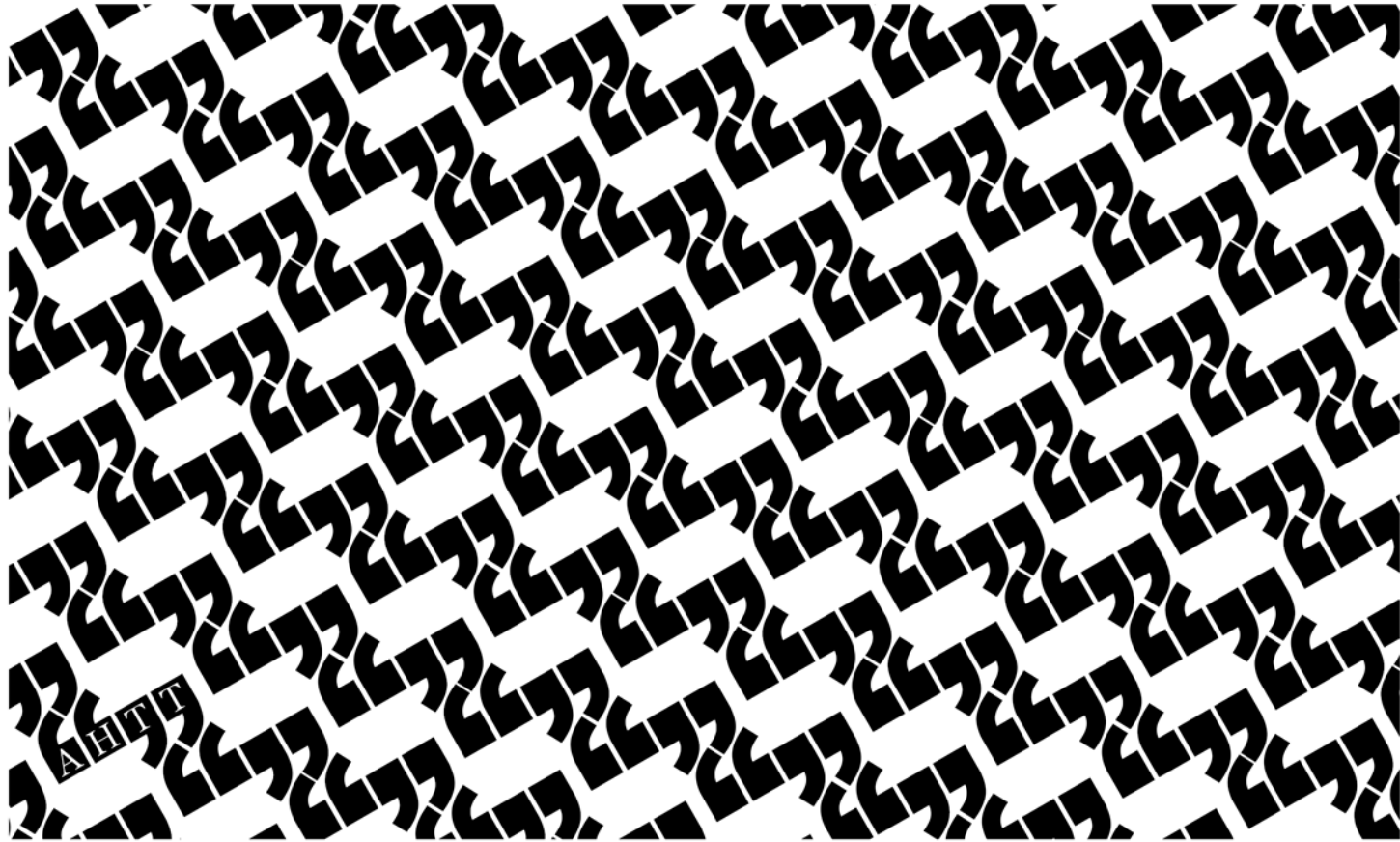
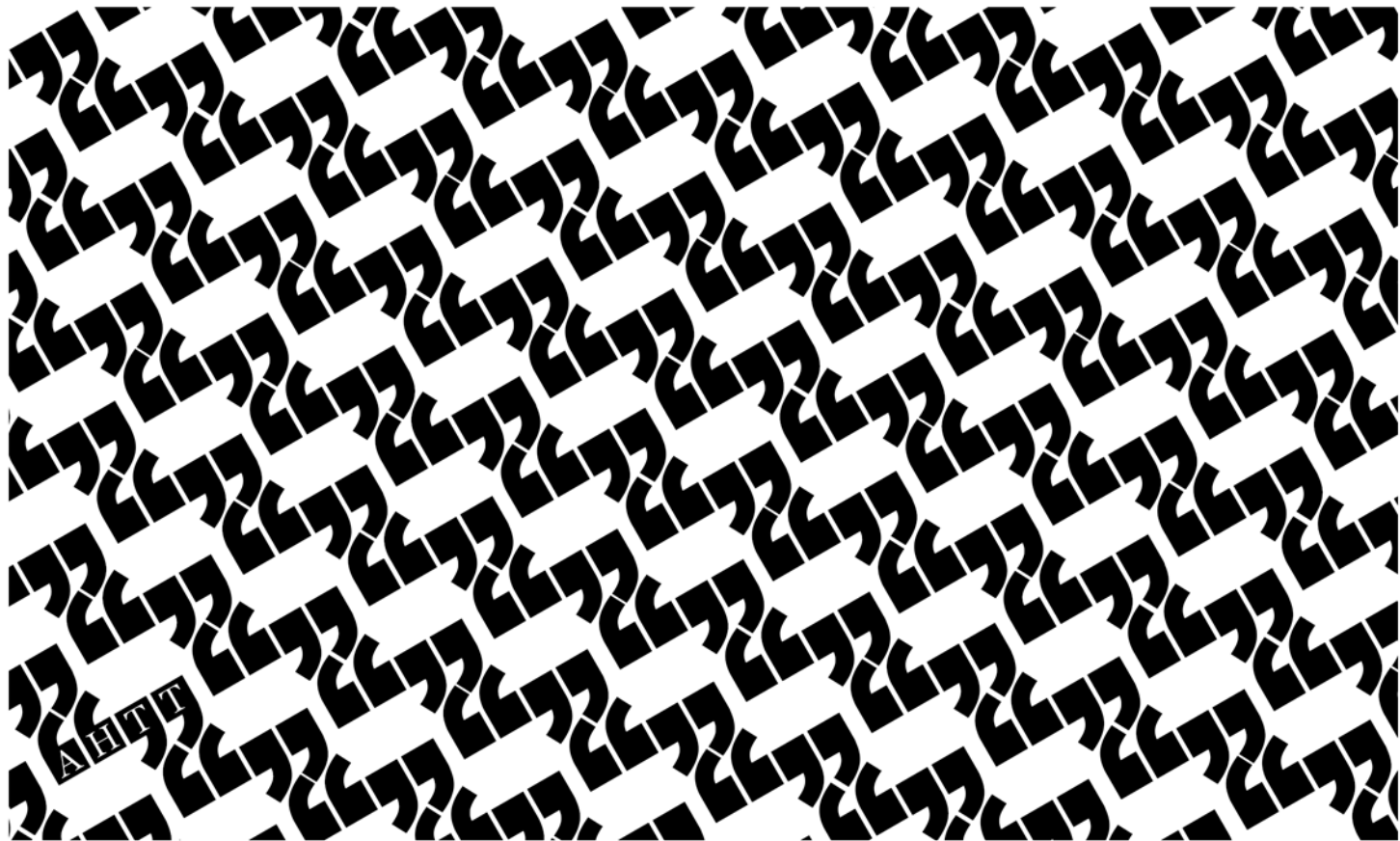


AIN'T HARD TO TELL stolen interviews

Volume.one



ART



AIN'T HARD TO TELL

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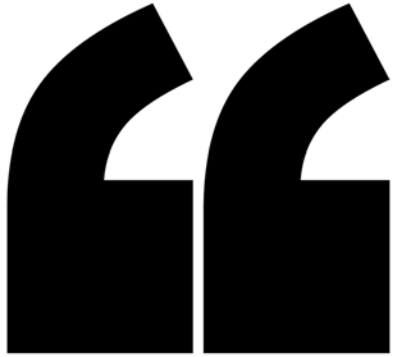


Rap music is a collage. Before 'found elements' came into fashion amongst art school students and facile postmodern critics, there have been musicians in America and other places in the African diaspora that have been incorporating previously recorded materials into the things they play. Even before that, the jazz standard set the parameters for players to interpret musical themes. They used old structures to build new ideas. Rap music now owes as much to this spirit as it does to the narratives encapsulated in the blues. It is an evolving system of organization using old elements to get across current ideas.

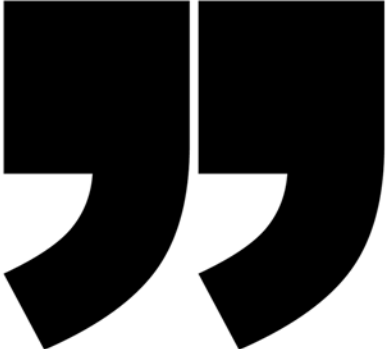
The mixtape is a higher order organization of these collages, and works like an anthology of both the rap songs it contains and the original elements the song was made of, all blended together in a seamless mix. In a sense, that's what we're doing here, blending these interviews into one digestible volume for you to take in and make sense of. We've given you not the works of these artists, but accounts of the artists lives and pastimes.

Art always comes from trouble, and trouble always comes from life. Maybe you do, or don't know these things well. But in here, it ain't hard to tell.-AHTT

Cappadonna is a member of the Wu-Tang Clan who never rose to marquis status, and to this day has no solo hit to speak of, despite having been featured on very high profile releases and delivering verses that are considered classic by many. The interview that follows is a cautionary tale: quality music, connections, a classic (platinum) album sometimes aren't enough to keep you from having to drive a cab.-AHTT



Cappadonna





of heads. I have 4th Disciple on there for the 'Blood Brothers' track. I have Cologero and a few other heads. Qazi. I was searching for that local talent. I wanted the poor people, the struggling people. Not the \$80,000 a beat people.

Is that why Rza is not on the new album 'The Struggle'?

C: Rza is not on there because he ain't want to be on there.

What is the meaning behind the title?

C: Self-explanatory. Anything that requires you busting your *ss in trying to get to the next level acquires a struggle. If you are looking for a victory, you have to work hard and struggle

to get that.

Do you have a favorite song on 'The Struggle'?

C: I like 'Momma'. That's one of the phattest tracks.

You are now on Code Red Entertainment, a label run by Remedy. How and why did this happen?

C: Code Red Entertainment? That's an independent label. I was finishing up another album on another label. I was going through whatever I was going through with those people over there and I decided to write about my struggle and all the things that I was going through to put this next album out.

What goes on?

Cappadonna: I'm chilling right now.

Your new album is called 'The Struggle'. Tell us about it. Who is on it? Who is doing the production?

C: I'm on it. As far as production is concerned, I got a couple

Your last album ‘The Yin And The Yang’ was extremely short and many of songs like ‘The Odd Couple’ weren’t on it.

How did this happen? Were you satisfied with the album?

C: If I do not have total control over the whole project, I think there will always be things missing. Word. I had to get what I needed to get. That was just part of my struggle right there.

What happened to your previous deal with Sony?

C: In the previous deal with Sony, they weren’t giving me the love and respect that I needed. I had to go. They had ‘The Yin & The Yang’ but it was not promoted to the best of their abilities. So, it did not get that airplay that

it needed to succeed. Basically, everybody was dropped from that label at that time.

Were there any contract problems or disputes with Sony?

C: Nah, not necessarily. I wanted to be independent anyway.

For people who do not know, how did you get involved with Wu-Tang Clan?

C: Well, that started years ago. That was one of my first projects, you know? We all grew up together so it was easy for us to start to get into music like that. We all from the same hood like Brooklyn and Staten Island. We were rhyming and decided to make it into a business. That’s when we felt that we could do

something bigger with these raps and make something happen. That’s what we did. When ‘Protect Ya Neck’ came out, I wasn’t around at that time. I didn’t come out until the ‘Only Built For Cuban Linx’ album. When ‘Only Built For Cuban Linx’ dropped, we dropped a single off there called ‘Ice Cream’ so that right there put me right on the top of things. We polly-ed that sh*t and the sh*t went platinum. That’s when I dropped ‘The Pillage’ album. That went gold in like 3 weeks. I just kept working from there and got a couple of soundtracks and everything. I was just doing me.

There are many rumors going around about tensions be-

tween you and Wu-Tang Clan? What is going on? Are there any tensions? Are there any Wu members that you just don't get along with?

C: The only tension that was created was that I felt like n*ggas owed me some royalty checks. Everything I was on went platinum basically with the exception of my solo projects. 'The Pillage' went gold, like 700,000.

Did Wu-Tang screw you out of publishing?

C: Yeah, yeah but not necessarily the publishing but the royalties. Actually, the publishing too! They still owe me. All together, they probably owe me around \$300,000.

If Wu-Tang Clan made another group album, would you be on it?

C: I don't know. Right now, I'm not doing anything unless my money is being paid upfront. I have to get paid up front or I can't do it. I cannot be waiting for the mystery God to come after the album is already shipped out and sold however many copies. Then, I'm still waiting years to get my little crumbs. I can't play that role right now. Life is different. I have my triplets and my wifey. I have to take care of my kids. I can't be the one acting like I'm going to be stuck in the back. I have to play front and center now. I have my album out now.

How did you get your name Cappadonna? What is the meaning behind it?

C: My brother gave me that name. There's a meaning behind that. I'm a don. I'm a captain of the dons. It stands for the head of the household. It's a mafia name. It's Italian. It's something like that.

I always thought your verse stole the song on 'Daytona 500'. That final verse was mind-blowing.

C: I did my best to provide that spot that they needed to keep their songs on their album. Sometimes, I don't know either. I really don't know my quality of rap sometimes. A lot of times, I leave it to the crowd to decide

but I know that they are so young and inexperienced with creativity. Anybody can kick a rhyme but when you come with a whole new and different style, it's almost like it has to be trendy in order to reach the masses. It has to be a trendy kind of style. If everyone is not really feeling it, then it ain't gonna pop. It ain't gonna happen. No matter what. You can rhyme all day. You can be the illest n*gga but you may not be that kind of person. The bully of the class has to like you. If the bully of the class likes you, then the whole class will like you. If everyone is looking at the bully and he ain't smiling, ain't nobody else will smile. They're scared to take those kind of chances. I know my album is hot.

I brought it back to the streets. I'm from the streets. I talk about the struggle because that is what I know. I don't think that there is another possible different way for me to go on. I know the contents is kind of harsh but hey, so is the struggle. Nothing in life comes easy. I don't care what it is.

Your old label put out a 'Greatest Hits' album of your work.

Did you have any say in that?

C: My 'Greatest Hits' album is one that Sony put out without even confronting or talking to me. They just put it out like 'F*ck Cappa!' You know what I mean? I don't know what they wanted to do. It's disgusting, man. It's disgusting.

Out of all of your albums, which one is your favorite?

C: I guess 'The Pillage' is my favorite album. I like 'The Pillage' album.

As an emcee, who were your biggest influences?

C: I get a lot of influence from just music, period. I like to hear a little of everything. I like to listen to a lot of music. Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye. Those people make me write because they are saying the same things I be saying. I put it out but I put it out in a rap form and they put it out in a singing form. I try to keep involved. Maybe I'm not too good of a beat picker. I'm always going for that gritty, gritty.

You were a major part of the 2nd Wu album 'Wu-Tang Forever' that went double platinum. Can you tell us about this? Did the label swindle you out of money? Was the deal very bad? How did you go from having classic verses on songs like 'Ice Cream', 'Comey', 'Daytona 500', 'Triumph' to struggling for money?

C: It's all in the checks, man. It's all in the royalties and the publishing. Wherever that money goes to, that is where that money goes to. You don't really get to know. You don't really get to see. So, you can't really tell. If you ain't there, you are out of sight and out of mind. The label is not going to call you and say

'We sent a big check over there. Make sure you get yours.' Who is going to call you to tell you that you have money sitting over here when they can go ahead and flip that on crack or whatever?

You are getting more points on 'The Struggle' album though, right?

C: Yeah. It's business.

There were some news reports about you driving a cab and being broke. How long were you driving a cab? What was it like?

C: That was no rumor. How could it be a rumor when my big *ss face was right up on MTV sitting in the car? I do it right now until today. I got to eat. Ain't

no shame in my game. Gotta get money. I got to do what I have to do. I have to feed the kids. It's a f*cked up world that we're living in. Society is f*cking dealing with n*ggas with \$100,000 and forgetting about the people who are trying to come up in the struggle. It makes it hard to live. It's my car. I just drive my car as a cab. I drive that sh*t to pay my bills and do what I have to do.

On your new album, 'The Struggle', there are more songs about women and relationships. Was this a conscious choice or something that just happened?

C: It's a lot of trials and tribulations. Women play 50% part of a man's life. I know how sneaky

and deceitful they can be and I know how loving and caring they could be at the same time. That's another struggle. You get the good with the bad.

One of the hidden songs is about a woman cheating on you called 'Calling It Quits'. It deals with betrayal and a woman stabbing you in the back. Did this happen in real life? How did you deal with it?

C: Women do that. It happened to me a few times or whatever but it could have been the result of how I was coming. I was stabbing women in their back too. As a matter of fact, I was stabbing them in their sides all over their body. (Laughs). Ain't nobody perfect, man. God already said

that we all fall short of the glory.

Are you in a committed relationship now?

C: Yeah, I'm in a committed relationship because it's like I'm committed to being in it until I cannot be in it any more. That's the good and the bad.

There was also a rumor about an associate of yours being involved with the Witness Protection Program. Can you explain that?

C: That's what they say. That was Mike Caruso. I don't know. They tried to sh*t on my man and all of that. He's alright. He works for Ghostface now. Rza wanted me to let him go. Rza told me to fire him. I thought I was mak-

ing a good decision but now, I don't think it was a wise decision and sh*t. Now, he's working for Ghost.

On your album, you said you were in many different prisons. What was the charge the last time you got locked up?

C: Scounding. I escaped from work release. I refused to go back. I just f*cking left.

Do the problems with the law get in the way of your music career?

C: Nope. I try to stay away from the police and all that. I hate the police. That's a ghetto thing right there. If you lived in the ghetto, you would not like the police. I guess the suburbs are pretty cool

because I never saw them in the suburbs.

They are there in the suburbs. They are just different.

C: Point blank, they don't roll through the suburban areas like they do in the ghetto. They do their 8 hour shifts in the projects.

There are some suburbs in NJ that if you are a minority, the cops will pull you over instantly and all the time.

C: Well, you shouldn't be riding through their hood. The suburbs are where the police live. There are only 2 places you can live. The ghetto or the suburbs. The police don't live in the ghetto.

Many artists are more popular

overseas than in the United States. Would you ever consider moving to Europe or Japan?

C: One of my good markets was Canada. As a group, we sold well overseas. I don't mind doing the whole overseas thing but I want to embrace my home. I have to go where the love is. That's what my father always told me. Go where the love is. If you are getting no love where you are, then, be out. F*ck them. That's what I did, man.

What artist or group would you like to collaborate with in the future that you haven't worked with yet?

C: I'd work with just about anybody. Whoever, as long as I have the capabilities.

I always thought that you and Thirstin Howl III would make a great collaboration.

C: Thirstin Howl III? That's my good buddy right there. I spoke to him not too long ago.

What producer would you like to collaborate with in the future that you haven't worked with yet?

C: I like to work with the poor producers. The ones who aren't getting sh*t. Everyone is trying to buy all of these expensive beats and leaving the others in the street to die. I'd rather work with those guys. I'd like to stay with my mind on the grind. You hear about motherf*ckers that are struggling and trying to come

up. I'm always maintaining and I always will.

What was the last incident of racism you experienced?

C: Racism right now, I look at it as anybody who doesn't like me. I don't really classify it in a Black or White thing. I know Black people who treated me way worse than any white man or Chinese man in the world. Those who were the closest to me stabbed me in the back the hardest. That's not white, Black, Chinese, Hispanic, or whoever.

Where were you on the September 11th Terrorist Attack? How did you deal with it? How do you think it affected hip-hop?

C: I was in bed. When I saw it, I couldn't believe that it was really going down. That was one of the things that I said would happen before I left New York. Before I left Sony, that day, I was giving them my album 'The Yin & The Yang'. I was telling them that New York was coming down. I told them that New York would fall. I just felt it. I don't know if my energy was mad high at that time or whatever it was. I have always been kind of spiritual and conscious about life. It was a premonition that came to me that really happened. Inside the sleeve of 'The Yin & The Yang', you see a picture of the Twin Towers.

How has being a father affect-

ed your approach to music?

C: I would have thought that it would have toned things down for me, but it just made it more difficult. I really have a cause and a purpose for what I'm doing. I'm not just trying to do this sh*t just for the love. Sure, I do it for the love but I need to live. I need to do something that supports my children.

What is the story with the unreleased 'Love Is Love' album?

C: As soon as I can find Mad Lion's number, I'll get up with the kid. It's not out yet. I need to find Mad Lion and hook up with him. I need to go ahead and polly that album there. Right now, he is trying to cease and desist me on some legal sh*t for dropping 'The

Struggle' album because me and him had the 'Love Is Love' album that was supposed to come out. He was going through some kind of difficulties that were crazy. I couldn't really call it. It was supposed to be on Killah Pride Records. He wanted to get 'The Struggle' album off the shelves because he said that I was locked into his deal or his label or whatever. He said that I had to do 4 albums with him. He's an idiot. How can I be locked into doing 4 albums when he can't even release one of them? Get the f*ck out of here! Brothers need to let the artists be the artist and stop trying to change a n*gga into something he's not. N*ggas tried to do that sh*t with The Lox. Them n*ggas, The Lox, fought

till the end to get free. Now they are free and they are doing what the f*ck they wanna do. That's what I need to be doing, what the f*ck I wanna do. I can't let nobody pimp me. Nobody can pimp me because I am not pimbable. I only can do what I do. I put myself in the right place at the right time.

Word association time. I am going to say a name of an emcee or group and you say the first word that pops into your head. So, if I said 'Chuck D', you may say 'revolution'. If I said 'Flavor Flav', you may say 'clock' or 'crack'. Okay?
C: Mmmm.

Rza.

C: Innovative.

Eminem.

C: Magnificent.

Masta Killa.

C: On the rise.

Jay-Z.

C: Top choice.

Method Man.

C: Commercial.

50 Cent.

C: Gangsta.

Cormega.

C: Gangsta.

Common.

C: Educational.

Gil-Scott Heron.

C: Never heard of him.

George Bush.

C: The killer. The murderer.

What do you think hip-hop is lacking these days? What do you think hip-hop needs?

C: It needs more love.

What are some CDs or LPs that you have been listening to lately?

C: In the last couple of days, I have been listening to this mix-tape. Old-school for the gangsters. Classic joints and old school joints. Slow jams and sh*t like that from back in the day. 'Close The Door' and all that

sh*t. Teddy Pendergrass. I listen to a little Jahiem here and there and some R. Kelly and sh*t.

Some magazine articles described you as a loner. Even though you are like the 10th member of the Wu-Tang Clan, many articles portrayed you as a loner. Is this true? Why?

C: Yeah. I do my best work when I am by myself and nobody can really relate to me. I'm not with a lot of the bullsh*t that has been played out in my life. I'm not no video game, up all night, smoking weed, playing video games *ss n*gga. I'm not too intrigued about sports. I like sports and sh*t but they don't excite me. Stripping and strip clubs don't excite me. I'm not a

heavy drinker. To me, my idea of a good life is a cozy evening with a female. Maybe, we can check out a movie here and there and travel around. Nice food, talk to good people. Good conversation. Think about life. My favorite study is sociology. I try to deal socially. I'd love a big house because I would always have my family and friends come over and share that with me. 8 bedrooms, big living room, basement and my own studio. I want to do something positive and I want to come away from all of this subordinate music. I want healthy things but I think I can only do that when I'm living that healthy and positive productive life. I can't do that from the struggle. I have to come out of the struggle

and then do the beautiful and soulful music. That is really where I want to be at right now. I have to let them know that it is going to be a struggle to get to at that level. That's where I am at right now. I'm in the struggle but I am working my way out.

What is the biggest mistake you have made in your career?

C: Not having a career. (Laughs).

Interview by T. Jones