

= Ready to Die =

Ready to Die is the debut studio album by American rapper The Notorious B.I.G. ; it was released on September 13 , 1994 , by Bad Boy Records . The label 's first release , the album features production by Bad Boy founder Sean " Puffy " Combs , Easy Mo Bee , Chucky Thompson , DJ Premier and Lord Finesse , among others . Recording for the album took place during 1993 to 1994 at The Hit Factory and D & D Studios in New York City . The partly autobiographical album tells the story of B.I.G. ' s experiences as a young criminal . Ready to Die is his only studio album released during his lifetime , as he was murdered just days prior to the release of his second album , Life After Death (1997) .

Ready to Die was released to critical acclaim and became a commercial success , achieving gold certification . In 1995 , after the release , the album became a certified double platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) , and the album has reached a certified quadruple platinum with sales . It was significant for revitalizing the East Coast hip hop scene , amid West Coast hip hop 's commercial dominance . The album 's second single , " Big Poppa " , was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Rap Solo Performance at the 1996 Grammy Awards . Ready to Die has been regarded by many music critics as one of the greatest hip @-@ hop albums of all time . In 2003 , it was ranked number 133 on Rolling Stone magazine 's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time , making it the third highest hip hop album on the list after It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back and Raising Hell . In 2006 , Time included it on their list of the 100 greatest albums of all time .

= = Background and recording = =

The album was recorded in New York City (mainly in The Hit Factory recording studio) in two stages between 1993 and 1994 . In 1994 , Biggie was only 21 going through 22 @-@ years old , when he recorded the album . In 1993 , Biggie was signed to the Uptown Records label by A & R Sean " Puffy " Combs . Biggie started recording his debut album in New York , after making a numerous guest appearances on among his label @-@ mates ' singles during the previous year . The first tracks recorded include the album 's darker , less radio @-@ friendly content (including " Ready to Die , " " Gimme the Loot " and " Things Done Changed ") . In these sessions , XXL magazine describe an " inexperienced , higher @-@ pitched " Biggie sounding " hungry and paranoid " .

When executive producer Sean " Puffy " Combs was fired from Uptown , Biggie 's career hung in limbo , as the album was only partially completed . After a brief period dealing drugs in North Carolina , Biggie returned to the studio the following year on Combs ' new Bad Boy Records label possessing " a smoother , more confident vocal tone " and completed the album . In this stage , the more commercial @-@ sounding tracks of the album were recorded , including the album 's singles . Between the two stages , XXL writes that Biggie moved from writing his lyrics in notebooks to freestyling them from memory .

The album was released with a cover depicting an infant resembling the artist , though sporting an afro , which pertains to the album 's concept of the artist 's life from birth to his death . It has been listed as among the best album covers in hip hop .

= = = Lawsuits and sample removal = = =

On March 24 , 2006 , Bridgeport Music and Westbound Records won a federal lawsuit against Bad Boy Records for copyright infringement , with a jury deciding that Combs and Bad Boy had illegally used samples for the production of the songs " Ready to Die " , " Machine Gun Funk " , and " Gimme the Loot " . The jury awarded \$ 4 @. @ 2 million in punitive and direct damages to the two plaintiffs , and federal judge Todd Campbell enacted an immediate sales ban on the album and tracks in question . On appeal , the Sixth Circuit found the damages unconstitutionally high and in violation of due process and remanded the case , at which point Campbell reduced them by \$ 2

@.@ 8 million ; however , the verdict was upheld . All versions of the album released since the lawsuit are without the disputed samples .

Although a fair use issue , Combs and Bad Boy never raised the legal concept of the fair use doctrine in their defense . This decision was questioned by some legal experts : Anthony Falzone of the Fair Use Project at Stanford Law School criticized Combs and Bad Boy for not defending the legality of sampling and suggested that they might have refused to raise such a defense because they feared it could later imperil their control over their own music .

On April 2 , 2014 , Lee Hutson of The Impressions filed a multimillion @-@ dollar copyright infringement suit against Combs , Bad Boy Records , and the estate of the late Notorious B.I.G. for copyright infringement , alleging that his song " Can 't Say Enough About Mom " was illegally sampled in the production of the song " The What " . The estate countersued in turn , claiming the sample as used was short , adapted , and supplemented , and thus subject to fair use , a legal tactic not pursued previously .

= = Composition = =

= = = Production = = =

The production on the album was mainly handled by Easy Mo Bee and The Hitmen . Cheo H. Coker of Rolling Stone depicted the beats as " heavy bottomed and slick , but B.I.G. ' s rhymes are the showstoppers . The tracks only enhance them , whether it 's the live bass driving a menacing undercurrent or [the] use of bluesy guitar and wah @-@ wah feedback " and that the production is used to " push the rapper to new heights . " The production is mainly sample @-@ based with the samples varying from the percussion of funk tracks to the vocals of hip hop songs . Steve Huey presented some criticism over the beats , stating that the " deliberate beats do get a little samey , but it hardly matters : this is Biggie 's show " .

= = = Lyrical themes = = =

The Notorious B.I.G. ' s lyrics on the album were generally praised by critics . Many critics applauded his story @-@ telling ability such as Allmusic writer Steve Huey , who stated " His raps are easy to understand , but his skills are hardly lacking ? he has a loose , easy flow and a talent for piling multiple rhymes on top of one another in quick succession " . He also went on to mention that his lyrics are " firmly rooted in reality , but play like [a] scene from a movie " . Touré , writing for The New York Times , referred to The Notorious B.I.G. , proclaiming that he stood out from other rappers because " his lyrics mix autobiographical details about crime and violence with emotional honesty , telling how he felt while making a living as a drug dealer " . The album is also noted for its dark tone and sinister sense of depression . In the original Rolling Stone review , Cheo H Coker declared that he " maintains a consistent level of tension by juxtaposing emotional highs and lows " . " Things Done Changed " was also one of the few hip hop songs in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature .

The lyrics on Ready to Die tend to deal with violence , drug dealing , women , alcohol and marijuana use , and other elements of Notorious B.I.G. ' s environment . He rapped about these topics in " clear , sparse terms , allowing the lyrics to hit the first time you hear them " . The album contains a loose concept starting out with an intro that details his birth , his early childhood , his adolescence and his life at the point of the album 's release . Songs on the album range from homicide narratives (" Warning ") to braggadocios battle raps (" The What , " " Unbelievable ") . The final song was " Suicidal Thoughts " , a song where The Notorious B.I.G. contemplates and finally commits suicide .

= = Singles = =

Three singles were released from the album : " Juicy " , " Big Poppa " , " One More Chance " and a promotional track of Biggie : " Warning " . According to XXL the more commercial sound of the singles compared to the rest of the album was a result of encouragement by Combs during the later recording sessions in which they were recorded .

" Juicy " was released as the lead single on August 8 , 1994 . It peaked at number 27 on the Billboard Hot 100 , number 14 on Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Singles & Tracks and reached number 3 on the Hot Rap Singles . It shipped 500 @, @ 000 copies in the United States and the RIAA certified it Gold on November 8 , 1994 . Produced by Combs , it features a prominent sample of " Juicy Fruit " as performed by James Mtume . Allmusic 's Steve Huey stated that , along with the other singles , it was an " upbeat , commercial moment " , calling it a " rags @-@ to @-@ riches chronicle " . Andrew Kameka , of HipHopDX.com , stated that the song was one of his " greatest and most @-@ revealing songs " and went on to say it was a " Part @-@ autobiography , part @-@ declaration @-@ of @-@ success . It document [s] the star 's transition from Brooklyn knucklehead to magazine cover story . " Producer Pete Rock , who was commissioned to remix the track , alleged that Puffy stole the idea for the original song 's beat after hearing it from him during a visit . Rock explained this in an interview with Wax Poetics :

I did the original version , didn 't get credit for it . They came to my house , heard the beat going on the drum machine , it 's the same story . You come downstairs at my crib , you hear music . He heard that shit and the next thing you know it comes out . They had me do a remix , but I tell people , and I will fight it to the end , that I did the original version of that . I 'm not mad at anybody , I just want the correct credit .

" Big Poppa " was released as the second single on February 20 , 1995 and like the previous single , it was a hit on multiple charts . It reached number six on the Billboard Hot 100 , number four on the Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Singles & Tracks and number one on Hot Rap Singles . It sold over a million units and the RIAA certified it Platinum on May 23 , 1995 . Featuring production by Combs and Chucky Thompson of The Hitmen , it samples " Between the Sheets " by The Isley Brothers . The song was nominated at the 1996 Grammy Awards for Best Rap Solo Performance , but lost to Coolio 's " Gangsta 's Paradise " . Steve Huey named it an " overweight @-@ lover anthem " .

" One More Chance " was released as the third single on June 9 , 1995 . The single was a remix of the album track . It was produced by Combs and featured a sample from DeBarge 's " Stay With Me " . It peaked at number two on the Billboard Hot 100 and reached number one on the Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Singles & Tracks and Hot Rap Singles . It sold over a million copies and the RIAA certified it Platinum on July 31 , 1995 . Steve Huey labeled it a " graphic sex rap " . Rolling Stone writer Cheo H. Coker had a similar view of the song , noting that it was " one of the bawdiest sex raps since Kool G Rap 's classic , " Talk Like Sex " and continued , stating it " proves hilarious simply because of B.I.G. ' s Dolemitelike vulgarity . "

= = Commercial success = =

The album shipped 57 @, @ 000 units in its first week of release . However , it was then certified gold by the RIAA only two months after its release on November 16 , 1994 , and was certified double platinum on October 16 , 1995 , only a year and one month after its release . Ready to Die was then certified triple platinum on August 26 , 1998 and was later certified 4x platinum by the RIAA on October 19 , 1999

= = Critical reception = =

Ready to Die received critical acclaim from music critics . In his review for Rolling Stone , Cheo H. Coker stated " Ready to Die is the strongest solo rap debut since Ice Cube 's Amerikkka 's Most Wanted . From the breathtakingly visual moments of his birth to his Cobainesque end in " Suicidal Thoughts , " B.I.G. proves a captivating listen . It 's difficult to get him out of your head once you sample what he has to offer " . Robert Christgau from The Village Voice commented " His sex raps are erotic , his jokes are funny , and his music makes the thug life sound scary rather than

luxuriously laid back . When he considers suicide , I not only take him at his word , I actively hope he finds another way " . The New York Times wrote " Though drug dealing carries tremendous heroic value with some young urban dwellers , he sacrifices the figure 's romantic potential . His raps acknowledge both the excitement of drug dealing and the stress caused by the threat from other dealers , robbers , the police and parents , sometimes one 's own . In presenting the downside of that life , Ready to Die offers perhaps the most balanced and honest portrait of the dealer 's life of any in hip @-@ hop " .

Q magazine gave Ready to Die three out of five stars , and stated " the natural rapping , clever use of sound effects and acted dialogue , and concept element (from a baby being born at the start to the fading heartbeat at the end) set this well apart from the average gangsta bragging " . In their original review for Ready to Die , The Source gave it four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half out of five ' mics ' , stating " Big weaves tales like a cinematographer , each song is like another scene in his lifestyle . Overall , this package is complete : ridiculous beats , harmonizing honeys , ill sound effects , criminal scenarios , and familiar hooks " . In 1996 , acclaimed singer @-@ songwriter Randy Newman enthused " It 's one of the best records ever made . It 's a strange album in that the first cut says , ' Oh , back in the old days was everybody was shootin ' everybody ? ' and ' Let 's stop killing each other ' , and then the rest of the record is all about people killing each other . It 's the damndest thing ; I don 't know what the hell he had in mind ? It 's like when Public Enemy would put out a record and it was noticeably classier than all the other rap stuff at the time . "

= = = Retrospect = = =

In retrospect , Ready to Die has been highly acclaimed . In 1998 , The Source included it on their 100 Best Rap Albums of All Time list , and in 2002 , they re @-@ rated it to the maximum five ' mics ' . Rolling Stone has also given acclaim to Ready to Die over the years . In 2003 , they ranked it number 133 on their 500 Greatest Albums of All Time list , and one year later , they re @-@ rated it to five stars . In 2011 , Rolling Stone also placed it at number eight on their 100 Best Albums of the Nineties list , and described it as " mapping out the sound of ' '90 's cool " . Kilian Murphy from Stylus Magazine wrote favorably of the album in a retrospective review , and concluded " Sweet , hypocritical , sensitive , violent , depressed and jubilant ; these words could all fittingly describe Big at various points on Ready to Die . "

Steve Huey from AllMusic gave it five stars , stating " The album that reinvented East Coast rap for the gangsta age , Ready to Die made the Notorious B.I.G. a star . Today it 's recognized as one of the greatest hardcore rap albums ever recorded , and that 's mostly due to Biggie 's skill as a storyteller " . In 2006 , Time magazine included it on their 100 Greatest Albums of All Time list , and stated " On Ready to Die , Wallace took his street corner experiences and filtered them through his considerable charm . The result was a record that mixed long stretches of menace with romance and lots of humor . No rapper ever made multi @-@ syllabic rhymes sound as smooth " . The album was also included in the book 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die .

= = = Accolades = = =

The information regarding accolades is adapted from Acclaimedmusic.net , except for lists that are sourced otherwise .

(*) signifies unordered lists

= = Track listing = =

= = = Samples = = =

= = Personnel = =

= = Charts = =