



DADDY

get that

CASH

HE'S THE CEO WITH
THE MASSIVE EGO.
THE ICED-OUT BOSSMAN
WITH A SERIOUS CAR FETISH.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
BRYAN "BABY" WILLIAMS.
LET THE BIRDMAN FLY, POTNA.

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It's one of the oddest sights you'll ever see. This ain't your average MC diddy-bopping in front of you to a lava-hot track. It's a businessman turning into an artist right before your cynical eyes. The yellow legal pad tucked under his right arm is not a front. It's Baby—the most expensive mouth of the South. More known for his jewel-encrusted cavity creeps than the lyrics that come from between them, the cocky CEO of the Cash Money franchise is quickly constructing 16 bars comprised of a cornucopia of his favorite topics: the ghetto, his accomplishments and his money-is-everything lifestyle.

Game face intact, he's getting his hustle on—right down to his red throwback Pete Rose jersey. But don't compare him to previous players, or rap hall-of-famers. "Hip-hop go way back," he says, just before bouncing into the vocal booth. "And you got a lot of cats that want to categorize with numbers. Who's the best and all that. I'm just looking at me doin' my thing. I want to be in my own little zone. I'll be my own number. I'm doin' me, dog."

Believe that. With competent young spit-ers like Gilly The Kid at his disposal here at Atlanta's Patchwerk Studios, Baby could easily get some assistance for his latest composition. But he's not having it. "I know I can speak what I want talked," he says, excited. "I just feel like over a period of time I done got better with the shit. I learn how to pattern my shit a certain way, to change my pattern another way. It's all due to my dedication to the game and being in the studio so much and the love I got for this shit."

To live and die for hip-hop. Treach once proclaimed it, but the car show king wants you to believe he's the embodiment of it. His new-jack exuberance when discussing his upcoming solo album, *Birdman* (featuring production from Baby's Big Tymers cohort, Mannie Fresh, Cash Money's new boardsman, Jazze Pha and a track each from The Neptunes, Swizz Beatz and Jermaine Dupri), is hard evidence.

Also on the guest list for the Sept. 11th



release are P. Diddy, Too \$hort, 8Ball, Foxy Brown, Clipse and Cam'ron. "Oh Baby's hot right now, are you kiddin'?" says Roc-A-Fella's Harlem Diplomat. "Baby is the man, no doubt. And he's about to be all over the place. It's gonna be for real."

"I'm a people person," says Baby, by way of explaining his newfound collaboration-friendly attitude. (The self-proclaimed "#1 Stunna" is currently featured on remixes of Foxy Brown's "Stylin'," Clipse's "Grindin'" and Cam's "Oh Girl.") "I never been one of those niggas who made it and don't want to fuck with other people. I ain't no selfish nigga."

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According to the man himself, Bryan "Baby" Williams was born on Feb. 15, 1974. One look and you'd think he's older, and after one conversation, you know he's definitely wiser. Raised in New Orleans' 3rd Ward, Baby lost his mom, Gladys, to kidney failure when he was only two. His father Johnnie remarried and produced a total of 20 children before passing away from injuries sustained in a car accident when Baby—one of the youngest of the seeds—was 10. Baby shares his strongest familial bonds with siblings who have both biological parents in common: his older brother (by five years) and fellow Cash Money co-CEO Ronald "Slim" Williams, and his sister Kim (Cash Money's in-house publicist).

In spite of his fortune, being orphaned

"IT'S LIKE, TO ME, THEM NIGGAS [JUVENILE, B.G., TURK] GOT GROWN. AND THEY GOT MANNISH. YOU KNOW, SOMETIMES KIDS GET GROWN AND WANT TO TALK BACK. NONE OF THEM AIN'T NEVER DISRESPECT ME, AND I LOVE THEM TO DEATH. BUT IT'S REAL LOVE WITH WAYNE 'CAUSE HE WANTED TO DO IT WITH ME. WHICH WAS THE SMARTER CHOICE, TO ME."



at such a young age weighs heavy on Baby's mind. "Losing my daddy," he says, "dog, it's like, you know you got to be strong. Shit hurt. An old nigga told me ain't nothin' more harder in life than me losing my mom and my daddy. I know it's a part of life. I was always taught that after bad times, come automatic good times. And I just put my heart into what I want to be. I just pray."

"I grew up in the projects," he continues. "So you know it was hard. Everyday I look at this shit... I be looking at life sometimes like I don't believe this shit is real, the success. Man, coming up in that muthafucka was like a crab in a bucket. One make it, one say muthafuck it."

While he admits to employing, and surrounding himself with, criminals ("They all got an X on their back"), Baby denies any connection with the distribution of N'awlins' drug of choice, heroin. "My pops raised me to not fuck with all that shit," he insists. "The shit I did was some juvenile shit. I was raised with a business mind. Me and Slim grew up in a bar. Our pops ran a bar so the business mind, we was born with that shit."

But around the Big Easy, rumors run deep. The deepest being a long-circulated story that alleges Baby had a role in the death of one of his own artists—Albert "Yella Boi" Thomas, a former member of the early Cash Money rap group, U.N.L.V. In April 1997, Yella, 23, was shot numerous times while sitting in his truck. The streets have it that the rapper, in a dispute with his employers over money, had put bullet holes in some of Baby's prized vehicles, leading to the deadly violence. The talk intensified in 1999, after Baby recorded a verse bragging about his thorough reputation on



Baby has never been afraid of challenges. In 1989 he jumped headfirst into his local music scene—with no connections and no prior experience. “Cash Money started with a rapper named Kilo G., dog,” his voice lowering, as it often does when he gets serious. “He’s dead right now. That was my first release. And I lost to learn. I thought by having money, I could spend it and win—but the game ain’t like that. You ain’t gotta have a lot of money. I was payin’ promoters, radio, thinking my shit gonna sell ‘cause it sound good to my hood. I’m going from state to state, moving too fast, trying to be a boss about it. I learned a lot when I took my first lick.”

Focused on becoming more cost effective, Baby lucked out when he met fellow rap-lovin’, car-obsessed hip-hopper Byron Thomas, a.k.a. “Mannie Fresh.” It was quickly written: Mannie Fresh would become Cash Money’s house producer, creating every track for a label that went through rappers like women go through shoes. After a few years of struggle, the Cash Money name began to bubble in the mid-’90s with the emergence of two acts: influential bounce artist Pimp Daddy, and the more lyrically adept three-man crew U.N.L.V. It was around this time that Baby befriended a 10-year-old Christopher Dorsey. He would later pair him up with another young’n, Dwayne “Lil’ Wayne” Carter, to form a duo called the B.G.’z (Baby Gangstaz). “Young mutha-fuckas get attached to me,” Baby says.

B.G.’s song “Made Man.”

“Nigga disrespect, let’s put the nigga to sleep (put ‘em ta sleep)/I’m discreet about the things that I do on the streets/Them niggas be sayin’ Baby put that fuckin’ boy to sleep (Baby done that?)/Them niggas be sayin’ Baby put that change on his feet (Baby done that?)”

Baby, for his part, insists he’s innocent. “I mean I ain’t have nothin’...” he says, trailing off. “That’s some shit I don’t know nothin’ about.”

A more recent rumor that Baby has had to address is that he fostered (actively or not) B.G.’s notorious heroin addiction. A longtime junkie, B.G. came clean in our May 2002 issue. “Really, I personally care not to discuss that situation,” says Baby. “I never was one to be the one that exploit a nigga’s business—that’s a house nigga to me. I’m a field nigga, I’m a real nigga. What go on around here... I was taught one way: Family business stay within family business. And you can wrap that.”

“IF A NIGGA CAN’T GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE, HE CAN’T BE AROUND ME. I AIN’T WITH THAT BULLS#*T—BEING DISRESPECTFUL TO FANS, PULLING OFF ALL THAT OLD DUMB S#*T ON THE ROAD. I JUST BE OBSERVING A NIGGA AND SEE IF HE BUILT FOR IT. THIS S#*T IS HARD. SOME NIGGAS AIN’T GOT PATIENCE. TALKING ABOUT THEY FAMILY AT HOME—MINE’S AT HOME TOO. F#*K IT. IF YOU WANT IT, DOG, SACRIFICE.”

Faced with the interrogation tactics of the evil media, Baby’s not a shook one. He remains calm under pressure. He knows questions aren’t bullets, so they can’t harm him. “Controversy don’t move me,” he says. “I just do me, dog. I don’t give a fuck about that. It goes in one ear and out the other. I ain’t trippin’. A nigga supposed to be able to answer anything that comes their way. That’s how I feel.”

But by the time the B.G.’z debut LP *True Story* was released in 1995, Wayne’s mother had pulled her son out of the group. (Apparently, ma dukes wasn’t convinced Mr. Williams had her son’s best interests at heart.)

After a conversation between Baby and Wayne’s moms, the prodigal Lil’ MC rejoined Cash Money, and, along with fellow newcomer Tab “Turk” Virgil, Dorsey (now “B.G.”) and the more established

Terius "Juvenile" Gray, formed the awesome foursome known as the Hot Boys. "It was four stars, dog," says Baby of the voices who brought the label national acclaim with songs like "Ha," "Back That Azz Up," "Tha Block Is Hot," "On Fire" and "Bling Bling." "Me and Fresh were just role-players. Wayne, B.G., Turk and Juve—they was Cash Money. When you heard Cash Money that's what you thought: the Hot Boys."

As you know probably from reading these pages month to month, things aren't all good in Cash Moneyland. First Juve, then B.G. and eventually Turk got to feeling shortchanged by Baby, and three-quarters of the Hot Boys bounced in pursuit of developing their own imprints. (All the artists are still technically signed to Cash Money, though, and Baby promises to put out the never-before-released Hot Boys album *Let 'Em Burn* by year's end.)

At first, Baby is diplomatic when pressed on the current status of his relationship with his disgruntled artists. "They down," he says. "But everybody trying to do their own thing. I look at it like, Fuck it. Y'all do y'all, I gotta do me. At the end of the day, what you want to do is cool with me. The way shit went, though—Shit ain't have to go like that. 'Cause a nigga could have came to the table, and we still could have been hustling together."

Later in the conversation, he grows more critical. "It's like, to me, them niggas got grown. And they got mannish. You know, sometimes kids get grown and want to talk back. None of them ain't never disrespect me, and I love them to death. But it's real love with Wayne 'cause he wanted to do it with me. Which was the smarter choice, to me. He's got Squad Up Records. I can give a nigga all the game he want. Wayne's a solid little nigga—he's a man. He matured. Some of them became men and got mannish. Right now, I'm just focusing on Weezy—'til the God separate us from one on this Earth to one in the dirt."

Cash Money affairs are twisted and tangled. Personal. Emotional. The intensity of feeling comes from the family ties that exist within the collective. For all intents and purposes, Baby was more than a label boss to his four young artists, he was a father figure. "I look at that situation like I raised these niggas, homie," he huffs and puffs. "I had them niggas when they was kids. It wasn't nothing but a conversation to avoid the bullshit. However it go, though, my heart pour out to them. And I'm still here, somebody gonna holla. Believe that. And my arms open to them. But for right now, it's me, Fresh, Weezy and these new niggas. And CMR? We off the diet, dog."



It's one of the more familiar sights you'll ever see. Only it's strange this time because of the star power of the principals involved. Two of the South's biggest CEOs, Baby and producer Jermaine Dupri, are going at it in an impromptu clash of *Madden NFL 2002*. Staged on the big-screen TV at JD's So So Def studio facilities (a massive complex complete with a custom-made, full-length hoops court), it's an intense match-up to say the least. Ever the competitor, Baby has upped the ante—choosing JD's hometown squad, the Atlanta Falcons, to go against the defensive monster, the Baltimore Ravens. Despite Dupri's boisterous boasts and psychological warfare, Baby is off to an early impressive start, enjoying a 14-0 lead at the end of the first quarter. The second quarter is more of the same, as Baby keeps the chains moving with quarterback Michael Vick's short screen passes. It's 21-6, Falcons, at the half. But JD remains defiant. "We'll see 'bout this

"IF YOU NOT PRACTICING YOUR SKILLS, SHARPENING YOUR SKILLS, FOCUSED, PAYING ATTENTION. YOU GONNA EVENTUALLY... SOMEBODY GONNA CATCH UP TO YOU. YOU ALWAYS GOT A HUNGRY MUTHAF#*KA, TRYING TO TAKE YOUR SPOT. I AIN'T NEVER LET THE MONEY MAKE ME CHILL. I'M A HUSTLER. IF I GOT SOME NIGGAS WHO WANNA HUSTLE WITH ME—WE GONNA GRIND."

here!" he shrieks to the ever-growing room-full of onlookers. "Now the game really begins. I'm gonna bust that ass."

JD's prophecy proves true as he cuts the lead to 21-14 at the end of the third, and ties the score (thanks to a Ray Lewis fumble recovery) with two minutes left in the game. Baby remains composed and defiant. In a drive reminiscent of John Elway in his prime, he marches his team



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70-plus yards with precision and finesse. After a courageous goal-line stand from JD, the Falcons' Jamal Anderson barrels into the end zone for a touchdown with 24 seconds left. Baby: 28, JD: 21. Game over.

"I be excited when another rapper want me to work with them," says Dupri later, making a sandwich in the studio's kitchen (no salt needed, 'cause he's still stinging from the loss). "Especially someone from the South, we all from the South. I love to fuck with a nigga that done made it. Somebody that don't need nobody. Baby don't need me. He got Mannie Fresh. So if you come holla at me, and you don't need me, I be more than delighted to do it."

Truth be told, it was Baby's infatuation with another producer that first brought him to the ATL. Jazze Pha, the man behind Nappy Roots' "Awnaw," joined the label this spring. "That was Fresh's idea," Baby says. "He said there was a nigga in Atlanta I'd like to fuck with. Fresh said he want to get him a production team. I met Pha when I was working on Greg Street's *6 O'clock 7* album. Me, 'Lac and Stone did a song, and Jazze did the track in five minutes."

Hyped up by his new collaborator ("he brings the *Superfly* slick pimp shit out of me."), Baby knocked out 10 songs over a span of three days, setting the foundation for his solo debut. As showcased first on Big Tymers' *Hood Rich* and Lil' Wayne's *500 Degreez*, the new Cash Money has a new sound—more soulful and melodic, more harmony-driven than before. (Thanks should also go to CMR R&B crooner T.Q. for blessing many a hook for the crew.)

The new label roster—which includes the aforementioned Gilly The Kid from Major Figgas, R. Kelly castaways Boo & Gotti and Tateeze (the artist formally known as Strings)—has been criticized for lacking punch. Shrugging off such negativity, Baby insists that musical talent isn't the only factor that determines who gets inducted into his click. "One thing I do is bring a nigga around," he says. "You can have a nigga with skills, but his mind's fucked up. If a nigga can't get along with people, he can't be around me. I ain't with that bullshit—being disrespectful to fans, pulling off all that old dumb shit on the road. I just be observing a nigga and see if he built for it. This shit is hard. Some niggas ain't got patience. Talking about they

family at home—mine's at home too. Fuck it. If you want it, dog, sacrifice."

Baby refuses to let you knock his hustle. "I got a real passion for this shit," he says. "I really love this shit, man. This is how I look at this: Hip-hop's a profession. It's art. It's a craft, this thing we chose. Just like football, baseball and basketball. If you not practicing your skills, sharpening your skills, focused, paying attention, you gonna eventually... Somebody gonna catch up to you. You always got a hungry muthafucka, trying to take your spot. I ain't never let the money make me chill. I'm a hustler. If I got some niggas who wanna hustle with me—we gonna grind."

But is Universal Records about to shut down the lights on Cash Money's comeback before it really gets going? That's been the rumor circulating throughout the music industry in recent months. While it's true that the \$30 million distribution deal the Williams brothers signed with the international media giant back in 1998 has almost expired, Baby insists things are hunky-dory with his corporate business partners. "I ain't trying to go nowhere," he says. "I love being there and I love working with them. They like my family to me. That's where I wanna be at. We in the process of making that happen again."

Keeping the boat afloat is this skipper's top priority. Time and again, Baby has overcome obstacles that would've done in a less determined man. Somehow, while weathering the deaths and defections of his best artists, he's managed to become a bigger presence in the business. The road may get bumpy, but Baby always enjoys the ride. The petty matters that get under other MC's skin slides off his back. The rumors, the talk, the controversy don't faze him. To Baby, being in the media hot seat is like lounging on a comfortable purple ottoman.

"I love magazines, attention, fame," he says. "I love that shit. I love that when I get my chance, I'm gonna shine. Always. I'm gonna take my blessings and run with it. You got young Black people like me in this business with a chance to make money with no education. Ain't nothing wrong with education—but I got common knowledge. That'll get you far, too." ♦