

HOO

Scriptures

YOU COCKER SPANIEL DOGS CAN'T PISS ON HIS CATALOGUE. 2PAC'S GOT SO MANY JOINTS IN YOUR RECORD STORE OR YOUR LOCAL STREET CORNER IT'S HARD TO KEEP TRACK OF. DON'T WORRY, XXL IS HERE TO SEPARATE THE REAL FROM THE FAKE AND SALUTE THE HARDEST WORKING MC EVER.

2Pac's

Official

Albums

Tupac Shakur comes to us, searching for answers, searching for a worthy opponent, searching for the next word to his rhyme. His militant debut, *2Pacalypse Now* (1991), bursts at the seams with a pubescent grasp of Black nationalism: broad-stroked diatribes against the police, heavy-handed denunciations of "AmeriKKKA," shout-outs to political prisoners and refugees, "Words of Wisdom" is an incendiary blast of street corner punditry worthy of a young Farrakhan.

Despite the album's thick pedagogy, 'Pac is able to emerge as the nigga next door with "If My Homie Calls," and "Tha Lunatic." But the best moments are "Brenda's Got A Baby" and "Part Time Mutha" where 'Pac assumes the position of observerant storyteller. The result? Two songs that speak more about the

Where the overwhelming majority of music artists peak with their early work, *2Pacalypse* shows promise that 'Pac's best days are ahead of him. But things get worse before they get better. *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z...* (1993) represents the nadir of 2Pac's musical career. The sounds are a hodgepodge of Cali crafts vying for New York novelty. 'Pac tries to be everything to everyone here: Then-Vice President Dan Quayle's boogeyman, the savior of the Black Nation, and friend to all MCs.

Possibly gassed from being called out by Quayle as Nigga Enemy No.1, 'Pac thinks he found a style as the stuttering, sometimes constipated rhyme schemes of *2Pacalypse* give way to muddled badassness. He also stops wrapping his topics within musical concepts, save for "Papa's Song," a first-hand rebuking of a

same way as "Brenda's Got A Baby." When 'Pac notices that "they got money for wars but can't feed the poor," moments after reminiscing on Marvin Gaye, he's calm but not cold, detached but not distant, as if he just opened up his mouth and let God come out.

The group effort *Thug Life* (1994) is where the 2Pac legend begins in earnest. 'Pac, who started sporting a bald dome with *Strictly...*, takes to wearing the bandanas that would become his signature, perfects the rhyme technique that would appear in analog via countless imitators, and begins his fascination with glory-through-death on "Pour Out a Little Liquor," "Bury Me A G" and "How Long Will They Mourn Me?"

'Pac's transformation into a West Coast ridah is evident on *Thug Life*.



Black condition than all the fire-and-brimstone rhetoric spewed throughout the rest of the disc.

deadbeat dad, and his two breakthrough hits: "I Get Around" and "Keep Ya Head Up." The latter succeeds much in the

Divided into an East Side and West Side, the LP uses all of the G-music staples: samples by the Isley Brothers, Curtis

Mayfield and the O'Jays as well as Parliament and Bootsy Collins. On "Stay True" Pac describes "Rolling down the 405 gettin' high/... Cruisin' in a 6-0 Impala, driving like I'm in a hootie/... 'Cause I can make the ass drop/Make the front pop/And hit the 3-wheel motion." Still, he adds textures and a vulnerability to the gangsta archetype on "Under Pressure," when he rhymes, "You wonder why I'm made this way/I wasn't turned-out/I was raised this way/... I'm stressed/Smoking weed and nicotine/But what a nigga really need is Thorazine."

On *Me Against The World* (1995) Pac goes from ashy to classy. He discards his ultra-baggy gear, gaudy, oversized rings and things and covers up his numerous tattoos in favor of a button-down shirt, understated jewelry and spectacles; he flashes his winning smile. Likewise, his music—a smoothed blend of R&B bass and drums tweaked for hip-hop consumption—begins to serve him. The tracks no longer overpower him, his flow becomes more relaxed and confident.

He sounds free on *Me Against The World*; as if he's making music to please himself for the first time. Gone are the pressures of living up to the expectations of his Black Panther family tree. Despite nihilistic numbers like "Fuck The World" and "Death Around the Corner," Pac is ready to live on cuts like "It Ain't Easy," and "So Many Tears." With "Dear Mama" and "Can U Get Away" he zeroes in on a one-on-one dialogue absent from his earlier material, speaking directly to his mother and a fictional girl stuck in an abusive relationship. He's coming into his own.

"I won't deny it/I'm a straight ridah/ You don't want to fuck wit' me." These are the first words on Pac's mammoth Death Row debut, *All Eyez On Me* (1996). The

Pac's never sounded better; but he rarely delves beneath the surface. "What's Ya Phone #?" and "How Do U Want It" are great in their documentation of conviviality, wantonness and carnality—you can hear the Alizé pouring, the panties dropping, the bed springs bouncing. Bolstered by the best beats Suge could secure, Pac rhymes like he can go on forever on "California Love (Remix)," "Ambitionz Az a Ridah" and "Got My Mind Made Up." But on "Heartz of Men," "Can't C Me" and "Holla At Me" he sounds hollow and directionless as he rails against

Most of the elements on 2Pac's last conceived album, *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* (1996) are his standard fare—gleeful helpings of debauchery ("Toss It Up"), overflows of dementia ("Krazy,"), tirades against foes ("Bomb First [My Second Reply],"), and the requisite ray of sunshine ("To Live & Die in L.A."). But he comes full circle on "White Man's World," asking his "true sisters" to "help me raise my Black nation" and once again shouts-out political prisoners. When he screams "Babylon beware/Comin' for the Pharaoh's kids" on "Blasphemy," you



album is a paradox. Reveling in his own legend and acting under the aegis of the world's most notorious record label

his "enemies." "Shorty Wanna Be a Thug" comes off as a paint-by-numbers admission of the thug life

hear two voices: that of the thug and the revolutionary. His concepts take a mature turn on "Me and My Girlfriend" a song-

ing metaphor on just one Daddy" he comes to realize that the true appeal to many women lies in his presentation as a arrogant lover, not as a sex symbol. He wrote "Rearranged the Odds" to be "the truest and never spoke" but nothing is as reveal-

ing as "Real Mary." Here, Pac is in love with the sound of his own voice: he breaks into small flutters of breathy melody, secure enough in his artistry to simply end his chorus with a diatonic non sequitur. Then he says: "I ain't a killer, but

don't push me." It's a statement that pushes him beyond his rebel-without-a-pause caricature and into more tangible territory. He's no longer martyr or messiah. He's just a nigga playing the hand he was dealt.—KRIS EX

2Pac's

Posthumous

Albums



Tupac Shakur would have no idea. When the troubled hip-hop icon was asked about his plans for the future by Bay Area KMET radio personality turned MTV news anchor Sway on April 19, 1996, the controversial MC hinted at slowing down his obsessive recording schedule. "I see myself having a job on Death Row," he optimistically answered, "being the A&R person and an artist that drop an album like Paul McCartney every five years." However, since Tupac's death following a violent Las Vegas drive-by shooting, the proliferation of unreleased recordings has been eerily non-stop.

Following the Nov. 12, 1996 release of *The Makaveli Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*, 2Pac's last overseen project, the public battle for material was in full-swing. Pac's mother, Afeni Shakur, took control of her son's \$100-million-grossing musical estate in 1997 after suing Death Row Records for royalties. An agreement was reached by the two parties as Afeni established Amaru Records, an independent label that would release *R U Still Down?* (*Remember Me*) on Nov. 25, 1997.

But while the double album project would go on to sell four million copies, fans expecting to hear 'Pac in all of his Death Row-era glory would be disappointed. *R U Still Down?* instead offered an uneven collection of tracks recorded between 1991 and 1994. The lukewarm

release is free of the MC's impending feud with the East Coast hip-hop circle, unveiling a more personal view of his thug life agenda. "Now the whole world's calling me a killer/All I ever did was try to reach the kids with the real," he cries on the Latin-infused title track. Still 'Pac's narcissistic proclamation of street life becomes too much to bear on tracks like "I'm Getting Money," "Enemies With Me," and "Fake Ass Bitches."

R U Still Down?'s seemingly outdated production is replaced by a more streamlined funk-heavy sound on 2Pac and the Outlawz' confident platinum set, *Still I Rise* (released Dec. 14, 1999). Recorded during his time on Death Row following his 1995 release from prison, the album is a collection of fiery tracks that offer insight into 'Pac's Black Panther upbringing. On "Letter To the President," 'Pac takes a sneering political stab at former president Bill Clinton as the MC declares that his people have grown "tired of being scapegoats for this capitalistic drug dealing." And while there's no shortage of venomous confrontations—"Secretz of War," finds 'Pac and his Outlaw protégés firing juvenile death threats against opposing factions—the album is balanced by such heartfelt moments as the somber "Teardrops and Closed Caskets."

Just as the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye and Kurt Cobain have had their images revised from controversial music rebels to saintly icons, the tortured gangsta soul of Tupac Shakur was reworked into that of a misunderstood "shining Black prince." Nowhere else is this reincarnation more apparent than on the Afeni Shakur-spearheaded project, *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* (released Oct. 27, 2000), an album that celebrated her son's poetry written between 1989 and 1991. Yet while the line-up of guests recruited to reexamine Tupac's spoken word passion (Ani

volumes on the MC's diverse influence on pop culture—hip-hop voices such as Mos Def and dead prez share the stage with spoken word legend Sonia Sanchez and acclaimed actor Danny Glover—it was 'Pac's gift for crafting emotional statements and not poetical observations, that made him a beloved figure.

2Pac's latest posthumous release, *Until the End of Time* (released March 27, 2001 jointly by Amaru and Death Row Records), fluidly brings home this point as the MC struggles to find his own humanity in a "crazy world of sin" on the ethereal "Ballad of A Dead Soulja." 'Pac still unapologetically flaunts his thug life persona on two-fisted tracks like "My Closest Roaddogz"—the double album's material was taken from the Makaveli recording sessions as evident by 'Pac's venomous jabs at Mobb Deep, Biggie, and Jay-Z. Yet, when you hear 'Pac display optimism on "Letter 2 My Unborn" ("I got shot five times, but I'm still breathing, living proof there's a God if ya need a reason," he testifies), you realize that Shakur's complexity was his biggest asset.

During its first week of release, *Until the End of Time* debuted No. 1 on the SoundScan chart selling 426,860 copies. Of course Death Row Records is preparing for the release of yet another 2Pac/Makaveli-era double album later this year (a spokesperson for the Suge Knight imprint said the album will be the last official 'Pac album of unreleased material).

Yes, it can be argued that the massive influx of Tupac Shakur recordings is yet another example of record companies squeezing the blood out of a deceased superstar's corpse in pursuit of monetary gain. Or maybe 2Pac's continuing posthumous album success says more about the public's obsession with worshipping the fallen hero. Or maybe we just miss 'Pac. —JAY-Z

2Pac's

Bootlegs

It wasn't long as we moved any more sticks in the west of confusion surrounding Tupac's demise. The hard-headed and conspiracy-wary alike already had a stocked arsenal suggesting that 'Pac was somewhere slipping umbrella drinks with Elvis, Sammy the Bull and the third shooter from the grassy knoll: No memorial service, no body, that chilling "I Ain't Mad At Cha" video, 'Pac's whole Nicolo Machiavelli fascination. But then, just months after his death, the first of 2Pac's bootleg Makaveli series—full of unreleased material, from his Death Row tenure—began flooding the streets. Even the most levelheaded persons became doubting Thomases, wanting to finger 'Pac's wounds for proof. As theories reached a convincing, surreal fever pitch (recall "Chuck D's 18 Compelling Reasons Why 2Pac Is Not Dead"), 'Pac probably pinched himself and checked his own pulse to make sure he was, well, dead.

Now that the hubbub has subsided and (almost) everyone can agree that 'Pac is no longer with us in the physical, these works go a long way to fortifying his new millennium urban legend: "2Pac-was-the-Hardest-Working-Rapper-Ever." One has to marvel at the tremendous amount of studio work he put in between October 1995 and September 1996, allowing him to drop more albums in death than the average rap artist drops in two lifetimes.

As bearers of the Tupac legacy, the Makaveli albums shine brighter than the cash-cow opportunism of releases like *1 in 21: The Tupac Shakur Story*, *The Lost Tapes*, *Legends*, *The Pac & Biggie You*

Never Heard, and *Stop The Guntlight*. Those records are mostly deplorable jumbles of outtakes and remixes; the worst cases just retread rare vocals over bargain basement beats. Also, there's a raw, jagged-edged allure to the Makaveli series that's lost in the commercial sleekness of official posthumous collections like *R U Still Down?* (*Remember Me*) and *Until the End of Time*. Then there's questionable quality control endemic to all things black market: there are two versions of *Makaveli 5: Thug's Passion*; something sold as *Makaveli 7* contains no 'Pac at all—just a sound-alike player paying tribute. *Makaveli 7* makes you cringe: Those ain't 2Pac vocals—what the fuck you done to that?

The best and most valuable album of the unofficial series, *Makaveli 2: Life Passion* features no song breaks—just segues from one song to another. Conceived by parties that had in mind to continue 'Pac's beef with certain East Coast parties, the LP contains interviews where 'Pac chastises the Notorious B.I.G. and reveals the genesis of his beef with Mobb Deep. ('Pac took a low-end ad-lib in the chorus for Mobb's "Survival of the Fittest" ["Thug life, we still livin' it"] as a subliminal jab to his famous jailhouse renunciation of the thug life.) In song, 'Pac berates Jay-Z (who gets a lion's share of harsh words throughout many of the series' earlier offerings with no explanation), LL Cool J, Da Brat, and Lauryn Hill. Radio gossip Wendy Williams gets threatened with a "\$20,000 hit through Jenny Craig" on a foam-mouthed distribe that ends "Why U Turnin' on Me?" (Williams' name was omitted when the song was released on this year's *Until...*)

Makaveli 2's saving grace comes in its music: the jam session backing tracks for the social commentary of "Never Be Peace" serves its topic well. Likewise, the lone horn that punctuates "Words 2 My First Born" makes it more poignant than its *Until...* version; the included version of "Black Jesus" flows smoother than its rendition on the Outlawz' *Still I Rise*. And, almost as if to prove 'Pac as not wholly anti-East Coast, there's "Military Minds," a collabo with the

Cocoa Brovas and Buckshot that bounces with menace.

All but five of *Makaveli 3's* songs (or some semblance thereof) have since been made public, some on the *2Pacalypse Now*-era retrospective *R U Still Down?* "World Wide Dime Piece" features Greg Nice, with Snoop closing the number out with silky pimp talk much like *All Eyez on Me's* "All About U;" "Cause I Had To," which interprets Bill Withers' "Just the Two of Us," is a pre-*Thug Life* justification for dealing drugs; "Pac's Life" uses Prince's "Pop Life" and interview snippets to tell his story.

Collaborations play a prominent role in one rendering of *Makaveli 5*, which also contains older vault material like "Fuckin' Wit Da Wrong Nigga," a rendition of "Grab The Mic" (found on *The Pac and Biggie You Never Heard*) and "Static" (mixes of which appear on *Legends*, *1 in 21*, and *The Lost Tapes*). Many of the songs are from 'Pac's never-realized *One Nation* project: "How Many Shots" featuring the Outlawz, the unfinished Big Daddy Kane duet "Wherever You Are," the reggae-hooked "Let's Get It On" with the Cocoa B's and Buckshot. On "Set It Off," 'Pac, his Boot Campian comrades and Greg Nice borrow a chorus from Strafe's "Set It Off" and Funkadelic's "One Nation Under a Groove" ("getting down for the smoke of it") in a round of microphone hot potato. "World Wide Mob Figgaz," bridged by snippets of *Good Fellas* and *Reservoir Dogs*, contains Outlaw lyrics different from its *Until...* version.

Makaveli 6 resorted to rejected tracks from his *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* and *Thug Life* days, some of which appears on *R U Still Down?* Then there's the female variant of "Fake Ass Bitches" only featuring 'Pac on ad-libs and dated stuff like "Outta The Guffa" and "Thug Bitch," on which 'Pac doesn't do so much as fart. Still, there are some good moments: The haunting "Hard On A Nigga"; "Fuck All Y'all" which samples "Breezin'" by George Benson; "Throw Your Hands Up," powered by Parliament's "Funkentelechy." Despite such aged music, *Mak 6* did its part to cement 2Pac's position as thug immortal—dead or alive. —KRIS EX



2Pac's Collaborations and Soundtracks

To truly appreciate the delirious recording pace of Tupac Shakur, check out this telling stat: From 1990 to his untimely death in 1996, the iconic hip-hop martyr hammered out well over 400 tracks in a brief seven-year period. As an artist who seemingly lived and breathed in the recording studio, Tupac took his musical ambitions to an almost religiously fanatical plane. Yet, while most of the critique of 'Pac's catalogue has focused mainly on his solo output, his wealth of outside collaborations and soundtrack appearances also deserve further review.

2Pac's diverse collaborative work boast a cavalry of artists ranging from the truly obscure (Shakur dropped vocals on Funky Aztec's 1995 remix track, "Slippin' Into Darkness.") to the bizarre (The unlikely union of the thugged out 'Pac and Jon B's stately White-boy soul on the 1997 romantic groove, "Are U Still Down?"). It was 'Pac's star turn on Digital Underground's 1990 infectious funk work-out "Same Song" that introduced the prolific MC to the hip-hop nation. Working as a road manager and dancer for his extended Bay-Area family, Tupac delivered a scene-stealing performance that hinted at his future trappings of stardom. "Get some fame, people change, wanna live they life high..." a hungry 'Pac lamented.

"He was definitely excited," remembers Digital Underground member Money B, who now runs a production company christened Shine Entertainment. The veteran describes the session for "Same Song" as a loose and stress-free affair. "Shock G (DU frontman) made the beat and gave me and 'Pac a tape with the hook on it and said, 'Yo, this is your part.' I just remember that me and him were both saying our lyrics to the song and I was joking like, 'Yo, I ripped you.' And he would be laughing like, 'Naw, I fucked you up.' We always used to clown each other about who had the dopest verse."

It would be another two years before 2Pac would release his critically acclaimed debut, *2Pacalypse Now*. While that release contributed to drafting Tupac's rebel image, the fist-pounding introduction of his street nigga mantra exploded on MC Breed's "Gotta Get

Mine." When a defiant MC proclaimed, "I live thug life, baby, I'm hopeless/Chokin' off indo, trying to keep my focus..." the outlaw legend of Tupac Shakur was born.

"I was in LA at the time in 1993," Breed remembers of his fateful encounter with Tupac. "I was going to get a tattoo and 'Pac was in the parlor getting 'thug life' tattooed on his stomach. I told him that I was in the studio with Warren G and before I could even say I wanted him to get on some shit, he was like, 'Man, I gotta get on that record.' He was such a professional."

As a product of the Bay Area (Tupac was born in New York, but spent the bulk of his teen years in Marin City, CA), Shakur also made it a point to reach back to his roots. 'Pac recorded tracks with West Coast rap mogul E-40—"Pac represented for 40 Water on the 1995 cut "Dusted 'N' Digusted" and showed up on



the boastful "Million Dollar Spot"—trading rhymes with the trigger-happy Spice-1 on "Jealous Got Me Strapped" (1995). Seminal mack king Too \$hort recruited 'Pac for his *Cocktails* release (1996), while underrated lyrical player Richie Rich landed 'Pac on "Niggaz Done Changed."

Tupac's soundtrack appearances were merely ignited out of convenience after the former student of Baltimore's prestigious School of the Arts blew movie critics away with his villainous performance in 1992's *Juice*. He would eventually land the starring role in John Singleton's *Poetic Justice* and was featured on the movie's soundtrack (the dynamic "Definition of A Thug Nigga"). Tupac continued his badass cinematic performance in *Above the Rim* (The blas-

ketball movie's highly successful 1994 soundtrack, which was ironically produced by Death Row Records, contains one of Tupac's most heart-wrenching tracks, "Pain."), the crooked cop drama *Gang Related* and the vastly underrated 1997 artsy druggie flick *Gridlock'd*, a soundtrack album that featured 'Pac experimenting with jazz on the pulsating "Life Is A Traffic Jam."

Since his death, 'Pac's haunting vocals have been heard on a variety of releases by Ant Banks ("4 The Hustlas"), Nate Dogg ("Me And My Homies"), Master P ("Homies & Thugs"), Scarface ("Smile"), Big L ("Deadly Combination") and The Dogg Pound ("Don't Stop"). Perhaps 2Pac's most intriguing collaboration turned up on Funkmaster Flex and Big Kap's *The Tunnel* album. The 1999 comp featured an early '90s, history-making concert freestyle of 'Pac and future



rival, the late Notorious B.I.G. There are also reportedly unreleased 'Pac collabos with Madonna and Alanis Morissette.

One of the last acts to work with Tupac Shakur was Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, who drafted the MC for their erie 1997 track, "Thug Luv." For group member Krayzie Bone, the experience of collaborating with 'Pac would resonate even heavier after his violent death.

"We had ran into him and the Outlawz. They were coming out of a hotel in LA as we were walking in," Krayzie says somberly. "He stopped we said 'We need to hook up.' He was like, 'Man, when I was in I used to follow my [cousin's] every fucking day. That was used to get me in. When he died that fucked me up.' —Krayzie Bone