

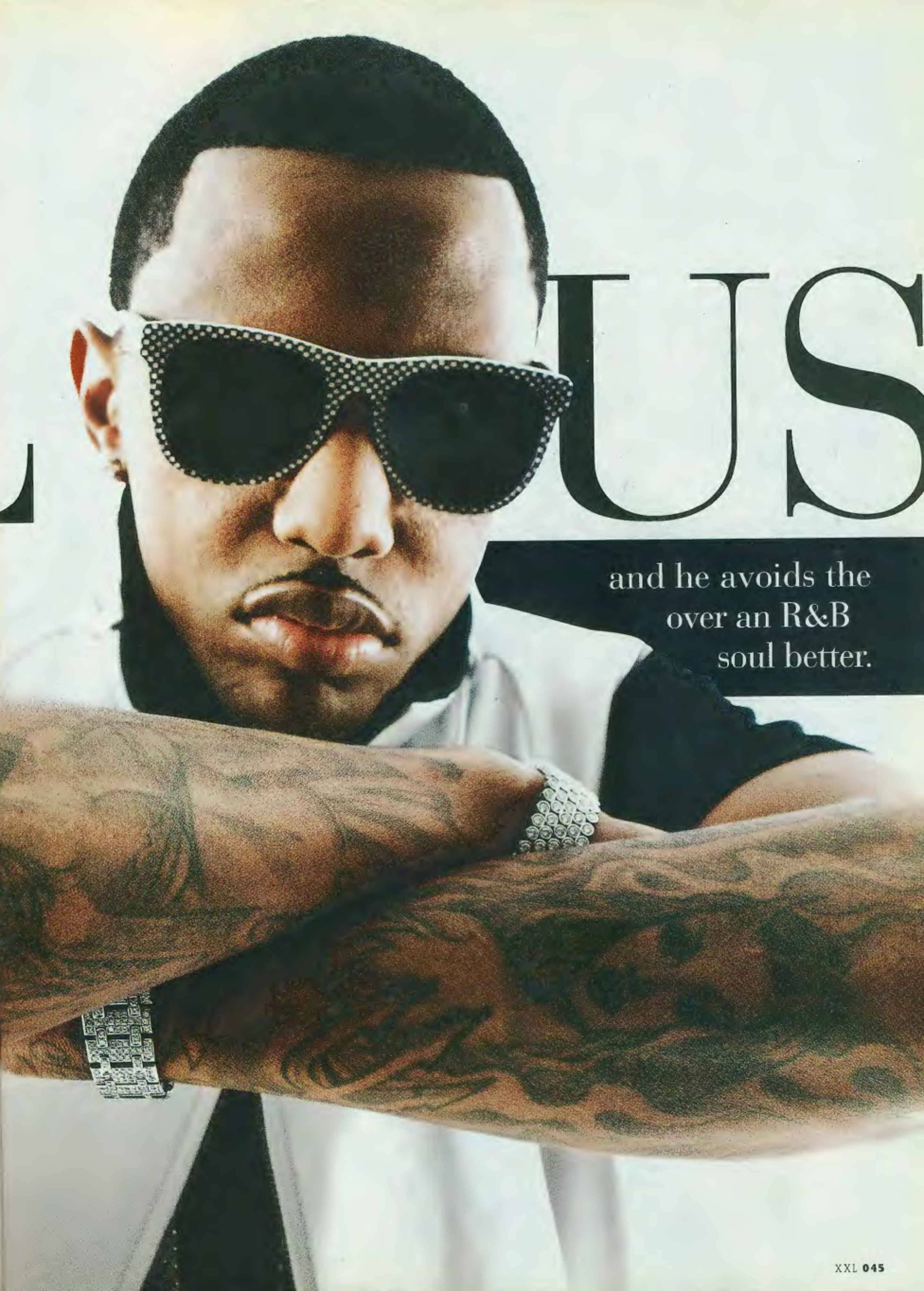
# FABOUI

**GO-TO GUY** Ladies love him, beef. And with every verse he spits track, Fabolous makes hip-hop

Words *Rob Markman*  
Photography *Phil Knott*

**M**elle Mel and Chaka Khan felt it coming. Ron G was a pioneer. P. Diddy claims to have invented it. Jay-Z and R. Kelly took it to blockbuster status. But when it comes to blending hardcore hip-hop with catchy R&B melodies, no one does it better than the soft-spoken MC from Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, known as Fabolous.

On this brisk spring evening in New York, the 31-year-old rapper is situated in the lounge of Times Square's KMA Studios, taking a break from putting the finishing touches on his fifth album (his second with hip-hop powerhouse Def Jam), *Loso's Way*. Sunk into a, yes, plush black leather couch (must be some kind of contractual studio obligation), watching the fifth game of the NBA Western Conference finals, between the L.A. Lakers and the Denver Nuggets, Fab leans forward and addresses Kobe Bryant as if the Lakers guard can hear him through the high-definition television set. "It's dagger time," he says as the fourth quarter is beginning.



# US

and he avoids the  
over an R&B  
soul better.

Kobe, of course, is L.A.'s go-to guy at crunch time. But Fab knows something about pressure situations and rising to the occasion himself. Reminiscing on his early days in the rap game, the baby-faced MC leans back and tells a story. "When I came in, I came in rapping on the mixtapes, and people just talked about my talent," he begins.

To say that he came in on "the mixtapes" is something of an understatement. More accurately, in the late 1990s, Fabolous came in on the only mixtapes that mattered—the ones crafted by the legendary DJ Clue. Fab—then better known as John Jackson—was still attending high school in 1998, when he met Clue at New York's famed Hot 97 radio station, thanks to the persistence of his managers, Web and Cheo. Immediately upon meeting

the rookie, Clue threw Fab to the wolves, urging him to participate in a friendly on-air back-and-forth with C-N-N's Noreaga, who, at the time, was riding high on the success of the highly revered *The War Report* (with partner Capone) and his own self-titled solo album. "Now I'm sitting there, and I'm just trying to gather thoughts, like, What the fuck am I gonna spit?" says Fab. "I didn't even think I was going there to rap. I thought I was going there to meet Clue." Suddenly Clue dropped the beat to The Lox's single "Money, Power & Respect," and the rest is hip-hop history. To this day, Fabolous remembers his verse word for word and counts those particular bars as his personal favorites. Today, after some urging, he jumps to his feet and gives a throw-back performance, pacing back and forth,

kicking each line emphatically: "Just in case y'all was lost/I'm the face in *The Source*, long Cuban, white ice placed in the cross."

Clue took him under his wing, and soon Fab found fame on the burgeoning mixtape circuit, which led to a deal with Elektra Records. Early 2001, he got a chance to test his street chops in more of a pop setting, when his Elektra label mate, Baltimore R&B singer Lil' Mo, chose him to lay a verse on her "Superwoman (Pt. II)."

"I remember coming in the game and having nothing but my mixtape material to go off of," says Fab. "Mo stepped in and was like, 'I wanna use that kid Fab on my "Superwoman" joint.' Her record label was like, 'You just did a joint with Jay-Z, Ja Rule, Missy Elliot. Why are you getting some mixtape kid?'" He smiles at the memory. "She was pretty much like, 'This nigga is dope,



STYLING: EMILY B.; BARBER: CARLOS; PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS PAGE: SUNGLASSES BY MOSLEY TRIBE, JEANS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL, SNEAKERS BY CHRISTIAN DIOR, T-SHIRT, CUSTOM LEATHER VEST AND JEWELRY: ARTIST'S OWN

and this nigga is gonna be the next nigga.”

Mo was right. Smooth-flowing Fab proved himself capable of fitting the same witty lyricism he employed on his mixtape freestyles into a more song-oriented, radio-friendly format. Next up was a low-key remix for Brooklyn crooner Jimmy Cozier's single "She's All I Got." When he spit "If you heard what the eff I did/You would've left my house on fire like Left Eye did," Fab again struck a perfect balance, catching the ears of both hardcore hip-hop dudes and R&B-loving honeys.

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According to Fab's guesstimation, he has appeared on close to 200 R&B remixes to date, both official and unofficial releases. "I jump on certain shit, and then they call me like, 'Yo, we wanna make it official,'" he says. "I really lost count a long time ago, because certain shit just come to me... At one point, niggas was coming to me with two songs a day." Mary J. Blige, Mariah Carey, Brandy, Jennifer Lopez, B2K, Amerie—the list goes on.

Fab signed to Def Jam in 2006, and his current label mate Ne-Yo has become a favorite frequent collaborator. In light of the long and lucrative radio run their 2007 smash "Make Me Better" enjoyed, Fab confirms there is a full collabo album in the works. "I think me and Ne-Yo have that chemistry," he says. "That's why we started to think about doing this *Best of Both Worlds* album, kinda in the same realm of the Jay and R. Kelly thing, but from a younger standpoint." Cheo, who has co-managed Fabulous since day one, seconds the motion. "R. Kelly and Jay-Z, those were two kings," he says. "But when you have somebody as good as Fab and as great as Ne-Yo on their two respective games, when they come together, it's gonna be something."

*Loso's Way* offers another taste of the chemistry, when Ne-Yo lends his vocals to



# “THAT WAS ALWAYS A HOOD RULE: STREET SH#T STAYS IN THE STREETS. BUT NOW YOU SEE THIS SH#T IS CHANGING.”

the tender “Makin Love.” The-Dream, meanwhile, blesses “Throw It in The Bag,” and Keri Hilson guests on “Everything, Everyday, Everywhere.” Trey Songz, Ryan Leslie and Floetry’s Marsha Ambrosius pitch in, too.

Fab’s penchant for love-song rap stylings has made him a favorite with the ladies—even if he doesn’t completely fit in the LL Cool J, lip-licking muscleman category. “Women started feeling me just because I was *that* dude,” he says, standing up from the couch to make his point clear. “I didn’t have to come out with my shirt off and dance. Not to knock who does do it, because it’s certain niggas who that works for. Nelly will pull his shirt off in a minute. Ja will pull his shirt off. L will pull his shirt off. They have great bodies; that’s cool for them, but that’s not me.” He breaks into a boisterous laugh. “And I’m from a different class of MC, too. I came up with different niggas that I patterned myself after... I’m cool within myself that I don’t feel like I gotta take off my shirt to win girls over. When I start doing that, that’s when you know the recession hit us up.”

It’s ironic, then, considering Fab’s pop appeal and pinup status, that his career has been interspersed with as much street drama as it has. Aside from his friendship and past musical collaboration with Atlanta rapper Bleu DaVinci, who’s currently serving a five-year prison sentence for drug conspiracy, as part of the notorious Black Mafia Family, Fab caught two separate gun charges in early 2003. And, of course, there was the infamous night of October 17, 2006, when Fab was shot in the leg outside P. Diddy’s Manhattan restaurant, Justin’s—an incident police suspected might have had something to do with the snatching, earlier that night, of a \$50,000 chain from the neck of Boston Celtics guard Sebastian Telfair. Fab and three friends were stopped on the way to the hospital and arrested for having loaded, unlicensed guns in the car.

Even in the post-50 Cent era, though, when many rappers are actively looking for ways to bolster their street cred, Fab continues to downplay the drama. “A lot of dudes do say incriminating shit, and they talk about shit that they not supposed to,” he says. “That was always a hood rule: Street shit stays in the streets. But now you see this shit is changing. Now street shit comes on camera, on YouTube, Twitter... That’s why, with my personal life,



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"IT DEFINITELY MAKES YOU RELATABLE TO THE CHICKS. IT DEFINITELY KEEPS YOU SPINNING ON THE RADIO, BECAUSE

**R&B IS ALWAYS A  
CONSTANT STAY AT  
RADIO."**

I was always a little secretive about what was going on in my life. And felt like I was still able to just make good music."

The irony isn't lost on Fab's team. "I think this is one of the real central dichotomies of Fabolous," says Cheo. "The funny thing about it is that, even though there was this rapper who had this pop-making ability and had a name like Fabolous, he was actually dealing with something that was worse than a lot of hardcore rappers."

Even when it comes to pedestrian rap beefs, Fabolous doesn't really indulge. There was a highly forgettable tiff with Mase in 2006, after the recently retired rapper/pastor aligned with G-Unit and got salty on the mixtape track "I Don't Know, Officer," rhyming, "I don't know why Loon and Fabby won't just say I'm their daddy." Fab responded with "Murda (We Don't Believe You)," off of his *Loso's Way: Rise to Power* mixtape: "Daddy, I mean Diddy, to be logical/50's his step-pops,

Puff's his biological." But the battle quickly fizzled out. It's just not his thing. In fact, Fab has actually gone out of his way to prevent lyrical skirmishes, in particular one with underground Brooklyn MC Uncle Murda.

In February 2008, on his DJ Drama-hosted *Gangsta Grillz: There Is No Competition*, Fabolous spit, "Burger-ass niggas, I look further past niggas/And go over the head of Uncle Murda-ass niggas." The line was a reference to a January shooting, when Murda was grazed, with bullet fragments left in his head. Understanding that his words might be seen as offensive, Fab called Murda immediately after laying the verse. "I knew Murda from him being on the 'Brooklyn' record," says Fab, citing his 2007 hit featuring Murda and Jay-Z. "So before it even got to him, like, 'Fab's coming at you, son'—that's not what I do, but you know hip-hop is sensitive—I hollered at dude and was like, 'Yo, just so niggas don't come at you, I said this.' I just felt like I don't want a nigga that

I know or I fuck with to feel that way."

Strangely, that wasn't the end of it. Despite the preemptive olive branch Fab extended his way, Murda used the perceived beef as a talking point on his "A Milli" freestyle, coming right back with, "I go over the head of these Fabolous-ass niggas." Fab let *that* be the end of it. "I've never really been into that," he says of rap's all-too-prevalent personal disses. "Because it gets too disrespectful for me. From where I'm from, it's gonna go to the next level after a nigga do some shit, or tape your moms, or some crazy shit like that."

Eschewing the extracurriculars, Fab focuses on the substance. It's a point Cheo's proud of. "Unlike a lot of stuff you see right now," he says, "it's not about theatrics. It's not about some made-up personality or some trumped-up beef. Fab is somebody who is truly committed to putting out solid, solid hip-hop."

Indeed, it's his skills, his hypnotizing delivery of instant rhyme quotables that keeps Fabolous at the top of hip-hop's most-wanted list, that makes him the go-to guy for 16 sly-voiced bars to juice up an R&B single. So while most MCs stay ever searching for a harder edge, Fab isn't looking to change anytime soon. "I like it," he says of his R&B lane. "I'm comfortable there. I mean, it's money, it's definitely money. It definitely makes you relatable to the chicks. It definitely keeps you spinning on the radio, because R&B is always a constant stay at radio. Sometimes [R&B records] live way longer than rap records."

**With the game** on the line, Kobe Bryant and his L.A. Lakers turn it up a notch. The game is theirs, 103-94, with Bryant scoring a team high 22 points. Now that his team has won, Fabolous sits and reflects on how he managed to become an MVP in his own right, as rap's premier R&B collaborator.

"All of the shit is relatable shit," he says. "But I still put that pen game in, where it ain't just a nigga sayin', 'Oh, I love you baby, you love me too/Yeah, here's ya cake, and we can be sweet too.' Nah, I'm not gonna say no corny shit. I'm gonna say some good shit, and make the shit flow, and make it cool enough for the bitches and still slick enough for niggas." ♠

## RHYTHM & GANGSTA

*When it comes to R&B remixes, Fab is king. Need proof? Check the résumé.*

"Superwoman Pt. II" - Lil' Mo, 2001

"She's All I Got" - Jimmy Cozier, 2001

"Family Affair (Remix)" - Mary J. Blige, 2001

"Last Night a DJ Saved My Life" - Mariah Carey, 2001

"I Got Love (Remix)" - Nate Dogg, 2001

"Tameeka" - Mario, 2001

"Oops (Oh My) (Remix)" - Tweet, 2002

"Uh Oooh (Remix)" - Lumidee, 2003

"4Ever" - Lil' Mo, 2003

"Is This Our Last Time" - Missy Elliott, 2003

"U-Turn" - Brian McKnight, 2003

"You Don't Know My Name (G-Mix)" - Alicia Keys, 2003

"Badaboom" - B2K, 2003

"Girlfriend (Remix)" - B2K, 2003

"Hurry Up (Remix)" - Mya, 2003

"Caught Up (Remix)" - Usher, 2004

"Dip It Low (Remix)" - Christina Milian, 2004

"Wake Up Everybody" - Various Artists, 2004

"Who Is She to U" - Brandy, 2004

"Boogie Oogie Oogie" - Brooke Valentine, 2005

"Hypnotic" - Syleena Johnson, 2005

"Used 2 Be" - Ryan Leslie, 2005

"One Wish (Remix)" - Ray J, 2005

"Get Right" - Jennifer Lopez, 2005

"She's No You (Remix)" - Jesse McCartney, 2005

"Fly Away" - Miri Ben-Ari, 2005

"Hot 2 Nite" - New Edition, 2005

"Don't Stop" - Alfonzo Hunter, 2005

"My Bad" - 115, 2005

"Talk What You Know" - Brooklyn Nina Shaw, 2006

"Is It Good to You (Remix)" - Yummy

Bingham, 2006

"The One You Need" - Megan Rochell, 2006

"I Really Want to Know You" - DJ Clue and Jagged Edge, 2006

"Bad Girl" - Black Buddha, 2006

"Don't Forget About Us, Pt.2 (DJ Clue Remix)" - Mariah Carey, 2006

"Let's Get Away" - Kieran, 2006

"Shawty Is Da Shit" - The-Dream, 2007

"Let's Just Do It" - Joe, 2007

"Bed" - J. Holiday, 2007

"Move" - Deemi, 2007

"My Girl Gotta Girlfriend (Remix)" - Ray Lavender, 2007

"Beautiful Girls (Remix)" - Sean Kingston, 2007

"Icebox" - Omarion, 2007

"Get Me Bodied (Timbaland Remix)" - Beyoncé, 2007

"Let Him Go" - Bobby Valentino, 2007

"How Do I Breathe (Remix)" - Mario, 2007

"In Love With You" - Israel, 2007

"This Is My Year" - Se7en, 2007

"Sumtimes I (Pt. II)" - Lil' Mo, 2007

"That's What U R" - Americ, 2007

"She Got Her Own (Remix)" - Ne-Yo, 2008

"Good Lovin'" - Slim, 2008

"I Can't Hear the Music" - Brutha, 2008

"Damaged" - Danity Kane, 2008

"Finer Things" - DJ Felli Fel, 2008

"Rewind" - Asia Cruise, 2008

"Feedback (So So Def Remix)" - Janet Jackson, 2008

"You Got Me (Remix)" - One Block Radius, 2008

"Break the Ice" - Britney Spears, 2008

"Rockin' That Thang (Remix)" - The-Dream, 2009

"Addiction" - Ryan Leslie, 2009

"Can't Let Go" - Shonie, 2009

"Fire" - Jagged Edge, 2009

"Do for You" - Marques Houston, 2009

"In Ya Phone" - Trey Songz, 2009

"Birthday Sex (Remix)" - Jeremih, 2009

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The-

# DREAM

**GOT TO GET IT** A star singer and songwriter, The-Dream a Grammy, has been compared to R. Kelly, collaborated and landed himself an R&B chick. Could he be the new king

Interview *Clover Hope Photography Phil Knott*

**I**n his songs, and his conversations, The-Dream swears a lot for an R&B singer. "Shit." "Damn." "Muthafuckas." Nouns, verbs, adjectives. He sings as audaciously as he speaks. He's even got an unreleased track called "You Ain't Shit" (the perfect complement to his debut single, "Shawty Is Da Shit"); it's a shoo-wop-sounding slow jam whose hook ("You ain't shit, you ain't shit"), sung in a smooth, yearning falsetto, is in complete contrast to the mellow beat. It's the best of both worlds: the gritty and the sweet.

A North Carolina native raised in Atlanta, the singer/songwriter, born Terius Youngdell Nash, 31, first found his groove as a member of the local singing group Guess Who in 1998, before meeting and working feverishly alongside producer Christopher "Tricky" Stewart, starting in 2002, to build a now-scroll-length discography (see sidebar). Despite the nonplatinum status, it's his multiple songwriting and production credits, and his albums—2007's *Love/Hate* and 2009's *Love vs. Money*—that have earned Dream the admiration of industry peers. Rejecting the notion that R&B has to be sappy, he's quickly becoming the closest thing to R. Kelly since the R&B thug himself, when it comes to hip-hop soul. Where other R&B dudes play Mr. Sensitivity, The-Dream is frank and blunt (see "I Luv Your Girl," "Ditch That Nigga," etc.). His rapperesque persona (the swearing helps) and tell-it-like-it-is touch bleed into his performances, production, songwriting and guest appearances.

It's a Wednesday night in late May, and the backstage area of NBC's *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon* is buzzing. From a couch in the green room, The-Dream is awaiting his performance set, watching on a flat-screen as Fallon chats with actor Chris Hardwick then *American Idol* winner Kris Allen. Dream is ostentatiously garbed in sagging Diesel jeans, with a black-and-red handkerchief tied around his left ankle, a medium denim Dolce & Gabbana jacket, a red leather Yankees cap and, for the stage, red Cupid Le-Barrage gloves. His new fiancée, singer Christina Milian (their pending nuptials were confirmed in the end of May), occupies a cozy spot beside him the entire time. With Tina as his arm candy, The-Dream, the Radio Killa, R&B Gorilla discusses the growing synergy between hip-hop and R&B, the future Mrs. Nash (who occasionally chimes in), and finding the rhythm and blues in everyday life.





# M

was nominated for  
with a slew of rappers  
of hip-hop soul?

“HOW WE DRESS AND THE THINGS THAT WE DO IN HIP-HOP CULTURE INFLUENCE WHAT R&B IS, BUT RAP IS RAP. IT’S TALKING. IT’S NOT SINGING. R&B IS R&B.”

**You're definitely one of the R&B artists who are more ingrained in rap, compared with other singers. What do you think of the term hip-hop soul? How would you define it?**

Well, you can't really make hip-hop soul something that R&B was already in the '60s and '70s. It's almost like... Not disrespectful, but it's like R&B kind of fell off when the '90s started, because I guess it became kinda useless... There wasn't no Gerald Leverts and Otis Reddings, you know, the people that were the catalysts. I think it was R. Kelly by himself basically just holding it over, until a certain point. How we dress and the things that we do in hip-hop culture influence what R&B is, but rap is rap. It's talking. It's not singing. R&B is R&B. Regardless of what our clothes look like this year or how we walk, whether our pants sag, the song itself is still an R&B song. I think even when guys was rapping and singing, they were doing R&B records. But *hip-hop*, the word, is associated with rap.

**Do you see a stronger connection now between rap and R&B?**

Yeah, I think it's more guys professing their love, even through rap records. Even Kanye. That's R&B. The feeling and everything about it is R&B. Now we could say that he's a rapper, that's his profession, but he made an R&B album, and that's what I see it as, no matter what everybody else say. If clothing and all that shit goes away and we start wearing our shit all tight and shit and hip-hop, if it's associated with baggy shit and all that, if that goes away, then what is it? Now everybody's basically singing. Or *trying* to... Now what would be the question is whether we make them say that they're doing an R&B record or not, you know. I think that a part of me and a part of why this is going on and why we're doing the feature is it might be cool enough to say that now. *Oh, it's cool to sing that.*

**It seems more acceptable now, whereas before maybe it would've been thought of as soft.**

Because it was associated with style, though. It's like R&B was somehow these guys with these six-pack abs, these fresh supercuts—that's what R&B was. But that didn't have shit to do with the music.

**Even though your albums haven't gone platinum, you and your production partner,**

**Tricky, are basically shaping the sound of R&B right now.**

**Do you feel like you should have more recognition, based on your impact?**

Depends on how many people like *XXL* make us look like the cool kids. That's all it is. I can continue to put out the album that's the best album. Whether my persona is the cool guy that's doing the shit or not, that's left up to writers and to magazines and whether they put me on covers or how they shape my life, to say, "Oh, he's doing something, and it actually does mean something, and I'm not gonna sit back in the cut and just say he's doing something that means something..." That's the part that hurts: When you're producing and you're songwriting for so many years, and you have somebody [else] come out to do a fuckin' popcorn song out of *nowhere*, and it's like, "Hey, I'm here!" And you're like, "What the fuck? Are you fuckin' serious?"

**How do your collaborations with rappers usually come about?**

Usually I just have this particular song in mind for somebody. Since now I've made myself an artist, I'll probably end up being the one that does it. And I've yet to have—until recently now with Christina—a female around to say, "Ay, you do this hook." Since I'm the one that's on there anyway, it's like, "All right," you know.

**What's the biggest difference between you and other R&B dudes, who are more lovey-dovey?**

I'm pretty lovey-dovey, though! I think it's just I try my best, and my intention is not to fool anybody. And I think that it can be considered edgy, 'cause it's basically the truth. Versus where somebody's, like, *trying* to write the consumer this particular song and say that it's this way, when you probably wanna say, "Eh, fuck that bitch." You probably wanna say it, but you're not gonna say it. Or it'll take a song like "Fancy" to say it's okay for a girl to want everything from me. Me and Tina talk about a lot how the guys profess now that being independent is the cool shit. A girl really doesn't want to be that independent. Like, truly, in nature, there's probably, like, 2 percent.

**You've often been compared to R. Kelly. You've written for him. Have the two of you met?**

I haven't met him. We've talked through so many people all the time. We just did this record for his album—me, him and Tyrese is on the record together. I wrote a record for him called "Ringtone" two albums ago, the *Double Up* album. Of course he got on "Shawty Is a 10," the remix, for me. So we go back and forth. [His manager] Wayne, he'll be like, "Yeah, Kelly's *12 Play* is his shit!" I'm like, "Of course it's his shit! 'Cause it's *his* shit!" [Laughs] I don't know why I haven't ran into that guy yet. It's weird.

**Let's talk about you and Christina. You two obviously are public with your relationship.**

**The-Dream:** [Laughs] We ain't got no public relationship.

**Christina Milian:** I don't know him. [Laughs] **So have you confirmed that you guys are together?**

**The-Dream:** Nope. I don't think that we've confirmed, have we?

**Christina Milian:** I don't even think we confirmed anything, to be real with you.

**The-Dream:** We don't really feel a need to. People can't really tell the difference between things and whether they're shallow or have depth or not. So it's kinda like, you don't really wanna get caught up in that whole little, "Oh, okay, they just looking for cameras today. They was just out there. They tryna show off for the cameras."

**It said on the blogs that you guys set up the photo shoots.**

**Christina Milian:** A lot of people been saying that we set up some. Like, please. We shop every day. We live in Hollywood. We live in New York. We're everywhere all the time, so it's not like there aren't people just following you or just popping up at your hotel or wherever you're gonna be. It's kinda crazy, but we don't look for that stuff. We're just living life, being regular.



Public lovin'





“THERE ARE  
FEELINGS THAT  
ARE IN BETWEEN  
WORDS, AND  
I JUST TRY  
TO EXPOSE  
THEM.”

