

ALL FOUR

From the gutterest of trap rap to ringtone-ready candy pop, friends and collaborators **Gucci Mane, Shawty Lo, OJ Da Juiceman** and **Soulja Boy** represent the next wave of Atlanta heat. Welcome to the *new new South*.

Interview Vanessa Satten
Photography Zach Wolfe



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XXL



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t's almost noon on a late April Tuesday, and the sun is beating down on a yellow Lamborghini parked on a side street off Edgewood Avenue. The giant rapper Gucci Mane stands next to it, eating lunch out of a Styrofoam container.

His cronies Shawty Lo and OJ Da Juiceman sit against a nearby brick building, talking. Assorted crew, stylists, label reps and photography assistants scurry around, preparing for the arrival of Soulja Boy.

The teen star has just touched down on his flight from Florida, on his way to be part of the cover shoot for *XXL*'s second-annual Hood 2 Hood issue. This year's hot spot: our current locale, Atlanta. The A has been consistently producing top rap talent for 15 years now, but—as represented by today's quartet—there's another new wave coming up from the streets, the MCs leading hip-hop's leading city into tomorrow.

Four solo artists of varying ages and stages of their careers—Gucci, Soulja, Shawty and OJ,—have developed a strong friendship, be it long ago, through the streets, or more recently, through rap. When Gucci was locked up this past year on an assault charge, Soulja Boy shot a "Free Gucci Mane" video and put it on YouTube in support. They've all appeared on each other's songs, mixtapes and videos—most recently gathering for Soulja Boy's "Gucci Bandanna"—presenting a united front.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Atlanta's new generation has clashed with the previous one. Gucci Mane endured an all-too-serious beef with Young Jeezy after the success of their collaboration on the 2005 hit "Icy." And

Shawty Lo was at odds with his old Bankhead neighbor T.I. for over a year, before squashing the problem at the local Club Crucial in March.

But today is about the new generation, not the one before. The youngest of the bunch, and the most successful so far saleswise, S.B. arrives in a black SUV packed with a swarm of security and a dozen or so Louis Vuitton suitcases and bags. But while he's taken the pop path, and never dealt drugs, like the others, the greetings are warm and genuine.

After the camera captures the moment, the four sit down at a table in a location trailer to chop it up in the round.

“SOULJA BOY FROM THE HOOD, TOO. HE MADE SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING, JUST LIKE WE DID.”

—Gucci Mane

What did you guys think of the photo shoot today?

Gucci Mane: Personally, I think it was history in the making. I enjoyed it. It didn't feel like it was no work. It was fun, and I got to kick it with my boys. Get to chill with them. We have busy schedules, so even though it was a photo shoot and it was work, it was good for us to get with each other and to just see each other again and touch bases with each other.

Soulja Boy: I feel like it's a good thing for Atlanta and just for all us to be on the *XXL* mag

at the same time. That's just gonna mark our star. So it's going down real big right now. **This is *XXL*'s second-annual Hood 2 Hood issue. For the first installment, last July, we had some popular Florida artists on the cover.**

Soulja Boy: Rick Ross!

Yeah, we had Rick Ross, Khaled, Trina and Flo Rida. That was the hot hood, musically, at the time. Now, a year later, we feel that you guys, collectively and individually, have been making a big buzz down here—like, a new wave, the new big faces of Atlanta.

Shawty Lo: I believe y'all are really on point with your idea, because we've been grinding so long and so hard. And for us to be the underdogs and getting out there good, it's a real good look for the city and for the rest of the world.

You've recorded a lot together. Gucci, Lo and OJ, you are all on the same label. But Soulja Boy, you aren't. How did you guys come to all work together? Is it that you are friends? Did the labels put some of you together?

OJ Da Juiceman: I think it was a good thing. You know, Atlanta cats, we keep it two, 100. We don't play soccer—save that for the folks over in Brazil, know what I'm talking about? But it's a good look that we came together and make the hip-hop better than what it is, because it ain't nothing without us, ya feel me? Juiceman said that. All we got is that. The music me and Gooch make, you know, it's just a good vibe. The music that me and Shawty Lo make, it's a stupid vibe. And the music that me and Soulja make, it's a wonderful vibe. And if anybody say different, I wish they would, you feel me? And this here's Atlanta, ya feel me? And we swagged up all the way to the max. Swag 200 for the 100. For the fool that ain't keeping it 100, you know we 100, anyway. So I say 200—100 for us and for the folks that ain't 100. Da Juiceman, aye! [Laughing all around]

Shawty Lo: No labels done put us together. We all homeboys from the jump.

When did you first get to know each other?

Gucci Mane: In, like, '89 I moved to Georgia from Alabama. The first person I really met was OJ. We met picking up cans in the hood.

OJ Da Juiceman: Trading Nintendo cartridges. [Laughing] Awww, man.

Gucci Mane: He used to steal my Nintendo cartridges. We started hustling early teenage years—12,13... And then just went to school together, hung out together, had beef with folks together, all coming up through the years. And just parlayed that into a rap career, man. Just glad we ain't doing what we used to be doing.

OJ Da Juiceman: Damn sure right about that.

Gucci Mane: And as far as me and Shawty Lo, that's, like, one of my best friends. We like brothers. And Soulja, that's, like, my protégé, to me. I parallel myself to him at the same

GUCCI MANE

Given Name: Radric Davis

Age: 29

Born: Bessemer, Alabama

Raised: Zone 6, East Atlanta

Label: So Icey Entertainment/Asylum/Atlantic Records

Breakout: "Icy," featuring Young Jeezy, 2005

Subsequent Hits: "Pillz," 2006; "Freaky Gurl," 2006

Albums: *Trap House*, 2005; *Hard to Kill*, 2006; *Trap-A-Thon*, 2007; *Back to the Trap House*, 2007

Currently Bubbling: Black Eyed Peas' "Let the Beat Rock (Remix)"; Ciara's "Feeling on My Ass"; OJ Da Juiceman's "Make Tha Trap Say Aye"; Soulja Boy's "Gucci Bandanna"

Upcoming Projects: As-yet-untitled LP, as So Icey Boyz with Wooh da Kid, Gino, Frenchie, Waka and Flocka Flame; as-yet-untitled LP with Brick Squad, which includes the So Icey Boyz and OJ Da Juiceman; *Writing On the Wall* solo LP



“PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHO THEY RAPPERS IS... THEY WANNA FEEL LIKE THEY WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL WITH THEM.”

—Soulja Boy

age. He got a lot of things in common with me. He's a hard worker, just like myself. That relationship is an interesting one. Gucci, you said in an interview, in our May issue, that Soulja Boy was an inspiration to you, and you applauded him for his positivity. Soulja, you did a "Free Gucci Mane" video when Gucci was locked up. How did you two become friends?

Gucci Mane: To be honest, Soulja Boy told me he was a big fan of my music. But he

SOULJA BOY

Given Name: DeAndre Way
Age: 18
Born: Chicago
Raised: Batesville, Mississippi
Resides: Zone 1, Westside Atlanta
Label: S.O.D./Collipark Music/Interscope Records
Breakout: "Crank That (Soulja Boy)," 2007
Subsequent Hits: "Yahhh!," featuring Arab, 2007; "Soulja Girl," featuring 115, 2007
Albums: *Souljaboytellem.com*, 2007; *iSouljaboytellem*, 2008
Currently Bubbling: "Kiss Me Thru the Phone," featuring Sammie; "Turn My Swag On (Remix)," featuring Jim Jones and Lil Wayne; "Gucci Bandanna," featuring Gucci Mane and Shawty Lo
Upcoming Projects: *The DeAndre Way* solo LP

wouldn't even imagine I'm a same big fan of his music as he is of mine. So we had mutual respect for each other. That's my dawg. **That surprised a lot of people. Your**

images are so different. **Gucci Mane:** Me and Juiceman had that conversation when we was coming over here to the photo shoot. We were like, even though



SHAWTY LO

Given Name: Carlos Walker
Age: 33
Born and Raised: Bankhead, Zone 1, Westside Atlanta
Label: Asylum/Atlantic Records
Breakout: "Dey Know (Remix)" featuring Ludacris, Young Jeezy, Plies and Lil Wayne, 2007
Subsequent Hits: "Dunn Dunn," 2008; "Foolish," 2008
Albums: *Down for Life*, 2005 (as D4L, with Fabo, Mook-B and Stoncy); *Units in the City*, 2008
Currently Bubbling: Soulja Boy's "Gucci Bandanna"
Upcoming Projects: *I Am Carlos* autobiography (self-published); LO cologne, through 7 Star Fragrances; *I Am Carlos* solo LP

me and Juice came up hustlin' and doing all kinds of things, we was like, Soulja Boy from the hood, too. He made something out of nothing, just like we did. That's what we were talking about before we got here. We gotta tip our hat to him, just like anybody else.

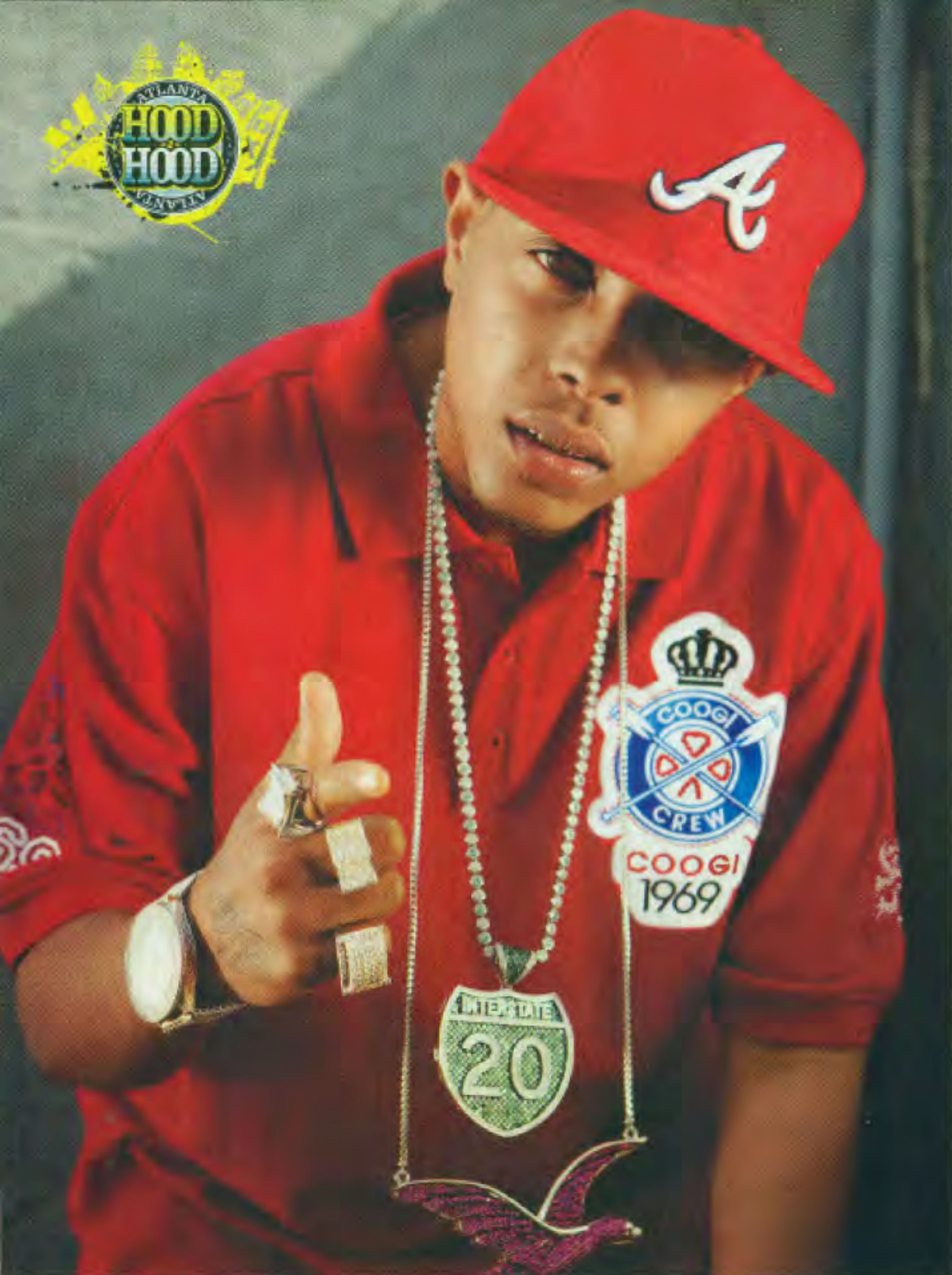
OJ Da Juiceman: Can't never knock a hustle.
Gucci Mane: That's how I am.

The Atlanta rap scene has been hot for so long. Cities rarely maintain that kind of consistency. Houston went up, went down. Same with New Orleans and St. Louis. But Atlanta stays producing national-level hip-hop talent. What do you attribute the city's success to?

Gucci Mane: I think what keeps us afloat and what keeps us in touch with the streets so much—not saying that Houston ain't got that street shit, or Florida, or Cali, or New York—but I think that the lifestyle in Atlanta is just the party atmosphere all the time. And just the people traveling, always coming down here. And the culture that just keeps us with a different, like, swag. Not even swag, just different flavor, you know what I'm saying? Because everybody always say that. A whole different way of seeing life. Partying every day, clubbing every day, you feel me? That definitely

“EVERYBODY AIN’T GOTTA BE A GANGSTA. YOU JUST GOTTA BE YOURSELF AND JUST BE REAL ABOUT WHO YOU ARE.”
—Shawty Lo

JACKET BY D&G, JEANS BY MEK, SNEAKERS BY D&G, T-SHIRT, GLASSES AND JEWELRY ARTIST'S OWN



**“THIS HERE’S
ATLANTA,
YA FEEL ME?
AND WE SWAGGED
UP ALL THE WAY
TO THE MAX.”**

—OJ Da Juiceman

gotta be an influence on the music in some kind of way.

Shawty Lo: It is. We got basically all the clubs poppin’ everywhere. It ain’t one, two, three places open—we got 20 places to go to. We got the busiest airport.

Gucci Mane: We see it on a daily basis. So even before I got history, I was partying with stars, even if I wasn’t a star myself. You know what I’m saying?

Because everyone’s around—athletes, artists...

Gucci Mane: I could just go to the mall and see somebody. In Atlanta, it ain’t big to see a star, [so we don’t] be starstruck, like if you go to another city, say. I feel like everybody in Atlanta, they always feel like they’re a star anyway. We got so many ghetto stars and hood stars, even the people working the jobs are professional stars. We got our swag just turned up like that.

Things are tough all over right now, with the economic climate. The music industry is suffering badly, and hip-hop even more than other genres. A lot of people say hip-hop is dead. Certainly, no one’s selling 10 million records, like people were. Do you guys feel like you missed out on the good ol’ days, or are there more good times to come?

Shawty Lo: The good days still exist, it’s just times done changed. The computers done took over. We got a lot of bootlegging going on. I don’t think hip-hop’s dead, because we got artists everywhere. We stay booked, and our fans love us.

Gucci Mane: I feel like hip-hop ain’t dead at all. It’s just the economy—it fluctuates. We might have missed the boat on making the crazy money they used to make back in the day, but we’re still doing good. Still having fun. Still traveling, seeing the world. We still doing what we love to do. We ain’t missing no meals, so, shit, we good.

Has the recession affected your careers individually at all? Through budgets? Through traveling? As working artists?

Gucci Mane: *Hell nah!*

OJ Da Juiceman: I don’t know what that is! [Group laughter] I say *flotation*, man. We floatin’ over here like a muthafucka in water.

OJ DA JUICEMAN

Given Name: Otis Williams Jr.

Age: 27

Born and Raised: Zone 6, East Atlanta

Label: Mizay Entertainment/32 Entertainment/So Icky Entertainment/Asylum/Atlantic Records

Breakout: “I’m Getting Money,” 2008

Albums: *The Otha Side of the Trap* mixtape

Currently Bubbling: “Make the Trap Say Aye”; R. Kelly’s “Superman High”; Jadakiss’s “Who’s Real”

Upcoming Projects: As-yet-untitled LP, as Brick Squad with Gucci Mane, Wooh da Kid, Gino, Frenchie, Waka and Flocka Flame; as-yet-untitled solo LP



Gucci Mane: I was gonna say, Hell nah. What the hell is that?

OJ Da Juiceman: Inflation, inflation. [More laughter]

Soulja Boy, your second album, *iSouljaBoyTellEm*, hasn't had such strong sales, even though the singles have done really well. It's interesting to have successful songs but not have it equate to album sales. What does it mean to you when you don't see the sales numbers?

Soulja Boy: I stay hot year-round, which is what I do, you feel me? My first album went platinum, and I just feel everything was perfect for that. My second album, I made like 250,000 right now, and I just feel like I timed it wrong. I ain't put the right singles out before I dropped my album. And now I got two of the No. 1 songs in the country. I got two songs in the Top 10 on the *Billboard* [rap singles chart] at the same time, with "Kiss Me Thru the Phone" and "Turn My Swag On." But I just feel like I released them too late. If I would've dropped the singles that I got out now before I dropped my album, then my sales would be different. But everything gonna be perfect on the third album, *The DeAndre Way*.

You've each dealt with your share of beef, sometimes in a high-profile way, with

"I FEEL LIKE EVERYBODY IN ATLANTA, THEY ALWAYS FEEL LIKE THEY'RE A STAR ANYWAY."

—Gucci Mane

other artists from Atlanta, whether it be Gucci and Young Jeezy or Shawty and T.I. Do you think Atlanta rap can come together as a united community, or is that unrealistic?

Gucci Mane: I was beefing with my jewelry man.

You're beefing with your jewelry man?

Gucci Mane: Yeah, he's stupid as hell.

Okay.

Gucci Mane: He keep making stupid diamonds. I told him don't be doing it, but he keep doing it. He retarded, man.

Your jewelry man keeps making stupid diamonds?

Gucci Mane: Yeah, I wanna go to war about that shit.

Okay. What about you, Shawty? What do you think?

Shawty Lo: I mean, it ain't serious, man. It ain't nothing like—you know, my beef, it's over. My beef over, you know.

So when you joined T.I. onstage in March, that was genuine?

Shawty Lo: Yeah, it's genuine.

So the idea of a united Atlanta is realistic, or that's corny?

Shawty Lo: I'ma let Gucci answer.

Gucci Mane: I don't got no answer for that one, I'm sorry. I don't know. But I hope so, because I'm not one to wish for the turmoil. You know, it would make more money if everything cool and it's about being financially straight. But, at the same time, you don't want to be played for no pussy, and this is a blood sport. This is what you signed up for. Every time I do interviews, people always ask me about beefs. [Other people in the industry] always shy away from the question. "Go to the next question. Don't ask him about that." But that's a part of your life. That's a part of your music. That's a part of who we are, where we came from, you know what I'm saying? But it's bigger than beef. It's about music, it's



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about money, and it's about spreading your message. So, at the same time, you have to keep, in perspective, everything. Your career will always be about colliding with people, because it's got to be more about collaboration, as well.

So you don't like getting those questions, or you do?

Gucci Mane: I wouldn't mind. I just think—don't just base your whole interview with me about just beefs. Ask me what's going on in my music career, 'cause I got a lot going on that people wanna know about. So if you just wanna ask me about beefs and don't wanna ask about nothing else, that just shows you haven't done the research on me before you interview me. Like, this interview is going great because you know a lot about us. But some people just don't bring they A game, and I be bringing mine.

Sometimes people just look at highlights or headlines of someone's history, and drama stands out. The selling point, at the end of the day, is the drama. So people go in looking for the drama.

Gucci Mane: It kinda keeps it fun, you know what I'm saying? 'Til it get outta hand and somebody gets killed or something, though. **Do you feel that an interesting background story is important to have to be successful in hip-hop?**

Gucci Mane: I'm not a fan of nobody who I can't really just—what you say you do or what you been doing, I want to check that out and make sure they straight. I feel like you gotta have a résumé in some kind of way of what you been doing. That's what I think.

Soulja Boy: I feel like your background should be what you portray. But some people portray different images. Some people portray gangstas, and they ain't no gangstas. But then some people don't portray gangstas, and they might've gotten shot by 12 niggas, you never know. So it is what it is. I just feel like people want to know who they rappers is. They wanna know they rappers. They wanna feel like they know them. They wanna feel like they went to high school with them. They wanna know everything, how many fights they done won, all that. They wanna know the artist. But I just feel like, if you portray that, that's what your background should be.

Shawty Lo: Everybody ain't gotta be a gangsta. You just gotta be yourself and just be real about who you are. You respect a man better like that. Instead of just saying you did this and you did that and you ain't did that. That make you look bad.

How much of your lyrics is about your real self, versus what you think people wanna hear? Because sometimes you have to write what people wanna hear so

you can sell, right? How do you balance what's real and true with what you put in because it sells?

Shawty Lo: It be true. And you gotta balance it out sometimes.

You didn't like that question, Gucci. You're looking at me weird.

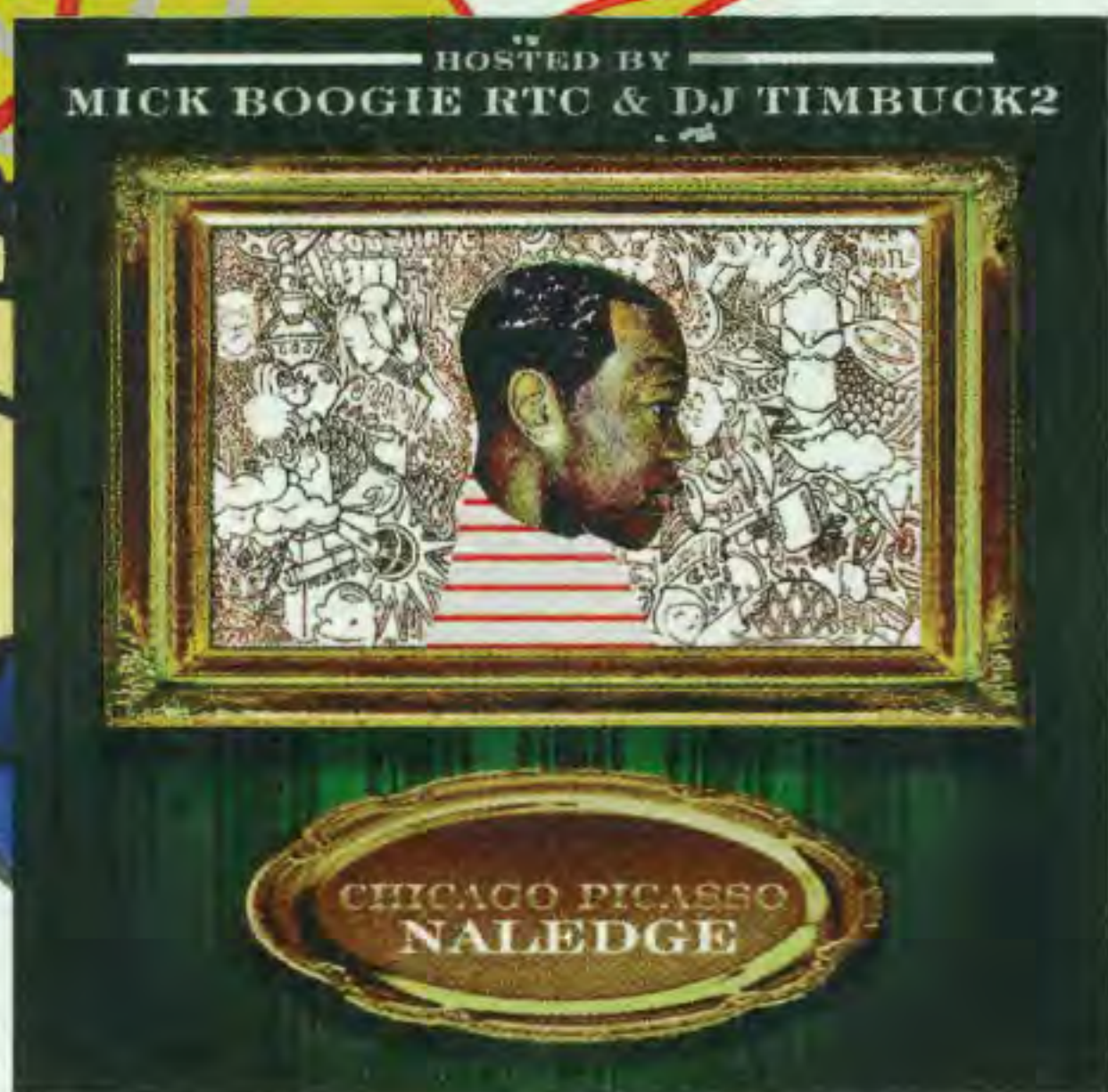
Gucci Mane: Nah. I was thinking about it. Because I was saying—I'm sorry, Shawty...

Shawty Lo: Nah, go 'head, go 'head, go 'head, go 'head.

Gucci Mane: I was thinking about it. I been listening to what you were saying. And I was thinking to myself—sorry, Shawty—but you gotta be true to yourself. I like to be honest with you when I kick my lyrics. So that's why I don't share a lot of my personal life in my music. But on my new album and in my new stuff, I've been trying to dig deeper, because I'm a fan of people who get deep in their music. But me as a person, I just try to entertain and just go ahead and kick how I feel, and just let it have fun and be free. But I feel it's more challenging to go deep and let people know what's inside of you. That's gotta be more challenging.

If we meet back here a year from now, where do you guys think you will each individually be careerwise?

Gucci Mane: Still making music, still the best of friends and just, hopefully, still alive. ♠



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