

On account of what I am doing now, and all the collaborations and just the amount of clout that I have gained and accumulated, I think this one is going to be bigger than both albums. **Talking about those collaborations, you've been described as the R&B version of Lil Wayne with regards to your work ethic and the sheer number of collaborations you've done. Are you afraid of over-saturating the market?**

No, the only time you get over-saturated in any market is when you do a lot of stuff and, every time you do it, you do the exact same thing. I switch my style up every time I work with somebody. I don't give anybody old hooks that I have done a long time ago. I make sure I get in the studio with that person and, anytime I go in with any type of person that I mesh with, I make sure I conform to that person. I don't bring the usual T-Pain features to everyone. If I work with a west coast artist, I work the west coast flavour in with them. If I was to work with an Australian artist, I would put an Aussie flavour in there, you know what I'm saying? I'm trying to do as much as I can to switch up [my style] when I do it.

Your use of Auto-Tune has also brought about criticisms of your vocal ability. There is a song titled "Super Soul Song (Reality Show)" off the new album that features yourself,

Musiq Soulchild, Anthony Hamilton and Raheem DeVaughn. Did you record this track to prove that, vocally, you can hang with the best of them?

Nah, there are some songs that don't require Auto-Tune. There are some songs that the feeling would be better if there was a natural voice hanging on it. I don't feel I have to prove anything to anybody. If anybody wants to know about my singing they can come to my shows. I don't use Auto-Tune in my shows. [But even] the people that really don't need Auto-Tune, like Kanye and Chris Brown, use it in their shows.

"THERE WERE NO REGULAR FITTED HATS THAT COULD FIT MY HEAD. I WENT TO LONDON AND FOUND A TOP HAT [THAT] FIT REAL GOOD, SO I STARTED GETTING THEM CUSTOM MADE IN LONDON."

I understand there is also a track titled "Havoc" on the new album in which you discuss the real life incident where you had your chain snatched. You've since managed to get the chain back. How exactly did that go down?

Akon actually got it back. I have no idea how, but he got it for me. [Laughing]

What can you tell us about your upcoming album project with Lil Wayne?

Umm, just that it's going to be great. [Laughs] Everyone knows what we do and everyone's waiting to hear us put it together. That's what it is. It's going to be fantastic. We haven't started working on it, we're going to wait until *Thr33 Ringz* drops.

For an artist who produces, writes and performs all his own material, you don't receive the recognition you perhaps deserve. Does it bother you that people don't recognise you as the all-round artist that you are?

It doesn't bother me. I'm just going to keep doing it until somebody recognises it. I'm going to keep doing 100% [of the] writing and producing on my albums, and when they do recognise, then I will go and start producing [for others]. I'm going to keep writing for myself 'cause that is my style. No one is going to write for me 'cause it's always going to come from the heart.

I understand you've also been collaborating with Timbaland, who described the resulting songs as "phenome-

nal". What can you tell us about your work with Timbo? We've just been working in the same studio and I would sneak into his room and he would ask me to listen to [a beat], and I would listen to it and then he'd ask me to put a verse on it. So it's mistakenly come together pretty much.

I heard a rumour that you used to be a DJ - and word is you were pretty good on the turntables. Is this true?

It's very true. I'm actually starting to DJ again. I'm going round to the clubs and not only performing, but I'm also going back to the clubs and doing DJ nights.

Do you feel your background as a DJ has helped you understand and make the records people want to hear?

Oh yeah, definitely. It has helped a whole lot. When you see the certain response to type of songs, you start to realise what type of songs you need to start making.

What made you decide to go back to DJing?

It was kind of a mistake, actually. I was in a club having fun and I went up to the DJ booth. The DJ said, "I heard you DJed", and I was like, "Yeah, I do a little bit." And he gave me a chance and I started DJing, and we have started DJing together now, going round to clubs.

What tracks could we expect to hear in a typical T-Pain DJ set?

Ooooh! I know "Good Life" is definitely one of them - me and Kanye. Lil Wayne's "A Milli" and my new track ["Can't Believe It" featuring Lil Wayne].

You have always had an outlandish dress sense, first the glasses and now the top hats...

I just wanted to be different and there were no regular fitted hats that could fit my head. [Laughs] It was kind of a mistake. I went to London and found a top hat and I always wanted one, and it fit real good. So I started getting them custom made in London.

When will we see you in Australia?

Very soon. I was supposed to come a couple of times but stuff went wrong. But my label has promised me I will be down there for this album. **R&R**



BACK FOR THE FIRST TIME

AFTER A LENGTHY HIATUS FROM THE SPOTLIGHT, TLC'S CHILLI IS CONTINUING HER MUSICAL JOURNEY AS A SOLO ARTIST. WORDS BY LISA D'ANDREA

M

Most debut solo artists don't have the clutter of four Grammy awards on their mantelpiece, nor do their solo careers boast a prelude of 45 million album sales. However, Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas is not your average debut solo artists.

As a member of R&B super-group TLC, alongside Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins and Lisa "Left-Eye" Lopes, the past seventeen years have offered the 37-year-old single mother both unfathomable highs and indelible lows, including the tragic death of Left-Eye in a 2002 car accident. The loss of their eye-patch-donning sister led to a 6-year recording hiatus which Chilli will break later this year with release of *Bi-Polar*, her long-awaited solo project.

In this Australian exclusive interview, Ms. Chilli speaks about her album, the future of TLC, the loss of Left-Eye, and why she won't apologise for loving Usher.

Tell us about your debut solo album, *Bi-Polar*.

Now, let me clear one thing up; Chilli the artist is not bi-polar by any means! [Laughing] The album is called *Bi-Polar* just because of the music, 'cause you're getting a little bit of everything. I really hope that you absolutely love it, it is a crazy album. It has a lot of uptempo [songs] and I know that you guys have a lot of great dancers in Australia. So all the dancers out there, they're gonna love this CD. They're gonna absolutely love it!

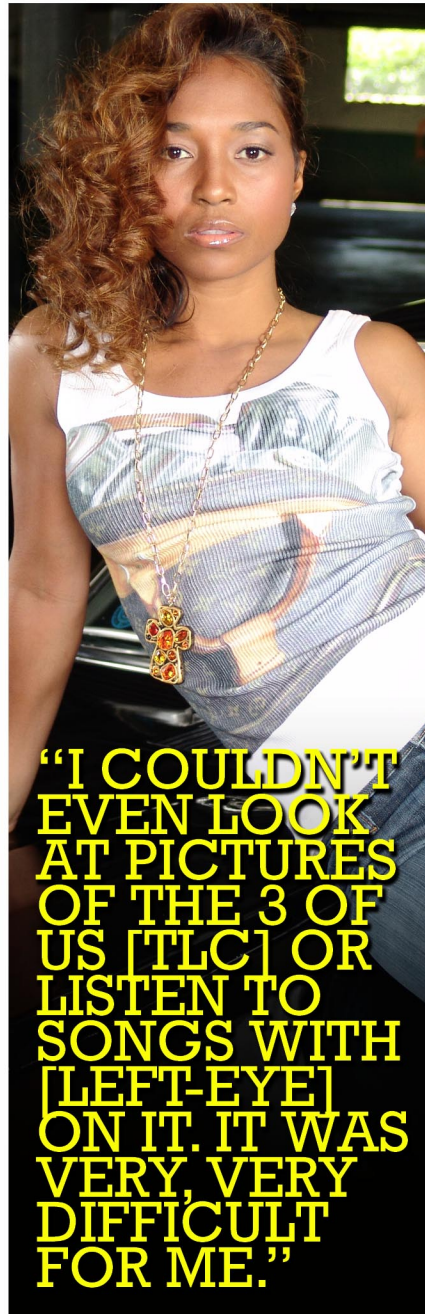
Do you have any guests featured on the album?

Well, T-Boz, of course, Missy Elliott ... those are the only two that are featured on a song, but I also worked with Akon and T-Pain [in a writing capacity].

Given the success you've experienced with TLC, do you feel any pressure to replicate that with your solo album?

Absolutely not, it's two totally different worlds. TLC is TLC and I'll always be Chilli from TLC, but we had three people in that group and we drew in different types of [fans] because we had three different personalities and styles. So, I'm just expecting to give everyone the best of me and pray to God that I have an abundance of success.

When TLC debuted in 1992 wearing condoms as fashion



"I COULDN'T EVEN LOOK AT PICTURES OF THE 3 OF US [TLC] OR LISTEN TO SONGS WITH [LEFT-EYE] ON IT. IT WAS VERY, VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME."

accessories, it caused quite an uproar. At the time, what did you think of the public's reaction to your outfits?

Actually, we were hoping people would get it, would listen to us, 'cause you can tell people all day long not to have sex but the reality is that they're going to. That was our way of promoting [safe sex]. We were like, if we can make it a fashion statement then it'd make it a lot easier for people to go in and buy condoms - just lie and say you're going to wear them on your clothes like TLC. For us, we were doing a good thing, we definitely didn't look at it like it was a bad thing, nor did we care if anybody had anything negative to say about it 'cause it was coming from a good place.

Do you intend on making such a statement with your solo album?

Oh, I'm totally making statements. That is definitely another thing that hasn't changed. I'm not one of those artists who, as Chilli, I'm something totally different from me [as a person]. I'm true to who I am at all times.

Do yourself and T-Boz plan to record another album as TLC in the future?

Oh, absolutely! I would love for something like that to happen, but right now I'm concentrating on my solo career and she's doing some other things as well.

Since launching your career as a member of TLC, how would you say you have changed as a person?

I have to say that I have not changed that much. At every point in my career, the highs and the lows, I have remained humble - that's just how God made me. It's totally helped that I have an awesome mother and incredible great-grandmother who I call 'Big Momma' that had a hand in raising me. I think that now I'm just more confident as far as it goes with things I want to do, things I want to say, and not caring what someone else says. Not that I really cared before, but I really don't care now.

You experienced so many highs and lows with TLC. What advice do you offer aspiring artists based on those experiences?

Oh, I can offer a lot of words! [Laughing] You know, it's funny when you look back. You just have to be true to yourself and make sure you don't compromise who you are as a person, because there are a lot of things that you may not like in trying to get into this industry. This is a very tough industry. It has no love for anybody, there is no loyalty, and once you realise and accept that, I think you can handle it a lot better. The problem comes when you go in expecting that everybody around you is totally in love with you. Everyone takes your phone calls real quick when you're super hot, or if there's something that they want from you, so you just have to recognise it for what it really is.

Do you have a particular highlight from the past 16-or-so years since starting out with TLC that you cherish most?

Becoming a mum. It put a lot of things in perspective for me. For many, many years I wanted to be a mother, that's all I could think about. As a little girl I would say I wanted to be a star and a mummy. When TLC first came out and the success

was coming our way, I was like, "Man, the baby is missing now." And when I had [Tron], it just put me at peace with a lot of things, 'cause I needed him.

Did the birth of your son help fill the void left by the death of Left Eye?

No, not really. I don't think you ever really get over a death, you just get to a point where you can accept it better. For the first couple of years [after Lisa's death] I couldn't even look at pictures of the three of us or hear our songs with her on it ... it was very, very difficult for me. It's always great to have people around you just to support you and give you a hug when you need it. That helps but it doesn't make it better. It's not a fix. I just had to learn to deal with it, and time is really what works on your side.

Your son recently turned eleven. Are you concerned by the images being offered to children nowadays by mainstream musicians?

I'm one of those parents [who is] totally into my son and everything that he does, so he's not allowed to watch certain television shows. I don't shelter him so much that he's so curious to wanna know what's going on. I talk to him about pretty much everything, things that are appropriate that he would understand at his age. That's my job as a parent, to make sure he's not exposed to things that he doesn't have any business thinking about or listening to, or whatever.

Is he allowed to listen to previous TLC albums?

Oh yeah! Maybe not "Ain't Too Proud To Beg". [Laughing]

In an interview a few months back, you mentioned that - although you're no longer in love with Usher - you do still love him. Usher dismissed your remarks by suggesting you're just trying to drum up publicity for your album. Were you disappointed by his comment?

Uh, no. I guess I would've been disappointed if I was expecting a comment from him. I wasn't expecting a comment at all, I was just expressing how I felt then and how I still feel to this day. I wouldn't change a word that I said. I don't think that there's anything wrong with always loving a person, or having love for a person. That's not a bad thing. Maybe it would've been better if I said I hate him, but that's not the case.

[Laughing]

Does it bother you to read derogatory press about your personal life?

No, not me. It depends on the type of person that you are. I'm just not the type of person to allow things to upset me like that because it's just negative energy that I don't need. The only thing that upsets me is the price of gas! Man, that puts me in a bad mood because I don't know if I want to travel anymore. They're trying to keep me at home more than I probably really want to be! [Laughing]

Speaking of travel, can we expect to see you in Australia any time soon?

Girl, yes! I have to come because we never went there as a group and I hear how beautiful Australia is. I know it's a loooong trip but I don't care. I definitely am looking forward to coming. **R&R**

TRIPLE THREAT

AS THE GO-TO PRODUCER AND SONGWRITER FOR TODAY'S LEADING RECORDING ARTISTS, RYAN LESLIE IS DIRECTING HIS HIT-MAKING PROWESS INWARD FOR HIS DEBUT ALBUM. WORDS BY BRIAN "Z" ZISOOK



A

“I COULDN'T AFFORD STUDIO TIME, SO I NEEDED TO FIGURE OUT A WAY THAT I COULD MAKE THE RECORDS THAT I HEARD IN MY MIND.”

After crafting hit records for a countless number of the recording industry's most talented artists, one of the most sought after musical minds in the game is finally putting the finishing touches on his own solo project. Well known for helping to propel the career of pop singer Cassie, triple threat Ryan Leslie will release his highly-anticipated debut album later this year.

Catapulted into go-mode after the surprising success of his hit single "Diamond Girl", Leslie and his NextSelection label began to craft the groundbreaking album they hope will give birth to the the Harlem native's solo career.

In an exclusive interview with Brian "Z" Zisook, Ryan talks about his forthcoming album, his biggest non-musical addiction, and how he stays out of that proverbial "box".

"Diamond Girl" is the lead-up to your long-awaited debut project. Describe the sense of accomplishment you have felt while completing material for this project, which is your own, as compared to all the records you have done for other artists' projects.

It's very, very, very exciting. It's so strange, people have been asking me [this question] more recently based on the great response we've [had] for "Diamond Girl". I've always been an artist and that's actually the reason why I started producing - so I could produce records for myself. I couldn't afford studio time, so I needed to figure out a way that I could make the records that I heard in my mind. All the success, all of the achievements that I've been able to have and accomplish as a producer have really all been byproducts of this dream I'm livin' right now, the dream of actually presenting and suppressing my artistic vision to everybody in the way that I'm doin' it.



Ryan, in a previous interview you told me that this solo project was not a priority. So from then to now, what has changed so that it is finally a priority?

Right. At that point in time we were really talking because I was getting some great action with the first artist on my Next-Selection imprint, Cassie, and we were having a tremendous response and encouragement and support of her first single, "Me & U", which went on to be my first number one record. So the priority has always been to put an album out, but just to see the way that people were reacting to "Me & U", I knew that I needed to focus my time and attention on getting her album done, grooming her, and making sure she could get out there and support this record and support all the stations and people that were encouraging and responding to her. In that time, I really just made it a priority internally that I wanted to do something that was going to be lasting and timeless and classic, since it would be really my first introduction to many of you, the listeners and people around the world that were gonna be hearing me, Ryan Leslie, actually performing my own record.

At the beginning of "Diamond Girl" you say, "They tried to put me in a box." Who tried to put you in a box, and furthermore, what do you do to stay out of that proverbial box?

I just said that in general. I said that kind of as a call out for anybody that's ever had a dream, ever aspired to be or do something and folks told them that that's out of their league or out of their range. I'm sure that there are definitely folks that say, "Ryan, why don't you stay in your producer box? We definitely enjoy what you've done for people like Cassie, Britney Spears, Loon, Cheri Dennis - we like that type of stuff." Or, "Ryan, if you're gonna sing, stay in the singer's box; don't rap." "Ryan, if you're gonna be in the R&B box, don't try and sing over Hip-Hop beats." Bottom line is, creative expression is a freedom that we have and I wanna be at liberty to freely express myself as an artist. And so, to stay out of that proverbial box, all I can do is be myself. Not only did we do a video for "Diamond Girl", I also shot another video and I shot an independent film, I did a photo campaign with a supermodel - I mean, we really just went all out and did any and everything I could possibly conceive of around this song.

Well, for as long as I can remember you've always told me that NextSelection is about a multimedia jump-off, and all the things you just mentioned in support of this upcoming project I'm sure is exciting everybody at the possibilities. The new single off the project is the Cassie-assisted "Addiction". Ryan, this is now going to be spill-the-beans time - what is Ryan Leslie's strongest addiction, other

than music?

Other than music?

Yes.

Hmm... ah...

You were gonna say music, huh?

I was definitely gonna say music. But, you know what? I think, honestly, video - video may be the next one. And I think that can be evidenced in my YouTube channel, with [me being amongst the] top 25 all-time most subscribed to musicians on YouTube. There's millions of channels, so that's definitely a testament to my love for video and expressing myself through the visual medium.

Are you also an avid DVD collector, Ryan?

No. I am an avid movie collector, but not DVDs, per se, or CDs, per se, when it comes to music. But I have a very expansive and insane digital library.

Okay, so a new-age pack-rat, if you will?

Exactly. I could honestly have my entire life on two hard drives and toss them in a backpack and there you have it.

Are we talkin' terabytes, one terabyte a piece?

Yeah, you're definitely talkin' terabytes. [Laughter]

Out of your three most well-known talents - singing, song-writing and producing - what is your favourite element of the process?

I would have to say that I equally - and I can't stress it enough - equally enjoy all three of them. And if you've ever watched me create in the studio - and you can do that on my YouTube channel - really, at the end of the day, it's about all three of those working in tandem to create some sort of expression. I really would feel helpless and lifeless if I were deprived of any of those three avenues for expressin' myself.

A few months back, you appeared on Green Lantern's Sirius radio show and freestyle piano-played over the beat to Lil' Wayne's "Lollipop". Was it straight off the dome?

[Laughter] Well, I'll tell you this; his show's really Hip-Hop-driven, so I was definitely honoured that he wanted to have me on the show. And two seconds before I walked in, my radio promo guy told me, "Look, Green Lantern's going to put you on the spot." I had no idea what that meant until I walked into the studio and saw that it wasn't a regular radio studio; it was actually him with some turntables and a keyboard was set up for me. And yes, that was one hundred percent extemporaneous piano-playing, right off the dome, man. To really be honest, all I did was a simple arpeggio, man, and a couple of different fills that I heard in my head. The response really has been crazy and I definitely appreciate it, but I definitely do that with great humility to those players who are out there that, from an improvisational standpoint, I gotta take my hat off to 'em. **R&R**



BEEN AROUND THE WORLD

BORN IN MALAYSIA, RAISED IN AUSTRALIA, AND PURSUING HER DREAM IN THE U.S.,
CHE'NELLE IS A TRUE INTERNATIONAL ARTIST. WORDS BY SOULEO



Y

You would've heard the beat booming out of the speakers of a local club as your body swayed to the rhythm and your head spun from the catchy chorus. But do you really know the talent behind the 2007 hit "I Fell In Love With A DJ"? Her name is Che'Nelle and she is the latest pop star to emerge out of the Australian scene. Born in Malaysia and raised in Oz, this Virgin Records signee is making a splash in international markets like Japan with her debut album, *Things Happen For A Reason*, released late last year locally. Despite having her U.S. release pushed back indefinitely, the bubbly and charming pop singer-songwriter continues to promote her release and spread her enthralling sound across the global market.

Che'Nelle took a break from travelling around the world to speak with Rhyme & Reason about growing up in Malaysia and Australia, trying to remain optimistic in a shaky record industry, representing her Asian heritage, why she believes in giving her all to a man, and more.

What was it like growing up in Malaysia?

Those were the best years of my life. What's beautiful about it is that there are different cultures: Chinese, Indian, and Malay-

sian. We all live together like one, so the blend of different cultures is like the most spectacular thing. It's very different from Australia.

How was the transition to Australia?

It was cool. Obviously there was a big culture difference with the way things are organised and the school. It was all new to me but I adapted. When you're a kid it's very easy to adapt. I loved growing up in Australia.

Geographically, Australia is so isolated from the rest of the world. So as a budding musician, did you feel a sense of isolation during your years growing up here?

I didn't actually think about that until maybe when I was, like, around nineteen or twenty, when I started getting really heavy into music professionally. That's when I started to realise we are really far from the rest of the world!

Do you have concerns about being a new artist in an unstable climate where labels are cutting artists left and right?

I try not to let it affect me too much because you can get negative and make yourself feel really down and depressed. Sometimes it crosses my mind and I'm like, "Oh my gosh!", but then again I try to change my thinking and tell myself things are always changing. So these things will sort themselves out — that's my belief. I'm going with the flow. If it's shaky right now it might not be so next year. Maybe next year will be my time.

There aren't too many visible Asian artists with mainstream success internationally. Do you feel a responsibility to represent Asians musically?

My main thing is to be able to give an image to Asians internationally and make them see that we Asians can make it. You don't necessarily have to come from America, 'cause I started off in Australia. I don't know if I'm gonna be an icon or not, but I don't feel much of a competition. Sometimes I don't really think about me being Asian in this whole industry. I just think, okay, I want to write good music for people. So that's what's in my mind most of the time.

I read that a lot of how you see yourself was influenced by your upbringing in Malaysia. In what way?

I still have a lot of cultural thinking from Malaysia. For example, in relationships, how a woman should treat their man over there is different than over here [America].

What's the difference?

For example, on a stereotypical level, ladies living here [America] would expect things from men - like, I expect you to carry my bag and buy me jewelry. [Laughs] But over in Malaysia we're like, we're gonna take care of our men and stuff like that, but not like men are domineering. So that's how I see things differently.

What is your behaviour like in relationships?

I think I am very Malaysian when in a relationship. Everybody deserves respect but I'm more of a giver. I don't expect anything in return - I just love. I just want to make sure I make the other person happy. That's how I am in a relationship.

Are you single?

Yeah, I'm single right now. [Laughs]

Happily?

Yeah. I'm travelling so much right now that if I was in a relationship I'd feel bad for the person. I'm away so much that they'd feel frustrated and see another woman, and then I'd feel bad. [Laughs] So I want to wait until I have more time. If I do choose to be in a relationship they have to be understanding and show me that they love me. Otherwise there's no point.

The title of the album, *Things Happen For A Reason*, is a phrase that people usually use when something doesn't go to plan. So when have you had to use that phrase after a disappointing moment?

Well, I wouldn't say disappointing; but how my album hasn't been released in America yet — there's a reason why my album isn't out just now. I know that good things are coming my way 'cause God has never let me down just yet ... and won't. **R&R**

“I THINK I AM VERY MALAYSIAN WHEN IN A RELATIONSHIP. I'M MORE OF A GIVER. I DON'T EXPECT ANYTHING IN RETURN - I JUST LOVE.”



LAST HURRAH?

IN THE AFTERMATH OF RELEASING WHAT MAY BE HIS FINAL ALBUM, THE GAME REVEALS WHAT IT WILL TAKE FOR HIM TO RETURN FOR A FOURTH OUTING.
WORDS BY BRIAN "Z" ZISOOK



O

As our infatuation with Lil' Wayne and his latest album, *The Carter III*, slowly faded away, the Hip-Hop nation has gradually gravitated toward the buzz of the next big release. In the past, consumers have been forced to wait months (sometimes longer) before another blockbuster disc made its way onto store shelves.

In spite of several delays, rapper The Game has finally dropped his highly-anticipated third studio album, *L.A.X.*. Leading the project toward the promised land was the Keyshia Cole collaborative single "Game's Pain", followed by the Weezy assisted "My Life", which has further fueled anticipation for the album and sees it battling against metal band Slipknot for the top chart position in the US. Though the Los Angeles native previously insisted that his recording career would end with this third album, *L.A.X.* might not yet be the rapper's final recording chapter.

In this interview with Brian "Z" Zisook, The Game discusses the influence of his music on the streets of Los Angeles, compares his face tattoo with Mike Tyson's, and reveals why retirement announcements following his latest project might have been premature.

Everything I've heard from you in the past two months, blowin' out my eardrums. I'm excited about the new project – are you?

Man, I appreciate it. I'm just in a space in my mind where I'm happy, my pen is happy. My lyrical content and the elevation speaks for itself. I think the last six years has helped me; I've grown a lot. [The] first two albums are classics in their own right, not because I said, [but] because the fans and the people have spoken, the critics, and *L.A.X.* is the third and the last of that trio.

On your first single, "Game's Pain", you pay homage to just about everyone who has paved the way for you. Who would you say is the person most responsible for your success that you left off of the song?

Eric Wright. Eazy-E, man. Without him, there's no me because

I couldn't re-rep Compton if he didn't start what he started. And that was what Hip-Hop was to me growin' up, so without him I wouldn't even know Big Daddy Kane existed, 'cause that was me. That's where music started for me. So you erase him and you erase me.

Eazy's influence on LA's street life was tremendous while he was alive.

He showed the world what LA was about. The world, the entire world, man. When you can do that, you've accomplished quite a bit.

How do you view your music, in the context of LA street life, when appealing to a worldly audience?

All I did was pick up where NWA left off and add my own flavour to it. I'm a street artist, but I'm still big and universal enough to hit the mainstream if I need to, and if I need to backtrack, take a couple steps backward and dive backwards into the underground, I can do that. So I think that I'm a gangsta rapper slash mainstream slash anybody who gets in my way I will annihilate. That's me.

Being a West Coast representative and wearing your community on your sleeve, what are your thoughts on the current Black versus Latino gang wars which continue to claim the lives of so many young people?

I think, well I know for a fact it's been on the decline, not an uprising, and I think my music always – not to toot my own horn or sound cocky – but my music always settles LA a little bit. I know a lot of people in LA are anticipating *L.A.X.* and I think that's gonna be on the decline, man. We got a couple peace conferences comin' up and things that we're doin' to try to cut that out.

Your music certainly has that ability. When you're creating it, do you think, "Hey, this could positively affect what is plaguing my area?"

I do that without making my album sound like Obama's political speeches, man. I just go in and I keep it one hundred, I keep it real, and whatever comes across – I make movies for people's ears, man, that's what I do. And if people can respect the fact that there's a message in every one of my songs and appreciate the message, understand it, then act on it, then it just makes me a bigger artist.

How does *L.A.X.* stack up against your previous releases?
L.A.X. [is] the best of the three, and I don't have to sell sh*t to a toilet.

Okay. So are you saying you have zero expectations for this album?

I'm not expecting nothing – that's the thing, man; I just let the album grow. I'm gonna give birth to that album and let it grow legs and become its own man in stores and let it do what it does. I'm not concerned anymore with numbers because when I started out I didn't have any fans, so I'm just

appreciatin' the fact that people love my music and gravitate towards it every time I drop an album.

It's hard to believe that *L.A.X.* is going to be your last album. Would you consider continuing to record albums if you just can't put the mic down?

If my fourth album comes together, if the idea of it comes together the way that I want to, I'll maybe consider doin' a fourth album. But if I can't get in the studio with the people that I want to and make it happen the way that I want to, if I can't even get them to talk about the idea, then I won't even consider it.

What is that idea that you speak of?

My fourth album - if it comes to life - will be titled *The DOC*, and that's *The Diary of Compton*. It'll have ten tracks on it, they'll just be called 'Chapter One' through 'Chapter Ten'. If I can get Dr. Dre, MC Ren, King Tee, DJ Yella, Ice Cube, and DJ Quik to help me – not necessarily rapping or saying anything, but to produce and just be in my corner, and I can document it all and get it done the way I want to, then *The DOC* will hit stores.

Okay. So, if you pitched that to those men you just listed, what could possibly deter the album from coming to life?

I don't know, but we're all men with different schedules, different lives, and that happening is not a reality to me. If it happens, it will be a dream and that's when I'll know there's really a God. [Laughter]

Does Hip-Hop need that type of album?

No, I need that album.

Will it make your career complete?

Hip-Hop needs me. [Laughter]

Who has the better face tattoo, you or Mike Tyson?

I got Mike beat.

Okay. If you and Mike are in the same room...

Mine's just sort of big [but] it's subtle, but I think it fits me more than Mike. Mike's is a little extreme.

[Laughter] It is. Would you ever consider something like that or...

I would never.

Okay, good.

I'm f*ckin' way off, out of my mind [just] puttin' this star under my eye.

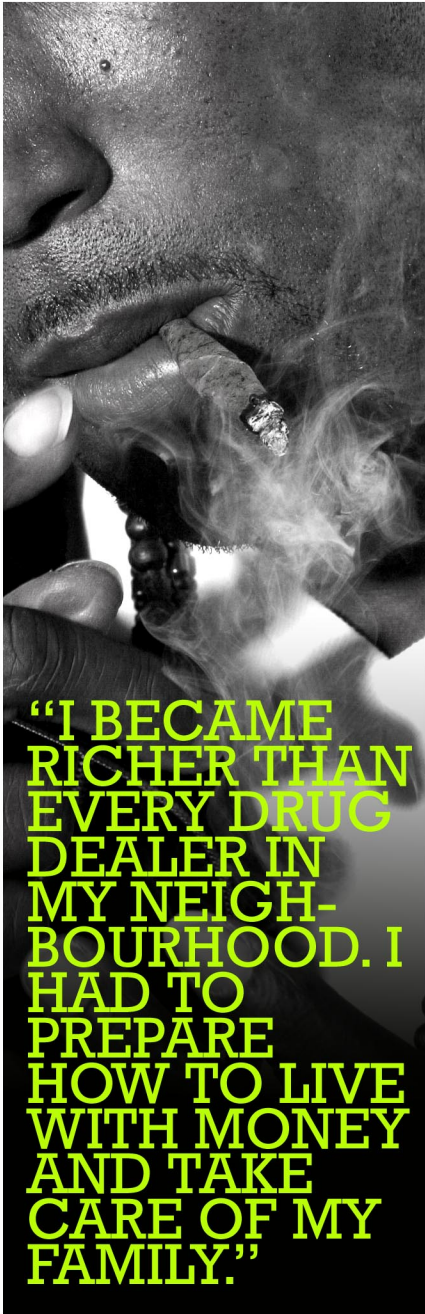
Give our audience a reason, if they need one, to go out and pick up *L.A.X.*

I don't get into that. You can buy my sh*t or you don't have to buy my sh*t. It'll be in stores for you to make that decision with your wallet. If you don't, then buy the person next to me or feed yourself and your family. And if you do [buy it] then be prepared to hear a f*ckin' classic album. That's just it: I don't sell myself to people. Hate it or love it, man – I said that five years ago, right? **R&R**



**TURN UP
THE VOLUME**

HAVING ALREADY FOUND SUCCESS IN CRAFTING HITS FOR OTHERS, DAME GREASE IS PREPARING TO MAKE SOME NOISE FOR HIMSELF. WORDS BY SOULEO



"I BECAME RICHER THAN EVERY DRUG DEALER IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD. I HAD TO PREPARE HOW TO LIVE WITH MONEY AND TAKE CARE OF MY FAMILY."

A

After first establishing himself with The LOX's "We'll Always Love Big Poppa" and DMX's breakout single "Get at Me Dog", Dame Grease has gone on to sell over 30 million records and produce for a veritable who's who of Hip-Hop.

In addition to developing his own production sound, Grease has been instrumental in launching the careers of artists such as Swizz Beatz, DMX and The LOX. But unlike other highly successful producers, he's yet to establish himself as a household name.

Now Dame Grease is ready to turn up the volume and scream his name out loud with his album *Goon Musik*, which finds him both in front of the mic and behind the boards.

Rhyme & Reason caught up with the Grease man to get the scoop on his music, adjusting to being a millionaire, the passing of his mother, and more.

You were a millionaire by the age of 24 or 25. How did you handle such success that early on?

It was amazing because I was off the streets. Me doing what I was doing, I became richer than every drug dealer in my neighborhood. I had fun with cars and that stuff but I had to prepare how to live with money and take care of my family.

You can't take a guy and give an individual off the streets a million dollars. They gotta get used to the million dollar things that come with it.

What was the hardest adjustment you had to make once you became a millionaire?

Taxes — like what the hell was that?! [Laughs]

Are your taxes paid now?

Yeah, I took care of everything.

You mentioned family. Did you have to worry about taking care of your own family or did you mean your siblings and such?

Family, as in my siblings. My mother passed away this past October, so I'm basically making some good money off of the craft that I love and taking care of the kids. That's my responsibility.

My condolences. How are you handling the recent loss of your mother?

I used it to be more focused. I don't hang out no more. Everything I do is work or with my family at home. It's been hard but I'm pretty sure my mother wouldn't want me to be so down, so I try to stay up and take care of the family. My mother was cremated and the ashes are here with me now.

A couple of years ago you slowed down a bit and just focused on working with Dipset. I read that you slowed down because you were trying to find what you really wanted to accomplish. Have you figured out your purpose?

Yes I have. I haven't gotten into this game thinking of how to monopolize and start a clothing company and these different things. I just love music and me loving music has made me some money. I appreciate it, but now as I get older and having kids, I need to sit back and figure out what type of work to do with this gift. I can take care of my family and even give something to the world that's different.

Do you ever wish for more mainstream recognition such as that of your peers?

I don't wish — I shall have. I haven't wanted it, so I don't wish. I will have it because that's what I'm gonna do. Before I never wanted it, so that's why I didn't have it.

So now, at this stage, you want more mainstream recogni-

tion?

I'm an adult now. I was a million dollar kid in that situation. So it's my job and part of what I do.

You've worked extensively with DMX and had a big hand in his success. Are you still in touch with him?

Yeah.

There have been a lot of rumours about his state and drug abuse. What is your take on the state of DMX now?

He's cool and in a good space. He's got his album coming out and his son is in the studio with me, 'cause he raps. He hangs with me on the weekends. We're family.

How old is his son?

About 15.

Xavier's his name, correct?

Yeah, but not his rap name. I don't know that yet.

Are you molding him?

Yeah, you gotta understand who his father is, so he's molded already, but I'm helping him along the way. I'm showing him the ropes to make great songs and be a beautiful artist.

What are the ropes?

To be an adult; if you're a woman, be a woman, a man, be a man, and to accept responsibility. So I instill that.

Are you producing on DMX's upcoming albums?

Yeah, I did a couple of cuts on there. I got the one with DMX and Freeway.

Is he still doing a gospel album?

Yeah, two albums.

Recently, Jim Jones said he wasn't speaking to Cam'ron but that they are still working on the *Diplomatic Immunity* series. So what's the state of the camp?

Uhm, I don't know. Those are my boys, too. All of them is my n***** so I try not to get too wrapped up in the political beefs. I believe that family problems don't come outside, so I don't even get involved in that stupid s**t. I'm Grease. I'm my own entity. I f**k with everybody and try to take no sides.

Do you have any closing words?

Big ups to everybody in Australia. I never been there but I would love to get there. I might just go to the outback and see a kangaroo 'cause I want to get in the dirt and really experience being there. **R&R**



GIRL TROUBLES

RAY LAVENDER'S GIRLFRIEND KISSED A GIRL ... AND SHE LIKED IT. NOW THE R&B CROONER IS MAKING THE MOST OUT OF HIS LOVE MISADVENTURES.

WORDS BY TRAC M.A.I.C.



“I CAUGHT MY GIRL IN BED WITH ANOTHER GIRL. AT FIRST I WASN'T EASY WITH IT, BUT I CAME TO GRIPS WITH IT.”

L

Let's face it, if you're going to catch your girlfriend in bed with another person, better it be a girl than another guy, right? Well, not only did 24 year-old Ray 'Ray-L' Lavender find himself in that exact predicament, but he wrote a hit song about it that launched his international recording career. Lucky bastard.

Signed to Akon's Kon Live Records, the Louisiana native's luck is set to continue with the imminent release of his self-titled debut album [formerly titled *X-Rayted*] and a scheduled tour with Akon and the King of Pop.

Ray Lavender sat down with Rhyme & Reason to talk cheating girlfriends, working with Teddy Riley, and why you'll never see a Ray-L sex video doing the rounds.

Of all the R&B artists out at the moment, you have to have one of the smoothest names. How did you land on 'Ray Lavender'? Is it your real name?

My real name is Earl Laray Lavender. Me and Akon were trying to find a name that suited my style and suited where I was coming from. I'm from Monroe, Louisiana, so I'm country. I'm real southern. Akon was like, "What do you think about Earl Ray?" And I was like, "Nah, too country." Then he's like, "Well, how about Ray Earl?" And I said, "Real country!" Then I said, "You know what? Let's just chop it in half. Everybody called me Ray in high school and I want to

represent my last name. What about Ray Lavender?" And he said, "Hey, it's got a ring to it!" So we took it to the label and the label said, "Let's go!" The ladies love it and my record caters to the ladies, so it worked out for me.

Your music certainly does cater to the ladies. Who were some of the artists who influenced your style?

Growing up I listened to a lot of R&B. Marvin Gaye inspired me, Sam Cooke inspired me, Babyface inspired me, Luther Vandross, Al Green, people like the SOS Band. I listened to a lot of R&B back in the day, but who inspired me the most was R. Kelly, because he's one of those cool R&B dudes and he says things a lot of people want to say, but in a cool way. He was one of the guys that I said, "Man, I wanna be like that when I sing!"

As a fan and a peer, what was your take on the child pornography charges R. Kelly beat earlier this year?

Oh man, you know what? People go through things and sometimes you can't bounce back out of it. We got the whole media looking at us; we got a microscope on us right now. Every little thing we do, whether it's good or whether it's bad, we're gonna get it. And that's just what comes with all the fame. But when you start filming stuff and putting stuff on camera, you're asking for a little controversy. I don't know if it was him or not [on the sex tape] but, either way, it's negative. All I can say is that I'm glad he bounced back and God gave him a second chance at life, 'cause he was going to jail. God gave him a second chance and he's going to learn from this. Believe me, it's going to be a big learning experience, and not only for him, but for artists like me and Akon. Everybody's looking. We saw what happened and we know not to put anything on tape whether it's us or not. [Laughing] I'm just glad he got out of it; I'm not condoning [his actions] if he did it, I'm just saying I'm glad he got a second chance. I still love his music, nothing changed about that. God gave him a second chance and I hope he learned from it.

You've worked with some fantastic talent on your upcoming debut album, from Akon to T-Pain to Teddy Riley. As a debut artist, how was it working with such esteemed talent on your first record?

Me and Akon, we've been friends for a long time, over ten years now. It was a pleasure working with 'Kon [from when I first] met him, 'cause he's been hot like that for a long time. T-Pain, the guy's incredible! He's an incredible character, he

knows his music and he does it well. Working with him I learned a lot, especially with melodies and how to build my stage presence. Working with Teddy Riley was like going to music school. Teddy Riley lives, breathes and bleeds music. I call him Uncle Riley. He is the professor of music; he came in and changed the whole face of R&B. I went to Virginia and I stayed up there for 2 years with him and learned a whole lot about music, melodies and just how to write songs. Working with these people is like a dream come true. It was an incredible experience that I'm still trying to get over.

You first made it onto everyone's radar with your single "My Girl's Gotta Girlfriend". Was that song based on actual events? Does Mr. Lavender's girlfriend indeed have a girlfriend?

You know what? It did happen to me, but when I put the song out I was amazed by how many other people it happened to. It happened to me just like in the song; I came home early and caught my girl in bed with another girl. At first I wasn't easy with it, it kind of messed me up. But I came to grips with it [because] having two chicks is better than none! So I joined in and it was cool for what it was worth, but I'm not with those girls now. Those were my college days when it was kind of crazy. But when I put that song out last year, it was very funny how many people that had actually happened to. I thought I was probably the only one, but when I put that out, all kind of guys were telling me, "Man, that just happened to me the other day." That song kind of worked out 'cause it's a fad right now - guys having girls with girlfriends.

Word is you're heading out on the road with your boy Akon and Michael Jackson. How do you prepare to open a show for the King of Pop?

Being that I'm going to be touring with Akon and Michael Jackson, I'm going to lose myself and make sure all my performances are incredible. Akon gave me a budget to do whatever I want to do in my show, so I'm going to try to have the pyro[technics], everything. I'm going to go all out! I gotta say this; it's an honour to be working with the incredible Michael Jackson. Even saying that right now gives me goose bumps 'cause I remember when I was younger, listening to this guy's songs and just tearing up 'cause I was in love with Michael Jackson. Who don't love Michael Jackson?! Just being on tour and being around the guy, just being on the same stage as him ... man, I'm honoured and it's a dream come true. **R&R**

GETTIN' GROWN

PRETTY RICKY EXPLAIN THE MATURE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SEXED-UP LYRICS THEY SERVE TO FLOCKS OF TEENAGERS.
WORDS BY SOULEO



I

If you didn't take the time to get to know them, you'd likely think that Pretty Ricky is nothing more than a sex-driven, immature group with lyrics a bit too adult for the teenage demographic they are marketed at. Part of the blame for that misperception lies with the group itself and they know it. After making a name for themselves with sensual lyrics, "childish" behaviour and steamy live shows, they are now aiming to round out their rough edges by displaying a softer more mature side, as evidenced by the innocuous title of their lead single, "Cuddle Up." That lead single and the forthcoming album, *80's Babies*, is not the only change fans will have to get used to - as the group introduces a new member, 4Play. Rhyme & Reason sat down with the boys to discuss the departure of Pleasure P, their new member, their provocative lyrics, and more.

So let's jump into the major change; what led to Pleasure P's departure from the group?

Baby Blue: He's still on our record label, Blue Star Entertainment. Right now we're figuring out a solo situation for him. We passed on over half a million [dollars] to keep him as a Blue Star artist, so we're working this situation out.

So he just wanted to go solo?

Baby Blue: Yeah, he wants to do his solo thing and that's all. So we're working this out.

Did you see his departure coming?

Baby Blue: Yeah, we talked about it. It wasn't no fighting - like a drastic thing.

Are there any other members planning to go solo?

Baby Blue: All of us gonna do solo stuff.

4Play, how did you end up a part of the group?

4Play: Well, actually on their last tour, Blue Star Entertainment signed a group from Pittsburgh, PA. I was on the tour with that group and the opportunity opened up. They auditioned people and interviewed them but they accepted me like a brother.

This group is already established and successful, so as the new guy coming in is there any pressure you feel to prove yourself?

4Play: No, not at all because they accepted me just like a brother. Baby Blue and I sit in the studio and we work all day. We'll work from 6am to 4am in the morning and we just keep it moving. I've been preparing myself this whole time—my whole life for this situation, so there ain't no pressure. It's like I was supposed to be here from the beginning.

What are you bringing new to the group?

4Play: I'm just bringing me, all of me. I'm gonna...

Baby Blue: I think that's more of a question for us to answer

'cause we are the group. I feel like he brings a whole new element and a whole new dimension to Pretty Ricky. 4Play don't need nobody to do his background [vocals] 'cause he's a beast. He does all his harmonies. We wrote these songs in ten part harmony and it's like, sh*t, to be honest with you, the boy is just a beast. He can dance and move and do everything. Physically, he's in shape, so now we got two six-pack kings instead of just one. The album cover looks like a battle of the washboards!

The album's title is pretty self-explanatory, but is there any other meaning behind the title besides the fact that you were all born in the 80's?

Baby Blue: We just want to pay homage to the 80's. We feel like real music is missing from the airwaves. The airwaves are being over-saturated with this ringtone music. There's young dudes getting rich because the technology enables them to stay at home and make music off of their computers, and it's a beautiful thing, especially for the black community and culture. But we just want to pay homage to back in the day where there was real music, where you had to be musically inclined to make music. I'm talking about back when Babyface and L.A. Reid were doing their thing and you had the Mary J. Blige's and Jodeci's. They were more urban and street ... and that's us. We're straight street and hood with the R&B and Hip-Hop, so we should have been [performing] in the 80's but we're here in 2008.

You all worked with the late Static Major on "Till the Wheels Fall Off". How was it working with him?

Baby Blue: He was a mentor of mine and he actually took me under his wing. He taught me a lot about what I know as far as making music, songwriting, producing and harmonies. We've got so many memories with him of being in the studio and him coming in with Crown Royal and doing his thing. So rest in peace to that boy. We give him a shout out on the album and that's like a brother to us.

When you guys first came out you were teens, but had what some call provocative and sensual lyrics...

Baby Blue: Let me get on that.

But wait, I didn't finish [Laughs]

Baby Blue: It's like the record label took advantage of the young charismatic look and marketed us to that young demographic. The album was like a 19 and 20 year old album, but they marketed us to these younger girls. Ain't nothing wrong with that but that's where it got crossed up at 'cause now, looking at it from the younger demographic point of view, you're like these songs are too mature for the younger crowd. I feel like, in our generation, they need somebody like us who can be the voice of the young people. Adults take it for

granted and think these young kids don't know what's going on, but we in the age of the Internet and cable television. The young kids know what's going on and I feel like what we do is educate them in a younger, more hip way. They feel like Pretty Ricky talks about sex but we talk about safe sex and consensual sex, and if you're being abused - reach out and talk to somebody. Who else can do it? There is no younger artist that actually can reach out to these younger kids and they feel comfortable about it. Bow Wow don't talk about sex like that; Omarion don't talk about the sex like that; Chris [Brown], he just getting into it. In his last video he was on stage [looking] like Pretty Ricky. When he first came out we were sending girls to his dressing room.

On your single "Cuddle Up" you feature your new girl group, Butta Crème. Often for females there exists a double standard when it comes to expressing sexuality. So do you think you'd still be successful if you were a girl group with the same provocative lyrical content that you have now?

Baby Blue: Yeah, look at Madonna and all of them. Sex sells. Madonna came out the way she did and over the years made the transition, and now you see her making the transition back with *Hard Candy*. It goes up and down. Elvis Presley in his day and age was doing his pelvic thrust, so they used to film him from the waist up. So sex [is] always gonna sell and the record labels are always gonna market it that way. They look for groups and artists that have that sex appeal to appeal to the women and the men.

Some people outside of your core fan-base look at your image and singles and think of you guys as being very sexual and wild. Are you guys ever concerned that people aren't taking you and your music seriously?

Baby Blue: I don't feel like the music is what caused it. The last group to be standing before we came was B2K. 112 was going through their thing and Boyz II Men - they pretty much went overseas in Japan. So B2K was the last group to actually be marketed to our demographic. So when we came out you had other groups trying to do the B2K thing. We came out in a different direction. I think that's the only reason why we work, 'cause we were real and wore baggy pants down to our cheeks. The other groups were trying to do the pretty boy thing and we were beginning artists. Now we have material and a background to grow from. Every album is about growth and we definitely have grown. We have paid dues and we're still here. So now people can look at us and say, "Them boys [are] still together and still making hit records." Now is when all the accolades will start coming to us 'cause we're still here. **R&R**





FEAR OF FLYING

ROBIN THICKE REVEALS HOW, EVEN WITH TALENT AND SUCCESS ON HIS SIDE, FEAR OF FAILURE REMAINS HIS GREATEST MOTIVATOR. WORDS BY BRIAN "Z" ZISOOK



“THE REASON I DIDN’T RELEASE A RECORD UNTIL I WAS 23 WAS BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID OF MAKING A FOOL OF MYSELF.”

When Robin Thicke released his debut album *A Beautiful World* in 2003, he was rockin’ the Captain Jack Sparrow hairdo, sampling “A Fifth of Beethoven” and dominating the international charts with his single “When I Get You Alone”. In October of 2006, the Los Angeles native returned with *The Evolution of Robin Thicke*, and with the help of Pharrell Williams (and a haircut), the project was platinum-certified in roughly six months.

Now, less than two years since *The Evolution*, this mega-talented, do-it-all musician is prepping the release of his third studio album, *Something Else*. Produced in-full by Thicke and his production partner, Pro Jay, the LP will possess a mostly live instrumentation feel and feature very few guest artists. Led by the current single “Magic”, the project is currently set for release this September.

In an exclusive interview with Brian “Z” Zisook, Robin talks about his constant fear of failure, those Justin Timberlake comparisons, which famous rap group was a major musical influence, and what his ‘Dream World’ looks like.

Your debut, *A Beautiful World*, marked your introduction into the music game. Your last album, *The Evolution of Robin Thicke*, really put your talents on that proverbial map. So, what will the release of *Something Else* mean for the future of your career?

Wow, that’s a lot of pressure! [Laughter] I don’t know – I mean, it really is just my job to express what I’m going through and try to connect with people. *Something Else* just really represents what I feel we’re going through in America right now, which is the age of change and hope and Barack Obama. And that’s what the first song, “Magic”, is about. I got it and you got it – we’ve all got magic inside of us even though they try to beat it out of us.

Well, let’s talk about “Magic”. As you mentioned, it’s the

lead single off the project. You got it, she’s got it, together you got it, but let’s explain how we get it. In your mind, how does one go about acquiring this magic?

[Laughter] Well, it really just takes not givin’ up on yourself and havin’ a dream, and believin’ in that dream and not givin’ up on it.

I’ll tell you, you are parlaying these questions perfectly for me. My next one is; one of the new songs off the album is entitled “Dream World”, on which you describe what your dream world would consist of. But, Robin, would it be safe to say that you’re already living a dream?

Well, I believe that I have been blessed to be able to live out some of my dreams, that is true, but I never stop dreaming because there is so much to be done to take care of your friends, to love your woman right, and help your community and help people in need. So the dream never ends, you know?

You recently won an ASCAP award for your hit single “Lost Without U” in the category of R&B/Hip-Hop Song of the Year. For those who are not familiar, ASCAP is the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Let me ask you, what is more challenging – writing a hit record, producing a hit record, or singing the hit record that you wrote?

I don’t know if there’s any math to a hit record or otherwise we’d do it every time. I think the thing is, you just try to make the best music that you can and music that you love first as an artist, and then every once in a while you get lucky ... and [that’s] a hit record.

Well, lucky for you the planets align quite often. The writing and production credits are solely yours on this new album, so what went into your decision to not collaborate with other artists and producers?

My co-producer is a guy named Pro Jay, who’s incredibly talented; he plays every instrument and we’ve been working together for eleven years. And besides that, after being on the road for two years with my amazing band, we went right into the studio to recapture that magic, which is why almost all of the album is live music. Then we called up the old horn players and string arrangers from the *Thriller* and *Off the Wall* records and had the old Michael Jackson cats on there puttin’ horns on. So we really just tried to include as many people as possible without doin’ it the way everybody else does it, you know?

Speaking of live performances, last summer I saw you open for Beyonce in Chicago. During the entire performance you did nothing but smile; it’s obvious that you are in love with what you are doing for a living. With that said, are there aspects of being a professional musician that, at times, make you unhappy?

Oh, absolutely. I mean, the pressure to deliver, the pressure to live up to things or to just take criticism, it’s all very challenging and it’s hard for the ego and your insecurities. The reason that I didn’t release a record until I was twenty-three was because I was afraid of making a fool of myself, but you gotta be willing to fall if you’re gonna ever stand, you know?

Is that fear of failure somewhat gone from your mind?

Oh, no. The fear of failure is what keeps me on my toes; it’s what keeps me on the edge. I want to try and make music and put on a show that people can’t live without, you know?

Definitely. Robin, late last year you were forced to reschedule some of your tour dates after your doctor said, “take a vocal rest.” Knowing that your voice is your career, do you have a daily throat routine that you use to protect your instrument?

Well, no, I don’t try to look at my life as any one thing [making] or breaking my happiness, because if I put all that pressure on one element or aspect of my life making me happy then I’ll be miserable a lot of the time. If something happened to that, it would ruin my life. I try not to take things like that too seriously. My music is a full art form that doesn’t just include my voice. I take care of my voice when it’s time to perform and in between I don’t let it stop me from enjoying my life.

Okay, so all that and a little bit of gargling and some chicken soup and you’re good?

Absolutely. Really, you’ve just got to keep singing; if you keep singing all the time, the muscles will stay strong for you. **There are many times that I have played your material for those who were unfamiliar with what you’ve done and accomplished in this industry, and at first listen I’ve heard them say, “Oh, yeah – he sounds like Justin Timberlake!” I’m sure you’ve heard the comparisons – do they bother you at all?**

Well, I don’t really hear it that often, only when I’m dealing with the media, but not when I’m dealing with music people. But no, it doesn’t bother me; he’s a very talented, successful dude.

Are there any other artists who are not performing or putting out music right now, but that you listened to growing up, that people have said, “Oh, Robin kinda sounds like him”, and you say, “Actually, that’s kinda where I got some of my inspiration from”?

Well, there’s the obvious Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, Al Green influences in the music, but I think that there’s so much music that a musician soaks up by the time they create their own style that, now, I really just feel like I’m creating my own music. And I’ve been influenced by everybody from Jim Hendrix to The Beatles to NWA, you know? **R&R**



HAVING ALREADY INJECTED THEIR UNIQUE BRAND OF SWAGGER THROUGHOUT HIP-HOP, JIM JONES AND THE DIPSET ARE NOW ON TRACK TO TAKEOVER FREESTYLE ROLLING WITH TEAM DIPSKATE. INTERVIEW DOMINIC DI FRANCESCO

Sure, the equipment might look similar, but don't make the mistake of confusing 'freestyle rolling' with 'rollerblading' or 'inline skating', especially not in the presence of Julian Bah, Rachard Johnson, Ramelle Knight, Calvin Sayles or John Stephens; collectively known as DipSkate.

This team of expert rollers are taking a traditionally tame sport to its extreme with a cocktail of blistering speed and dizzying hang-time. Add to this a sponsorship deal with one of Hip-Hop's most indelible movements, courtesy of Jim Jones and Diplomat Records, and skating of the inline variety has never quite seemed so hip.

In this exclusive interview, the DipSkate team gives Rhyme & Reason Magazine a crash course on what's really good with freestyle rolling.

What differentiates freestyle rolling from rollerblading?

Ramelle Knight: The swagger. We use the term 'freestyle rolling' because it incorporates everything we love to do with extreme rollerblading. Freestyle rolling is the combination of rollerblading mixed with fashion and music. We skate hard, get fly and the music plays the role of a heartbeat. Freestyle rolling is a lifestyle. There's still a lot to discover and bring forward to freestyle rolling. It's still young.

John Stephens: This is real entertainment - something you can watch with your family and friends who know nothing of the sport. We bring that era of swag and style that we are living in

to fans, with the skates off or on. Some "rollerbladers" showcase people having knives thrown at them while they're drunk - this isn't Jackass, and I don't skateboard. Don't associate me with that. I don't wear tighter pants than my woman, nor do I listen to music that sounds like the devil is speaking to me.

How long has freestyle rolling been around in its current form, and how popular and wide is its reach?

John Stephens: Freestyle rolling has been out long before I strapped on my first pair of recreational skates back in 1995 at nine-years-old, when I took out the middle wheels just so I could try to grind. Just know that we are here now. Don't let our sport's past taint your view of us now. As far as how popular it is now, I can't name one place I haven't seen freestyle rolling. Just recently on YouTube I saw a U.S. soldier in Iraq with his uniform on, gun in hand, rolling on pieces of wood that lead up to a practice rail. Our sport has been to war. That's gangsta. You can't tell me nothing.

Ramelle Knight: It's only been a few years now for me. Like three years. Freestyle rolling is known all over the world, but at the same time it comes from rollerblading, so we can never down someone for saying they rollerblade. I prefer freestyle rolling. I just feel that anyone can rollerblade. Everybody can't do what we do.

From the outside, freestyle rolling seems to share a very similar culture to skateboarding. How would you describe the freestyle rolling culture and mentality?

Ramelle Knight: It's a lifestyle, a culture. We have big events every year where we all meet. We rock certain types of gear. We don't jump on bandwagons - we build everything from the ground up. It's set up like we're a big family. I can travel anywhere in the world and have friends that live out there. The music and fashion is what you make it in anything you do in life - what you choose is what you choose.

John Stephens: I would describe freestyle rolling's culture and mentality as one that's very united and we understand that swagger and gracefulness is a must when we roll out each and every single day. Rollerblading, as it stands, is a little close-minded. They prefer it to be called 'rollerblading' [as opposed to 'freestyle rolling'], but they don't seem to understand that we excluded ourselves from the formal use of inline skates a long time ago with all these death-defying maneuvers that we love doing.

Julian Bah: Well, we're both athletes - that's about the only similarity between freestyle rollers and skateboarders. When y'all see us, you're gonna know you ain't never seen nothing like this before.

How did your affiliation with Jim Jones come about?

Ramelle Knight: At first, we were working with Dame Dash and Roc-A-Fella to do something with Rocawear clothing but, as we all know, the split [with Jay-Z] occurred so we were kinda left in the dust - but at the same time, we were still grinding and figuring out ways to get out there to the masses.

We knew Jim a bit already, so we went to the studio in 2006 to chill with him and our manager at the time, Joseph Miles, rest in peace. We threw on some footage of us skating and he was hype. Right before we left, he's like, "Yo, we should make a skate team." Ever since then, we've been on our grind with DipSkate.

How has this affiliation been working in your favour?

Julian Bah: Well, DipSkate is the first team of its kind. So now when you talk about freestyle rolling you'll think of us.

John Stephens: We've had several magazine spreads, live interviews with popular television shows and college radio. We've travelled all over the U.S. and met a lot of people that actually love what we are doing for our sport. I've got a lot more haters than usual now, so that's always good. [Laughs] We're getting remarkable publicity that will eventually allow us to branch out and start other ventures like modeling, acting and other things. Overall, we've been able to introduce freestyle rolling to a wider range of audience than ever before was possible!

Ramelle Knight: It's definitely giving us a boost in buzz. We went from under the radar to out in the public. We just want people to see what we do and respect it. We are dedicated individuals, but when we get together we are unstoppable.

To see videos and get more information on DipSkate, go to: www.myspace.com/dipskate **R&R**

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