



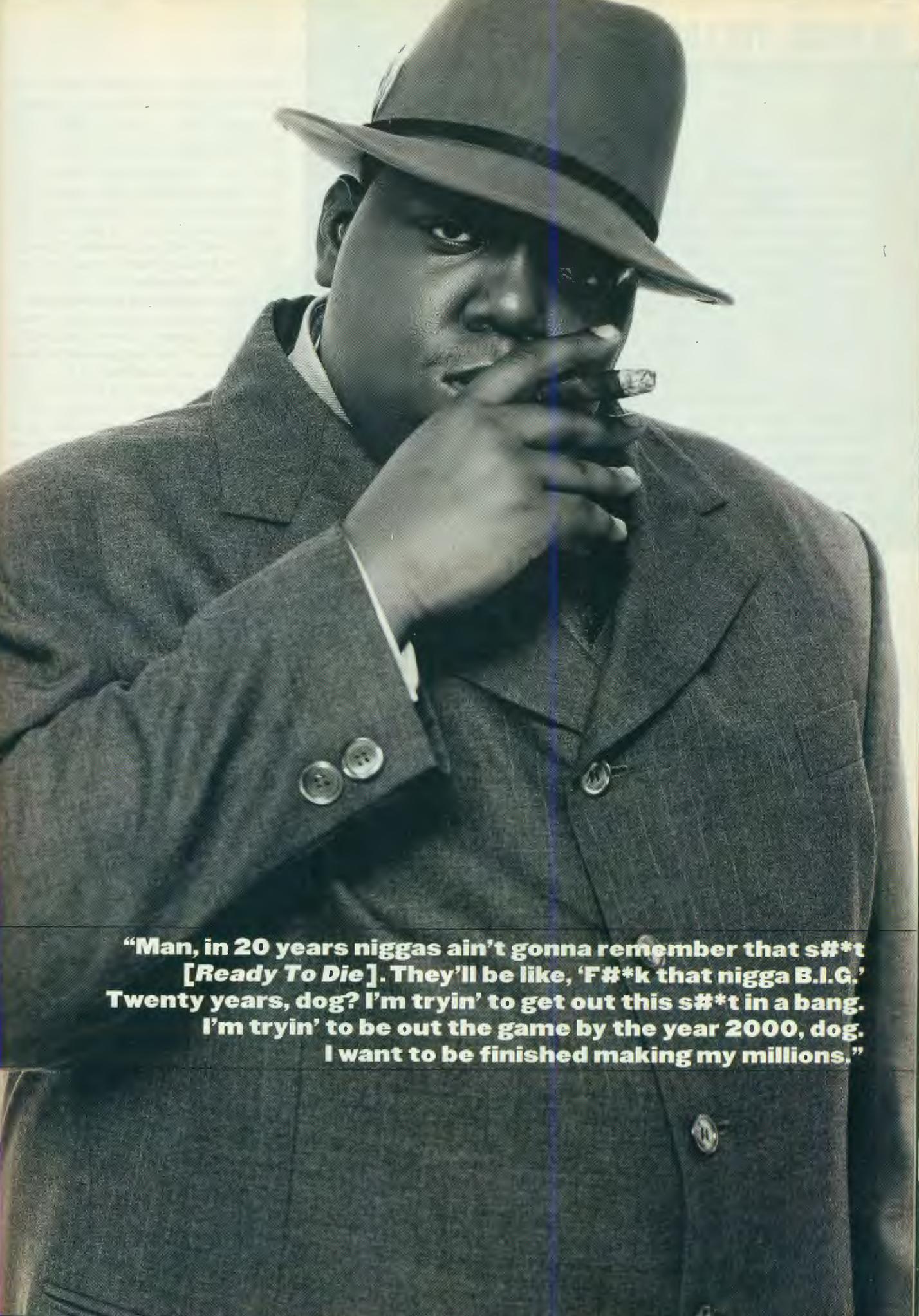
xxclusive

**1995 INTERVIEW
WITH THE KING
OF NEW YORK**

CAME BACK for you

Six years after his death, Biggie Smalls lives on—through his music, and now, through this never-before-published interview. Let's go back in the day: 1995 was the year and the Black Frank White was on top of the world.

WORDS Gabriel Alvarez IMAGES Eli Hershko



“Man, in 20 years niggas ain’t gonna remember that s#*t [Ready To Die]. They’ll be like, ‘F#*k that nigga B.I.G.’ Twenty years, dog? I’m tryin’ to get out this s#*t in a bang. I’m tryin’ to be out the game by the year 2000, dog. I want to be finished making my millions.”



BIGGIE: THE LOST TAPES

Things were about to change for Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." Wallace. It was a quiet weekday afternoon in March 1995 and he was in Los Angeles, along with some of his young homies from Junior M.A.F.I.A., on business. The large Brooklyn-born gentleman who sat on the couch inside an executive suite at the Le Montrose Suite Hotel had done quite a lot in a rather short time in the rap game. His debut album, *Ready To Die*, had just been certified platinum, launching his record label, Bad Boy, on its historic voyage and—continuing what Staten Island's Wu-Tang Clan had started—bringing New York City back to prominence at a time when the West Coast was dominating.

• There would be a lot more to come for the 22-year-old MC. More awards and rewards. More great music. More good times. But it was all about to be tainted. • In less than a month, wounded former friend Tupac Shakur would, from behind bars, implicate Biggie (as well as Bad Boy founder Sean "Puffy" Combs) in the November 1994 shooting that left five bullet holes in the California rapper's body. 'Pac, who had been ambushed on his way to a recording session in Manhattan, was convinced he'd been set up. Come August, at the Second Annual *Source Awards*, Marion "Suge" Knight would publicly insult Puffy, inaugurating the Death Row vs. Bad Boy feud. Two months later, Knight would recruit Shakur, post a million-dollar bail bond and bring him home signed to a contract. Things were about to change, all right. • On this lovely spring day, however, B.I.G. was only duking it out with his rival on *Billboard's* Hot Rap Singles Chart, where "Big Poppa" vied for top position against "Dear Mama." He'd married his labelmate, singer Faith Evans, six months earlier, and he seemed calm, cool, down-to-earth and confident. • Christopher Wallace was shot two years later, less than 10 minutes away from where this interview took place. Here's one more chance to hear from an artistic young man who most definitely was ready to live.

XXL: You've got the number-one spot on *Billboard's* Hot Rap Singles chart. How are you able to do big hits like "Juicy" and "Big Poppa" and still stay true to the streets?

B.I.G.: 'Cause the street-level shit is the natural shit. That's the shit that I'm always gonna have, you know what I'm sayin'? 'Cause I'm from the streets. But the radio shit is shit where I know that in order to make money in this game, you gotta give the radio what they want. **There's a lot of honesty in your songs. You mention how your mom had breast cancer on "Things Done Change."**

I don't be givin' a fuck, dog. Straight up and down. If that's the shit that I'm feelin', this has to be said. And it has to be said in order for the song to make fuckin' sense. It don't make no sense makin' up no shit. "My mama got cancer in her breast/Don't ask me why I'm stressed!" My mom's fucked up. That's all I got. So if a nigga be like, "Yo, the album is real hostile," or "He's angry," there's no reason why I shouldn't be angry. You know what I'm sayin'? I'm in a fucked-up situation. I'm tryin' to get some ones. If that's what I want to say, I say it. That's how I get down.

"...If I said it, I meant it/Bite my tongue for no one."

Really doe.

But on "Gimme The Loot" there were words that had to be edited out.

Yeah, like the pregnant girl shit. That was that shit that Puffy told me I couldn't do. Instead of

me changin' the song, we just edited it. I mean, at the time it was all good. But then after he thought about it, like, "Yo, I wouldn't give a fuck if you pregnant/Gimme the baby ring and the #1 Mom pendant," he was like, "Yo, that shit is just ridiculously cruel." I mean, it's ridiculously cruel, but at the same time, it's real! Niggas get down like that, you know what I'm sayin'? But I guess it was too real. So instead of me changin' it around and makin' it sound stupid, niggas bleeped out "pregnant." And they bleeped out "the cops in the blue suits" just to avoid having problems with the police... I got shit that ain't even been on that *Ready To Die* album. Hard shit that Puffy was like, "You crazy if you think I'm puttin' that shit out. You nuts?"

How much responsibility should an artist have when it comes to kids listening to the music?

As much as they put the self out to have. Some rappers come in the game on some wantin' to be a role model... [Like] "I'm here for the kids." That wasn't my job. I'm here to tell the real shit. And the real shit ain't pretty. You know what I'm sayin'? And the truth hurts. Muthafuckas is getting mad. But, I mean, the proof is in the pudding, dog. I'm a platinum artist. I got gold singles. I'm doin' my thing. So obviously, I'm doin' something right. And I gotta stay on that road. Ain't no nigga can change that.

The split voices on "Gimme The Loot," where did that come from?

I mean, hearin' people like Slick Rick do it. I

always bugged off of that like he always [imitated] two people. I liked the way he freaked that. So on "Gimme The Loot" I really wanted to make people think that it was a different person [rhyming with me]. I just wanted to make a hot joint that sounded like two niggas—a big nigga and a lil' nigga. And I know it worked because niggas asked me like, "Yo, who did you do 'Gimme The Loot' wit'?" So I be like, "Yeah, well, my job is done." I just got it from Slick though. And Redman did it too, but he didn't change his voice.

What is the illest line that you ever heard?

Damn... I heard some crazy shit, dog. I would have to pick somethin' from my shit, though. 'Cause I know I done said some of the most illest rhymes, you know what I'm sayin'? But mad niggas said different shit, though. I like that shit [Keith] Murray said [on "SychoSymatic"]: "Yo E, this might be my last album son/'Cause niggas tryin' to play us like crumbs/Nobodys/I'm a fuck around and murder everybody." I love that line. There's shit that G Rap done said. And Meth [on "Protect Ya Neck"]: "The smoke from the lyrical blunt make me ugh." Shit like that. I look for shit like that in rhymes. Niggas can just come up with that one lil' piece. Like when I said, "Fuck the world, fuck my moms and my girl..."

"...My life is played out like a Jheri Curl."

Yeah, shit like that. It's just ill lines. You ain't never gonna lose with shit like that.

Do you think there's a difference between a rapper and an MC?

I don't think so. It's a difference between an MC and a songwriter, though. An MC nigga is them niggas that be rippin' the shows. Niggas like Lord Finesse and Supernatural. Niggas that got that stage shit, where if they get on stage you gonna bug off they shit. When they drop the beat and you hear what they say, they punchlines is so on point, or the shit they do on stage is so on point. But then you gotta look at niggas like Treach or niggas like myself or niggas like Nas who are straight-up songwriters where you have to hear the music—and the way the beat and the rhymes is put together is just crazy. I say Treach as far as "O.P.P." Shit that he laid down and made classic shit. Those are songwriters.

What is your take on battlin'?

To me, battlin' is some shit that you used to do when you ain't had shit. When you was tryin' to prove yourself. You was like, "Fuck that. I know I'm nice. And I know it's another nigga that everybody sayin' is nice. So I'll battle that nigga so niggas can say I'm the nicest." Niggas ain't had shit back then. They ain't had nuthin' to do but to gain that crown of just being the nicest MC. Now, me, I'm tryin' to be the MC with the most money. [Chuckles] That's my shit now.

"AIN'T NO EAST COAST OR WEST COAST. IT'S B.I.G. COAST. I got my own s#*t. I ain't f#*kin' with nobody. I represent the East 'cause that's where I'm from, but it ain't like when I come to the West I'ma have an attitude."



“I want to be remembered as a youth that got into the game at the tender age of 18, came out with his album and just blew up and just never stopped. He had his lil’ five-year album deal and ever since the first damn interviews he said he didn’t want to do this s#*t forever. He wanted to make five platinum-and-better albums. I WANT TO BE THE ARTIST TO HAVE EVERY ALBUM THAT WAS DOPE.”



That’s the shit that I’m tryin’ to accomplish. I wanna be a young nigga in the game handlin’ some millions. So far I made my own category. I’m the first solo Brooklyn nigga to go platinum. That’s my shit. That’s my category. I won. I’m number-one at that right there. You know what I’m sayin’? I’m tryin’ to get money. Fuck that battlin’ shit. A nigga stepped to me, I think it was in Oakland or San Francisco, on some real smooth shit. Like, “Yo, you Biggie Smalls?” “Muthafucka, you know who the fuck I am. Yeah, it’s me.” “I wanna battle you.” “You wanna battle me?” I said, “Yo, I’ll battle you for some money.” He said he’d battle me for a dime sack. When I got an ounce in my pocket. But I’ll battle niggas for some money, no problem. And I’ll put a hole in a nigga’s ass. But that’s another thing I don’t want. I don’t want these niggas to give up their lil’ dreams of rap. Fuck around and get burnt by me and be like, “Damn, he embarrassed me. I don’t wanna rap no more.” ‘Cause I’ll put a hole in ‘em.

Are you gonna do another conceptual album?

We tryin’ to figure out how we gonna pull this shit off. We got a good idea, ‘cause we gonna try to like continue it off from the last album, ya know what I’m sayin’? ‘Cause the heartbeat [at the end of *Ready To Die*’s last song, “Suicidal

Thoughts”] never stopped. So we just gonna try to continue it on from there.

How much input do you have with the tracks you rap on?

I mean, Puff, he gives me beats, but he don’t like say, “You gotta rhyme to this.” He says, “Yo, if you went with this joint right here, you’re outta here.” That’s what he said on “Big Poppa.” He said, “Yo, dog, your voice over this beat right here, you’re gone. I mean it’s definitely a gold single.” And I’m listenin’ to the beat. I always loved it. I loved it when Tip flipped it with the “Bonita Applebum” remix joint. So I was like, “Yo, I’m with it. I don’t give a fuck.” I mean, that nigga track record is like 99%. You never gonna hear ‘bout nuthin’ that Puff did that was wack or ain’t sell no records. So I kinda respect his vision and I respect his opinion. And the shit is blowin’ up crazy, so I can’t even be mad at him.

How do you feel about biting?

Young niggas tryin’ to get paid, dog. If niggas is sittin’ there flippin’ some ol’ diggity-diggity type shit, and that’s the shit right now... Then damn, I’m diggity-diggityin’ too. Fuck that.

But how would you feel if someone started to sound like the Notorious B.I.G.?

Can’t jack me. Can’t jack me, dog. Shit is too different. What you gonna do? You gonna do a joint like “One More Chance” where a nigga is

just rhymin’ forever on his first verse? You never even know when this nigga is gonna stop. Or you gonna try to sound like how I was sounding on the Meth joint [“The What”], where I was just tryin’ to slow down a lil’ bit? You gonna try to sound like “Gimme The Loot” and flip two voices? What you gonna do? It’s like, you may try to sound like how I sound on one song, that’s possible. But you can never have a whole “Aw, that nigga sound like B.I.G.” That’s crazy. That’s impossible. I don’t sound like nobody. I got my own shit. I’m gonna keep growin’.

Let’s look at some of the lyrics to “The What”: “Excuse me/Flows just grow through me/Like trees to branches/Cliffs to avalanches/It’s the praying mantis/Deep like the mind of Farrakhan/A muthafuckin’ rap phenomenon...” Do you read any poetry at all?

[Laughing] No! Naw, naw. When I said, “grow through me,” I was sayin’, like the flows just be comin’ out my brain like leaves on trees coming out of branches. And how, like, a cliff can grow into an avalanche, ya know what I’m sayin’? Like that. And I know I can’t really think of too much words that rhyme with “avalanches” but “mantis,” so I was like, “It’s the praying mantis.” Plus, I was doin’ a song with Meth and he was on that ninja shit. And I was like, “my shit is deep like the mind of Farrakhan” ‘cause that’s the deepest mind alive right now. And “a rap phenomenon,” I live that shit. I know I’m nice. [Laughter]

For “Suicidal Thoughts,” were you actually in that kind of mood when you wrote that, or is that something you recalled back on?

I told Puffy that I wanted to do a song where I’m killing myself. He was like, [whispering] “You are so dope.” So I just knew that I had to take myself into that stage when I didn’t have a fuckin’ bed, I just had a mattress. In that back room getting four blunts out a dime bag. Smokin’ them shits in White Owls so that shit could last. The stress. And the summer with the hot fan goin’. Fucked up. Ain’t had no loochie. Rollin’ pennies.

What would you say has been the biggest improvement in the rap game in the last 10 years?

Just the flows. Everybody change. Shit change. We went from the “hippity hop” to where we singin’ and shit now. Niggas like Bone—they got like a harmony-type shit—to niggas like Nas that can get straight lyrical on a nigga. Or you got niggas like ODB that just be on some drunk, bummin’ out... But like, the flow is so much on point, you can’t even front on a nigga. Or niggas like Meth, that just be on



BIGGIE: THE LOST TAPES

“Like what if Tyson just said, ‘F#*k it, I quit.’ Just stopped boxing. Niggas lil’ three-pointer and was like, ‘Aw, that’s my last three. I’m straight. SAY, ‘OK, IT’S OVER.’ ’CAUSE YOU DON’T REALLY GET THE CHANCE TO

top of any beat no matter what kind of beat it is. You got different things. Ain’t nuthin’ gonna stay the same. That’s why, the same niggas that used to love Run-DMC, today they don’t really like ‘em that much now. Because you got others, you got Ill & Al Skcratch, you got new groups. Everything changes. And the mistake that most people make is, they don’t know how to change with the times. I’m a nigga that can change with the times.

So how does an artist grow if they want to do something different, but the audience is demanding more of the same?

That’s a mistake. You not makin’ albums for yourself. You not gonna put out an album and buy all of ‘em. You makin’ albums for fans, man. You gotta do what the fuck *they* want you to do, yo. You gotta please the fans, man. If the fans wanna see that old shit, you gotta flip that old shit. But you just gotta make it into a version where you feel comfortable. Just look at how Das [EFX] did it. Das came out with that flow, that ill shit. Niggas was on they dicks. Every rapper that came after them sounded like them, but they could never get it like how they got it. And then [Das] came out with they new album, which to me was just as dope as the first one.

Lyrically, that fuckin’ *Straight Up Sewaside* was a dope album. Them niggas was rhymin’ they ass off. The beats was tight, too. But niggas wanted to hear some more of that diggity diggity shit. It didn’t get the same audience. It didn’t even seem like that album was out. Niggas really slept on that joint. I don’t want to be that nigga. I don’t want to come out with some ol’ new-type flow that everybody jumps on, that everybody gonna try to bite, and then I’m gonna be like, “Well, OK, I’m tryin’ to do my new shit now, I’m tryin’ to get on some different shit.” You don’t want to be no different-ass nigga. You don’t want to come out slippin’ and niggas not lovin’ you, man. C’mon, that’s a fucked-up feeling, dog. To be a hot nigga back in the days, and then to come out with new shit, and your shit is tight, but niggas ain’t fuckin’ with you. Nuh uh, I can’t be that nigga, dog. I gotta hear the buzz on my shit. And I know that Puff is gonna have it that way, where niggas gonna be like, “You heard that new B.I.G. shit? That shit is incredible.” If everybody ain’t understand my shit is the bomb before it come out, it ain’t comin’ out. Not just him and Lil’ Cease, because them niggas know I get busy. If anything, I know the lyrics is on point. But it ain’t just the lyrics. The

beat’s got to be on point. The beat has got to be some shit that Idaho niggas is lovin’, Houston niggas is lovin’, LA niggas is lovin’, everybody got to love that shit, dog. It can’t be no Brooklyn record. Fuck that. I love Brooklyn. That’s my spot right there. That’s where everything starts and ends, in B-Town. But... niggas ain’t buyin’ records. [Laughter] But I got love for my peeps though, because they represent.

Why don’t they buy records in New York?

Because they got Hot 97! That shit play everything. You got Bobbito, you got Mister Cee, you got everybody, man. You got Premier. Niggas is playin’ shit all the time, niggas is dubbin’ shit, you got your bootleg shit. You got Ron G, Doo Wop, Kid Capri, Clue... Fuck Clue! You got who else? Silver Surfer. You got S&S, Starski. You got so many mixtape niggas, man, blowin’ up. A nigga can just be like, “Why should I buy the album when all the phat shit is on the mutha-fuckin’ Doo Wop tape? And I can get a whole bunch of other phat shit all on one tape.” The only reason niggas bought my shit is because I had a whole lot of phat shit and niggas couldn’t put B.I.G.’s whole album on they mixtape. My sales is the biggest in New York. Nobody bought more of my album than New York.

to be like, 'Oh my God. He quit.' Or if Magic ain't get AIDS. He just made that I know what I'm sayin'? I JUST WANT TO BE AT THE TOP OF MY GAME AND JOY THAT MONEY [WHEN YOU'RE] WORKIN' ALL THE F#*KIN' TIME."

Do you hear a West Coast influence on some East Coast artists?

Yeah, I do. It's because niggas want to sell some records. Niggas is buggin' how these West Coast niggas come out with they shit and they be going gold, platinum real quick. They supportin' the LA shit. They know that shit is strong. And also, the A&Rs know that shit is strong. So they like, "You really wanna get hot on the West? Rap to this track," or whatever, and niggas do it. Niggas tryin' to make some money.

What's your take on the whole East-versus-West thing?

I don't trip. I got love. I don't give a fuck. I'm my own person. Ain't no East Coast or West Coast. It's *B.I.G.* Coast. I got my own shit. I ain't fuckin' with nobody. I represent the East 'cause that's where I'm from, but it ain't like when I come to the West I'ma have an attitude.

You've had a big first year. How long do you see yourself rapping for?

You can't do it forever. You can't. I don't want to. I got a five-album deal. I got four more albums to go. After that, I'm straight, I'm not fuckin' with it no more. I'm rollin' with the J.M. I'm goin' on shows with my lil' niggas. I'll be road manager or somethin'. I don't even want to do that. I just

wanna go, pay for my ticket, pay for my hotel room and just bug with my lil' niggas. Be with my wife, be with my lil' girl. That's it.

And talk about the good ol' days. Because 20 years down the line, *Ready To Die* will still be discussed and—

You think so? In 20 years? Shit... C'mon, man, niggas ain't gonna be fuckin' wit' it. Man, in 20 years niggas ain't gonna remember that shit. They'll be like, "Fuck that nigga *B.I.G.*" Twenty years, dog? I'm tryin' to get out this shit in a bang. I'm tryin' to be out the game by the year 2000, dog. I want to be finished making my millions. My wife's album is just gonna be large out the water. And my lil' niggas is gonna be gettin' their money. I just got in the game to help myself, to better myself, to better my daughter, better my parents. Just to make sure that my shit is straight. My shit is straight already. I got enough money right now to live for a nice lil' piece, but I'm still gonna make some more. Shit.

What would you like to be remembered for?

I want to be remembered as a youth that got into the game at the tender age of 18, came out with his album and just blew up and just never stopped. He had his lil' five-year album deal and ever since the first damn interviews he said

he didn't want to do this shit forever. He wanted to make five platinum-and-better albums. I want to be the artist to have every album that was dope. So nobody can say, "Yo, his shit is wack. Shit ain't come off this year. *B.I.G.* is slip-pin'." I want my fifth album to be my best album ever, 'cause it's my last album. It ain't no more after that. I'm puttin' my word on that.

Just leave at the top.

That's all. I'd rather leave the game rich and still reigning. I want it to be like if Tyson didn't get locked up. Like what if Tyson just said, "Fuck it, I quit." Just stopped boxing. Niggas just be like, "Oh my God. He quit." Or if Magic ain't get AIDS. He just made that lil' three-pointer and was like, "Aw, that's my last three. I'm straight." You know what I'm sayin'? I just want to be at the top of my game and say, "OK, it's over." 'Cause you don't really get the chance to enjoy that money [when you're] workin' all the fuckin' time. Movin', goin' on all these flights. I'm a big nigga, man. I can't be on planes for five hours flyin' out to LA. My ass be hurtin'. I gotta be movin' around and shit. That shit is mad tirin', wakin' up early in the mornin' and shit. I'd rather just wake up, go on the boat with my niggas, smoke mad pounds of chronic, just livin'. ♠