

EXCLUSIVE: DJ BATTLE TRANSCRIPTIONS :: A-TRAK :: SHORTKUT

SCRATCH

THE SCIENCE OF HIP-HOP

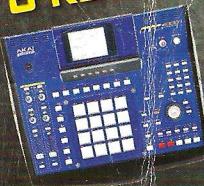
MAGAZINE

in the studio with
kanye west

Soul Brothers
No. 1

NEPTUNES
9TH WONDER
ALCHEMIST
D12 LIVE
GREEN
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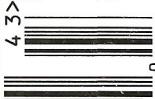
david
banner
jazze pha
trackboyz

HOW THEY GET
THAT SOUND.

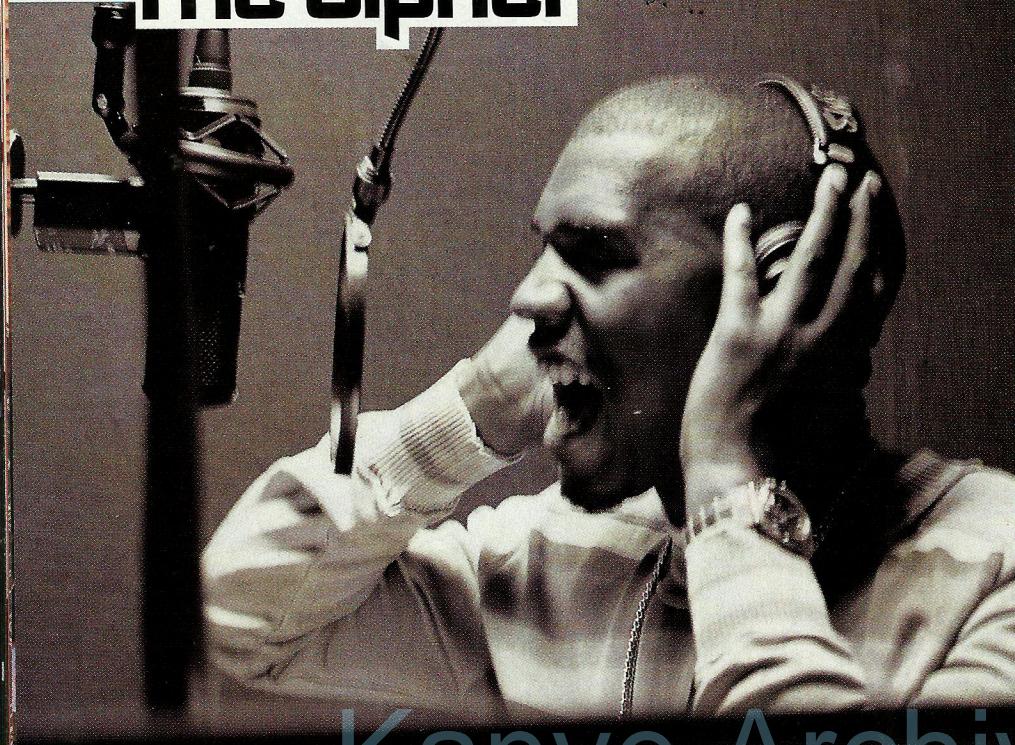


FALL 2004

\$4.95 \$5.95 Can.



The Cipher



Kanye Archiv

Kanye is killing the game very bad. I held back in the first issue, but you knew we had to get up with the new Soul Brother No. 1 and get in his head on some studio techniques. Deemed the most unlikely to succeed on the Roc, he's ironically been the only one outside of Jay to go plat-plus. Doing five beats a day for three summers seems to have paid off.

In a lesser producer's hands, those same records Kanye's holding on our cover don't quite bump the way they do in his. 9th Wonder tells us that, in the end, it's about the ear, and that's real talk right there. It's the ear that separates real producers from beat makers. It's that adobo that makes a great producer like Kanye stand out from a mediocre one, like myself. No two people hear music the same way, and dope producers flip joints in ways that the next man wouldn't think about. If you're planning on sending us beats, like some of you already have, don't try to sound like Kanye—with another soul joint on 45—he already killed that. Do everyone a favor, and just do you.

It's the ear that separates David Banner, Jazze Pha, and the Trackboyz. There's no fronting on the grip the South has on the game right now. We get with three heavyweights in the Dirty that are taking the music to the next level, moving beyond just samples and coming with some of the freshest sounds we've ever heard in hip-hop.

I could go on all day, this issue's bananas. From DJ battle prep with turntable prodigy A-Trak to a beat convo with G-Unit's Lloyd Banks. Green Lantern speaks on the mixtape game, and we set off our mixtape battles to try to make some sense of the oversaturation of the scene. Things done changed, but we're still searching for what's popping in the midst of all the bullshit. Whether it's coming from sensitive thugs in the mainstream or some backpackers (a term we officially retire this issue) in the underground, we're strictly about heat. Hip-hop is already in a bad enough state to keep seeing it through cracked lenses. But we're focused over here, so expect nothing less than hot beats. Whether they were made on a laptop by some college kid to spit over in his dorm room, or on a raggedy-ass Casio keyboard by your mans and them; if it's hot it's hot. It's time for SCRATCH MAGAZINE to clean out your ear holes, 'cause like the man said, "We don't wanna hear that weak shit no more."

Ease back,

Andre Torres
Editor-in-Chief

SCRATCH

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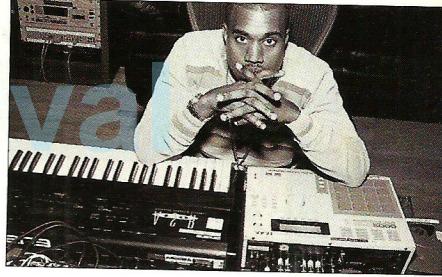
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Kanye Archival



Kanye Archiva TOP DOG/

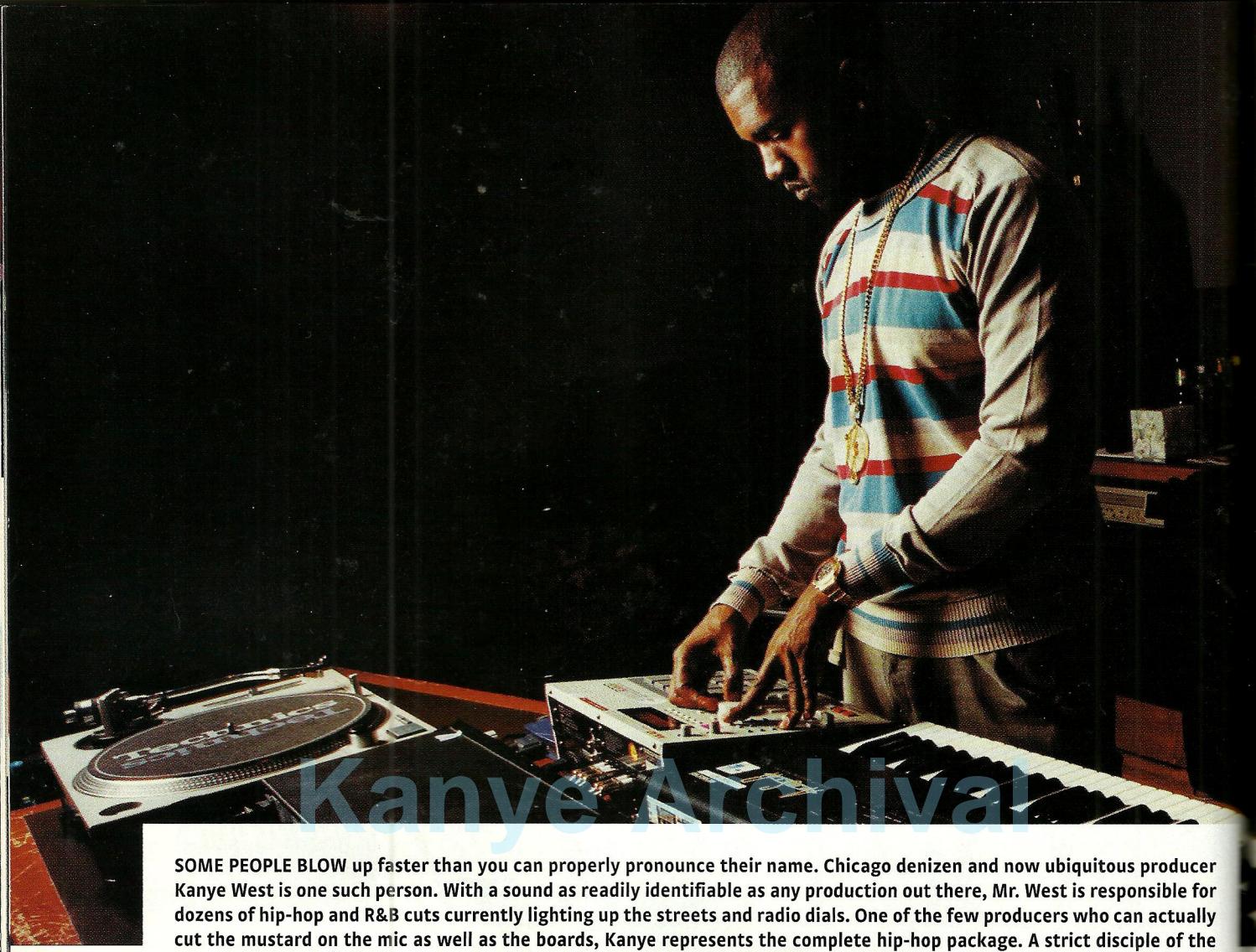


With an encyclopedic knowledge of music history,

a determined lack of foolish posturing,
and a legendary ear for radio candy,
the often-underestimated
producer/rapper **Kanye West**
is finally secure atop
the rap world.

UNDEAD DOG

STORY DANTE CARFAGNA | PHOTOGRAPHY CLAY PATRICK McBRIDE



Kanye Archival

SOME PEOPLE BLOW up faster than you can properly pronounce their name. Chicago denizen and now ubiquitous producer Kanye West is one such person. With a sound as readily identifiable as any production out there, Mr. West is responsible for dozens of hip-hop and R&B cuts currently lighting up the streets and radio dials. One of the few producers who can actually cut the mustard on the mic as well as the boards, Kanye represents the complete hip-hop package. A strict disciple of the unspoken laws of hip-hop, he is still sampling in this age of sound modules, online sound libraries, and Triton takeover. And so, at Sony Studios in midtown Manhattan, this Chicago writer sits down to talk to perhaps the greatest hip-hop producer to hail from the City of Big Shoulders.

SCRATCH: How much time do you spend in the bins?

KANYE WEST: In the Benz?

In the bins, looking for records. Oh hell naw, I thought you said in the Benz. Well I guess those bins got me my Benz! [laughs] I used to spend way more time, but now I got so many records I can just go back and listen to them. I re-listen to a record and I'll have a different ear from when I bought it. I might have bought them in '96, so something I would sample now would be different than what I would have sampled then.

So there was a period that you were doing some thorough record shopping? Yeah, at [Chicago record stores] Second Hand Tunes, Dr. Wax, Gramaphone. But now, I just go to Amoeba and get CDs. [Jay-Z's] "Encore" is off a CD and "Lucifer" is off a CD, and those are like the *realest* hip-hop beats. What else is off a CD?

"School Spirit," that's like the *realest* hip-hop beat on my album. That's the most A Tribe Called Quest-esque, which I love.

How much time do you spend listening to records? Like I'll play video games, watch TV, do some other shit, look through magazines. Listen for like three hours before we start a session.

Listen to whole albums or just scan them? Take the remote control like this [makes flipping motion], tap the button, fast forward to the middle of the song. I would never just sit back and let the record play. If I like the basic instruments of the song, or if I like the basic melody, I'll let the whole song play.

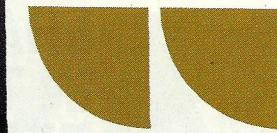
When was the last time you listened to an entire LP? I might listen to a whole song, but I don't have time to listen to a whole album. The last album I listened to all the

way through was my album when I performed it all the way through.

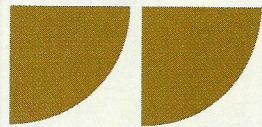
Do you miss the time when you could relax and listen to a full record? I miss having more time. But when I have more time...people say, "More money, more problems," but I think I had more problems when I was broke.

So when you are listening to a song, do you know instantly when you hear the part you want to sample? I know it when I hear it. Sometimes it will happen like this [snaps fingers] and other times it will come up hours and hours going into it. When I make beats I sit and pray to God that I find something. I go to the studio *in fear of being wack*.

Who was the first person to put you on to the old records? No ID? Actually it was Dug Infinite. He told me to go out and buy this Bobby Hutcherson record for the drums. Back then, drums was the shit. That was



EMINEM IS ONE OF MY TOP FIVE PRODUCERS, LET ALONE ONE OF MY TOP FIVE RAPPERS. ME AND EM, TOGETHER? DAMN.



So what was the first piece of equipment that the little producer bought? I had a sound program for my Amiga computer.

And I bet you bought the Amiga for the games and graphics. Yeah, it had 496 colors and it was like five or six hundred dollars. I wanted to make video games, so I also wanted to make the music for them. So once I got to that point, I just stopped there and started making beats. That was seventh grade, who wants to make video games in the seventh grade?

I did. [laughs] You know what you want to hear right now? The new song I did with Common. That shit is straight grimy, underground. This shit is like...the drums. Straight loop drums, heavy and hard like Beatnuts-era shit. And the sample...I took this melodic sample and muffed that shit, straight filtered the sample. I mean, who has filtered beats now? We took it back there.

You just looped the drums? I mean, I chopped them, but they sound very loopish. I didn't chop them like Marley Marl chops. I don't want to give it away, I mean I'll tell you how I chopped them, but I don't want to say it right here. [points to tape recorder]. It's something about the air. There's so many things that people give me credit for, like that Alicia Keys record ("You Don't Know My Name"). All that is a complete bite. What I did with the Alicia Keys record is that I paid them back for all them times everybody was talking over the part I wanted to sample. I'm listening to the record like, "Yo, fucking stop talking." [laughs] When they used to talk on those old records, they were very exact. [Affects smooth voice] "Baby I had to

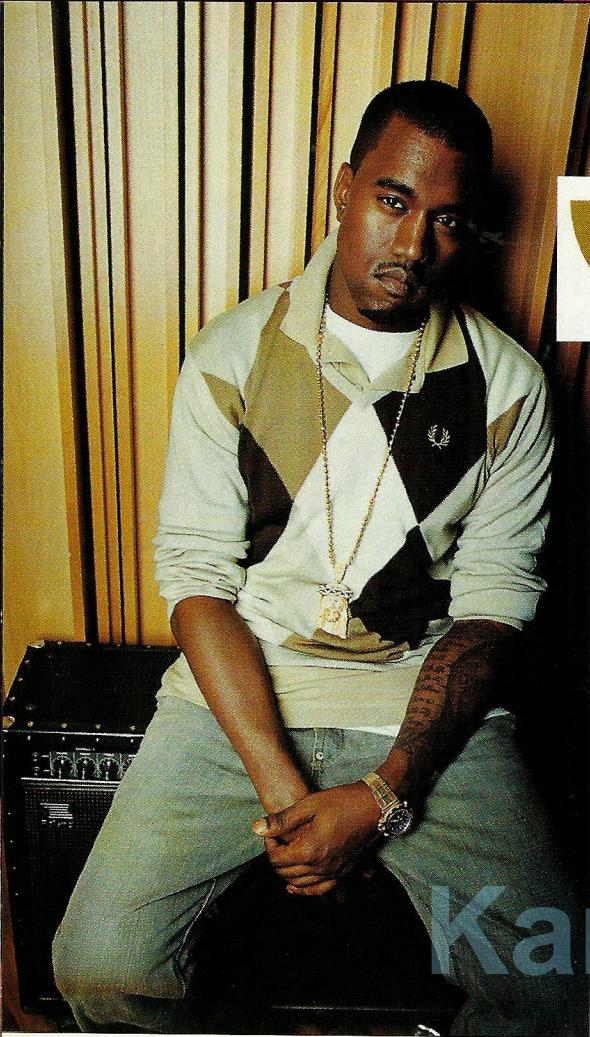
stop at the grocery store and the pay phones didn't work." So when we wrote the story Alicia tells, I was like make it *real exact*. That was good because at least I could get something out of what tormented me for years. That fucking talking on the record, you can't muffle that shit because it don't sound right! [laughs]

Old rap magazines used to have advertisements for a machine that removed vocals, I was always dubious. I don't remember the ads, but I remember that there was supposed to be that machine. Do you know how many people came to me because they thought I had that equipment? Because I was the only one who produced on the block and everybody had a singing group and that. They'd bring me a Shai record or something and be like, "Yo, why don't you use your equipment to take them words out? Don't your equipment do that?" I remember I'd say, "I can do that Shai beat," I used to be so arrogant I would say that I could do shit that I had completely no idea how to. Do you know how much harder it was to make an R&B beat than it was to do a rap beat?

The playing field has leveled a bit these days. Yeah, because now I know people that can actually play. I can't play instruments worth shit. I can play the bass lines just to get by, but that's as far as it goes. I used to try and play the R&B chords and do those Teddy Riley drums. Them drums are hard as hell [to program]. Full Force

the whole rule—that you're not supposed to use breakbeats. [sings] *I like the way you make beats, he doesn't use breakbeats.* Nigga, I'll use a breakbeat, I'll sample a snare right off someone's album now. You know? I don't give a fuck. [laughs]

I got you. There's a lot of rules that people had. I used to be mad when someone made a song from a sample I heard before. But Dug was the one that really took me under his wing early. It was later that Dion [No ID] became my manager, when I was 19 years old and wanted to shop my demo. But Dug was the person. A lot of people forget about Dug Infinite, you know. He showed me a lot of shit. I used to speak without any thought to the consequences of what I was saying. I was always like that, ever since I was little. People now are thinking, "Yo, he's changed," but I've changed for the better actually. [laughs] I was like that little prodigy, that little 15-year-old producer and shit.



Kanye

and Teddy Riley are some of my biggest inspirations. MC Hammer, EPMD, Kid 'N Play, they really got me into this shit. I used to *love* MC Hammer. I was a little kid, what the fuck do you expect?

You weren't the only one buying some Hammer at the time. I guess that's where my niche is, because I have all these principles. Just like people pay their dues in the street, I paid my dues in the beats. I have all of these hip-hop principles and all of these gods of hip-hop were like my mentors. The type of people that wouldn't *let you* get drums and shit. I went through all that and then I kind of rebelled. I used everything that they did, then I broke all these rules and started sampling off [other producer's] albums. If Pete Rock opens the drums, let me grab those drums too. I was a madman. Stealing people's records. I used to steal No ID's drum records from his crib and shit. [laughs] He'd change his number on me.

But at least you weren't racking his disks. Aww, let me tell you a funny story. I had to work with D12, right? And I think Eminem is a dope-ass producer, so I wanted to ask him to trade drums but I was intimidated because he's such a

I HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO RECORD MY ALBUM BECAUSE NOBODY BELIEVED IN ME.

superstar and everything. And [whispers] *I saw it right there*. What's so crazy is that Kon Artis [aka Denau Porter] would have gave me some drums, but Eminem's drums were badder to me. Eminem has some of the best drums in hip-hop. [whispering] The disks were right there, the MP disks, but there was cameras. So I said, look, I know I'm on camera but *fuck it*. I'm just gonna try and get as many sounds copied as I can before they come in. So I started copying them and I thought I had something, but next thing I know an engineer comes in and straight grabs the disk and leaves. [laughs] The shit was up in the MP because Em was working. I started seeing how he do, doing shit I wouldn't do because I still had certain rules. If somebody's a new producer they'll do shit like speed the snare up +8, and that's shit I wouldn't do because I'm like, "I am sampling *this* snare." I was seeing how he truncated sounds, like chopping the air *completely*. It gives it a certain sound, the sound he wanted. So I learned a lot by going through Eminem's drum set. Hopefully he'll take it as a compliment.

He should. I really like Eminem's beats though. He is one of my top-five producers, let alone one of my top-five rappers. Me and Em, together? *Damn*. Not that I put myself on that level, being that I have only one album and I don't know if I can think of the rhymes I thought of this time next time, but if I don't think up some good shit I'm not coming out with another album. [laughs] I have to talk shit! If I can't put out something good enough to talk shit, I'm not doing it. But me and Em together, we're like Prince and Stevie, you know. We're the type of people that can help other people out, but can also just go into the studio completely by themselves and make mas-

sive shit. I'm more known for the beats and he's more known for his raps, but [the production on] "I'm Sorry Mama" and "Lose Yourself" is dope.

You got a little game on the mic. Where I lack on voice, pattern, breath control, or whatever, I make up for with lyrics. Line for line, my raps were generated from the aspect of spoken word. That's the reason I made "Get Em High," what I say on there, because I figured if I could get my raps anywhere near my beats I could kill the game. Some folks that don't like my raps probably don't understand spoken word. Watching Def Poetry Jam, they'll say shit and I'll be like, "Oh, *that's* what I want to say." These motherfuckers get a rise out of people with *no* beat.

We're talking about potency here. On my next album I'm gonna try and incorporate more spoken word. If I could have the pattern *and* the potency, I'm in. On the Brandy record ["Talk About Our Love"], that was a real patternized rap, and I feel like I'm getting better. Same with the Slum Village beat ["Selfish"]. Jay Dee is a drum god. His drums can only be paralleled, they can't ever be topped.

I heard whispers that Jay Dee makes on-site recordings of people clapping and freaks those into his drum programs. That's that extra dope work. I remember when DJ Premier had lied to everyone and said that the Shelley Manne sample ("Infinity" used on Jeru the Damaja's "Come Clean") was actually waterdrops that he recorded. That rumor sent chills through the hip-hop community, 'cause *when that beat came out?* The way he did those drums, he chopped those when everyone used to just loop them because they were so ill.

A little trivia, what were those drums? I'm terrible with drum names. I don't even know the name of those drums in "Jesus Walks." 88 Keys gave me the record. I just told him I wanted the drums to



JUST LIKE PEOPLE PAY THEIR DUES IN THE STREET, I PAID MY DUES IN THE BEATS.

[Brand Nubian's] "Punks Jump up to Get Beat Down," because I wanted that march feel. That drum roll was important. Jay Dee gave me some drums and I used them on this other Common record and this joint sounds like N.W.A. Shit is so crazy. Jay Dee handed me drums—he didn't know how many times I jacked drums off his beat CDs! [laughs] Which is totally like against hip-hop rules or whatever, but you know....

Is there anyone out there that you really want to work with? Not particularly. There are people who I'm really a fan of, and I just want to network with them. If I listen to the Brandy record, I'm hearing things that I feel the engineer should have turned louder. I'm too critical, I'm a nitpicker to a fault. It might add to my greatness, but it also takes away from things in my life. The way I deal with people and shit. I did two videos for "Jesus Walks" and did you know I'm coming out with a remastered version of my album?

You didn't alter any of the music, you just mixed it differently? Just a new mix. The album mix was rushed, they only gave me so much time. I had all the time in the world to record my album because nobody believed in me, but when they finally believed in me they were like, "Let's go." I didn't have the opportunity to be there for the mastering because I

had to do promo, the mastering was fucked up so we had to go back, and go back, and go back. Trying to make the release date was so much pressure. For the pressure we had, it came out decent. "Workout Plan" has this kick, and you don't know what we went through to get that kick like that, and that's not the kick you hear on the album. So I had to come out with a remastered album because I'm a perfectionist. My instrumentals will be a double CD, you'll notice the instrumentals aren't on wax. You heard that bootleg shit where they re-did my samples and my beats?

Doesn't sound like something I'd fool with. Yeah, they said, "These are the *College Dropout* beats." I haven't put out the instrumentals and I knew people would fiend for the shit. I also want to put out a "stringstrumental" album where's there's all of the music and the hooks, but none of the drums. This way you can hear the plucking on the strings and the bass lines, all that shit. Some of those songs have hundreds of tracks on them. "Spaceships" was impossible to program! I think it was in 6/8, but I'm not a drummer. I'm used to putting the shit in 4/4,

put it in triplets, and put it at a slower speed. So I credit the dude that redid that on the bootleg shit.

What is it about Lenny Williams? You know what that is, that Lenny Williams? That's one of those beats where nobody can fuck with the sample ever again. You can never touch the "Reminisce" horns, you could never do the "Come Clean" shit. I think I shut down pretty much all Lenny Williams samples. I had to learn to take shit out of my tracks, in order to give room to rappers like Twista. Did you peep that "Slow Jamz" was a muffled sample? And "Overnight Celebrity" was a filter too.

Have you ever gotten feedback from an artist you've sampled? Chaka [Khan] seems to like it. A lot of older people that hate when people sample, they'll be like, "I kinda like this one though." I had made a decision to stop doing sped-up samples because I thought other producers were playing that style out. So I did "Through the Wire" on some novelty shit, with me rapping through the wire and whatever, and I made a beat right quick. Okay, this makes sense, let's put these *two* together. It wasn't well thought out.

What was most of *College Dropout* created on? On an ASR-10. All of the samples and some of the drums. "H to the Izzo" ("Izzo (H.O.V.A.)"), I would have never sampled something that popular ("I Want You Back" by the Jackson 5), at that time my mentality was *so Primo*. Still underground, still by the rules. The only reason I sampled the Jackson 5 is because Mike Love (WGCI Chicago DJ) wanted an intro to his show. So I said, "This sounds like some shit that would be a radio intro," because I didn't make radio songs and I may never change. The drums on that Jay-Z are my *most* used pattern. I even started to get tired of it and use other shit. [laughs] I struggle with the fame and all of the pressure. People putting more pressure on me doesn't allow me to just do music.

You still enjoy making music though, right? As long as it's my decision. One reason I hated the reviews on my album was that people didn't see that I was a producer who was making over 100 beats for people, and I made an album with 16 beats on it that didn't sound like each other, but didn't sound like anything I made for anyone else either. That means I gave 16 new plateaus for the biters. *