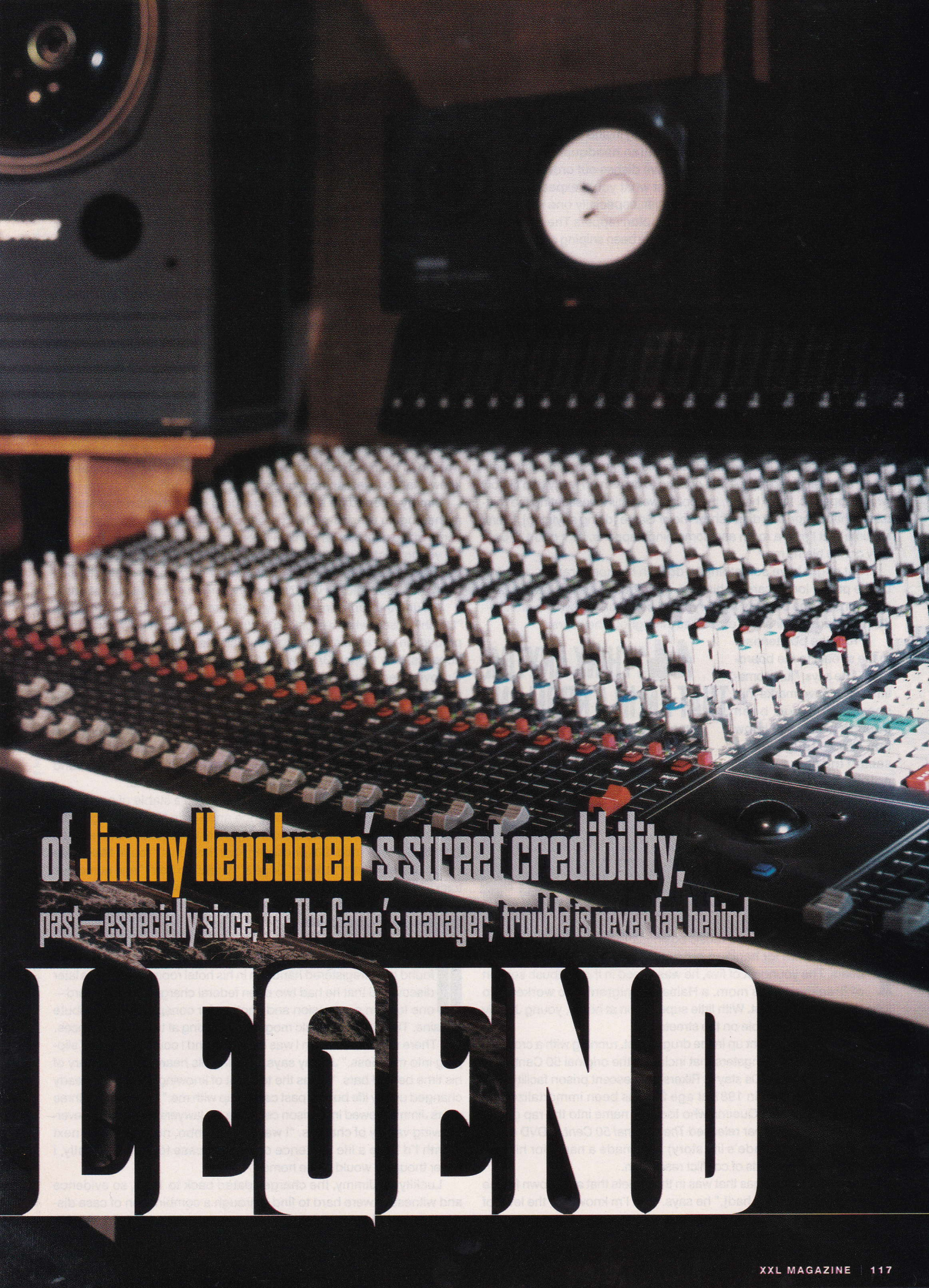


Rappers today would kill for an ounce
but the former gangsta turned record mogul doesn't glorify his

URBAN

Words ANSLEM SAMUEL // Images T. HOPKINS



of **Jimmy Henchmen**'s street credibility,
past—especially since, for The Game's manager, trouble is never far behind.

MEMO

Neatly clad in a charcoal sweater, black slacks and dress shoes, Czar Entertainment CEO Jimmy "Henchmen" Rosemond looks like your typical industry exec: busy. Darting in and out of his office at his company's Manhattan headquarters, the 36-year-old Brooklyn native dishes out orders and juggles phone calls—just what you'd expect of a successful artists' manager, especially one whose top two clients (fellow Compton rappers The Game and Guerilla Black) have lately been sniping at each other in the press.

"There was a little misunderstanding, but everything is cool now," says Jimmy, who also manages Mario Winans, Black Rob and Sharissa. "Game and Guerilla just came to the conclusion that, Hey, we got the same manager, so it doesn't make any sense to be warring."

What's more, current reports have Jimmy himself involved in an alleged assault on Maryland radio personality Xzulu. Apparently, during a January interview with The Game on WKYS, Xzulu commented that Jimmy's cell-phone earpiece looked like something out of a *Star Trek* episode. After the show, a group of men jumped the jock in the station lobby. According to widespread Internet accounts, both Game and Jimmy landed punches.

"I was there, and there was a little scuffle," Jimmy says in a gruff baritone. "But Game and myself had nothing to do with it. I really don't know what happened. Last I heard, the police were still investigating the matter and had a tape that didn't show me or Game [doing anything]. I think anytime that I'm in a room and something happens, be it good or bad, they gonna blame me."

That might have something to do with his appearance. Judging by the pair of long scars on his face—one traces his left jawline, and another swoops over his right eye and continues down his cheek—Jimmy's had his fair share of scuffles throughout the years.

"From the penitentiary to the streets to the boardroom," he says, "just sometimes you have marks that shows what you been through in life. You know that I had a rough life by seeing the scars. It ain't nothing but the ghettos that I've walked and the drama-filled life that I've had coming up."

Clearly, there's more to Jimmy Henchmen's story than conference calls and record contracts.

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Prior to breaking into the music business 14 years ago, Jimmy was better known for handing out beatdowns than for laying down beats. The youngest of five, he was raised in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn by his mom, a Haitian immigrant who worked two jobs to make ends meet. With little supervision at home, young Jimmy found his way into trouble on the streets.

In time, he got caught up in the drug racket, running with a crowd of notorious Brooklyn gangsters that included the original 50 Cent, who he met during a mid-'80s stay at Rikers' adolescent prison facility. The original 50, who died in 1987 at age 22, has been immortalized, of course, by a guy from Queens who took his name into the rap game. But Jimmy (who last year released *The Original 50 Cent*, a DVD documenting his old comrade's life story) also made a name for himself with his chosen methods of conflict resolution.

"You had some niggas that was in the streets that are known for the amount of money [they had]," he says. "But I'm known for the level of my violence. And for me to come from that amount of ignorance, it's more of a shock for the niggas that know me. When they see how cool

I am now, they be like, 'Nigga, you must be either making some paper or you done changed.'"

Actually, it's a little of both. Jimmy's transition from street legend to straight businessman began in the early '90s. As a local celebrity with lots of friends in various circles, he met David Hyatt, who was managing a then-unknown singer named R. Kelly and looking for a way to showcase his talent. Jimmy had a plan. Using *Yo! MTV Raps* host Fab 5 Freddy's birthday as a lure, he'd fly some 60 label execs and music journalists down to Miami over Labor Day weekend and throw a party. Hyatt's artists would perform.

"It was just such a successful weekend," Jimmy remembers. "And that was really the first exposure of Miami Beach to the industry. So, after that everybody was like, 'Yo, how do I get down with these niggas throwin' these dope-ass parties in Miami?'"

The positive response prompted Jimmy to make it an annual celebration. Two years later, he teamed up with Peter Thomas, a Brooklyn transplant who ran one of the few Black clubs in South Beach, and officially launched the How Can I Be Down? music conference in 1993. Over the years, it grew to become one of the biggest industry mixers, helping to make South Beach the hotspot for hip-hop heads.

"That's what really made me a player in the game," he says. "I was still knee deep in the streets at the time, but I realized at that point that I wanted to be in the industry. But in order for me to stay in this game, I knew I had to invest some money."

Jimmy opened up a recording studio in Manhattan and started managing an up-and-coming producer named Mark Sparks. Using some of the contacts he'd made through How Can I Be Down?, he got his young beatsmith in the studio with Salt 'N' Pepa. The trio ended up using one of Sparks' tracks for their smash hit "Shoop," which helped push their 1993 release *Very Necessary* to five-times-platinum status.

Around the same time, Jimmy met former Mantronix rapper Bryce "Luvah" Wilson, who was looking to start a duo wherein he would handle production and a female vocalist would sing lead. After auditioning a few hopefuls, they tapped Greenwich Village chanteuse Amel Larrieux, and Groove Theory was born. Under Jimmy's management, the group signed to Epic Records and rocketed to success in fall 1995, when their smooth R&B hit "Tell Me" reached the Top 10.

"That just really solidified me," Jimmy says. "After that, I went from just being a dude from the streets with a lot of money to being a real player. 'Cause at the end of the day, it don't matter what background you come from. You gotta know how to make good music."

And that's exactly what he did. He fostered a stable of producers (including Ron "Amen-Ra" Lawrence and Deric "D-Dot" Angelettie before they became mainstays of Puffy's Hitmen squad) that created a slew of hits in the mid-'90s, including Toni Braxton's "You're Makin' Me High," Grand Puba's "I Like It," Suga's "What's Up Star?" and numerous tracks for Mary J. Blige. It looked as if nothing could stop his success.

But as we learned earlier, there's more to Jimmy Henchmen's story than parties and pop charts.

During a trip to L.A. in early 1996, Jimmy was arrested after police found an unregistered handgun in his hotel room. Authorities later discovered that he had two open federal charges on his record—one for gun possession and another for conspiracy to distribute cocaine. The budding music mogul was looking at twin life sentences.

"There were times when I was in my cell and I could feel myself slipping into madness," Jimmy says, shaking his head at the memory of his time behind bars. "It was the torment of knowing that I had already changed up my life but my past caught up with me." Over the next three years Jimmy stewed in a prison cell while his lawyers fought off an ever-growing variety of charges. "I was just in limbo, not knowing if next month I'd have a life sentence or another case to fight. Honestly, I never thought I would come home."

Luckily for Jimmy, the charges dated back to 1991, so evidence and witnesses were hard to find. Through a combination of case dismissals and plea bargaining, Jimmy was released in fall 1999. He immediately began working with R. Kelly's new manager, Barry



Hankerson, who asked him to help executive produce the soundtracks to the DMX movies *Romeo Must Die* and *Exit Wounds*, which went platinum and gold respectively.

But it wasn't over. The DA had decided to prosecute for the gun found in the L.A. hotel room—a charge that had been ignored for more than two years. That led to eight months of legal arguments over whether Jimmy's stint in jail would count as time served. The wrangling

"Niggas gonna think I'm a rapper or something after this."

Despite his obvious discomfort, he gets into position for the shoot. As the photographer snaps away, publicist Sibrena Stowe takes a seat on a nearby sofa. "You know how long I been trying to get him to do this?" she begins. "Almost three years. You guys can talk about whatever, but *please*, no questions about Tupac."

That's easier said than done. Do a random Google search for "Jimmy

Henchmen" and a majority of the hits will include mention of Tupac Shakur. Jimmy and 'Pac met through How Can I Be Down? and became fast friends. But things changed after the night of November 30, 1994. While at Quad Recording Studios in Times Square, working on a record for his artist Little Shawn, Jimmy asked 'Pac to come by and drop a verse. Unfortunately, 'Pac never made it to the studio because he was robbed and shot in the downstairs lobby.

'Pac survived the shooting but went on to blame practically everyone at the studio that night for setting him up. (Puffy, B.I.G. and Junior M.A.F.I.A. were there, recording "Player's Anthem" on another floor). Still, Jimmy was shocked when he heard his name on *Makaveli's* "Against All Odds," where an agitated 'Pac spit: "...*And did I mention/Promised a payback, Jimmy Henchmen, in due time/I know you bitch niggas is listenin', the world is mine/Set me up, wet me up, niggas stuck me up/Heard the guns bust but you tricks never shut me up.*"

"At the time he mentioned my name I was in the penitentiary," Jimmy says during a wardrobe change. "But the way 'Pac mentioned my name, people that knew me, it took them aback. 'What is 'Pac saying? Did Jimmy have

something to do with [the shooting]?' It just stuck in people's minds. That's when the whole myth around Jimmy Henchmen started. So a lot of those things need to be cleared up, man. Me and 'Pac was friends all the way up to the day I went to jail."

No one but 'Pac will ever know the full meaning of those lyrics, but the mention has been heavily debated on many a street corner. Jimmy, who has always adamantly denied any involvement in the shooting, wants to close that chapter of his life.

"You run my name through the Internet—this shit keeps coming up like I'm the bad guy," Jimmy says before returning to the photo shoot. "There's a lot of misunderstandings. People thinking I had a problem with 'Pac, which I didn't. It was an honor to even know I knew the nigga. I'm not trying to bring up no more old wounds, 'cause people have they own concepts of what happened, and I don't wanna be in the mix of the bullshit. I'm really just trying to get away from those type of things."

And rightfully so. 'Cause there's more to Jimmy Henchmen's story than former friends and foes.

The torture is over. The photographer has just finished shooting, and Jimmy can finally get back into his own clothes. Moments later, he emerges from his office wearing a striped button-up and a pair of blue jeans. "Now, this is more me," he says, cracking a rare smile. "I would have never did an interview or been in no photos back in the day. Like, that just wasn't in my path."

Whether he's steering the careers of artists like The Game to superstardom or playing co-executive producer for the Vibe Awards, Jimmy has proven there's no single path to success. But despite all his accomplishments, his past still haunts him.

"There's many people that I believe I've hurt in my time of getting to this point of where I'm at," he says somberly. "I've been shot, I've been in the penitentiary, I've killed... And when I look back, it hurt me to know that I dealt with that kinda ignorance. But I can also say I've changed. I'm the epitome of a nigga from the streets that's been in trouble since a juvenile and graduated to the Feds and should have been broken and fucked up. But for me to be where I'm at now is an accomplishment, man. So if people don't wanna know me for my music, I want them to know me for my tribulations. Because if I can touch one kid with my story, then I can sleep better." ♦



The Game and Jimmy Henchmen

culminated in a March 2000 all-star sentencing hearing that included Fab 5 Freddy, Queen Latifah, Wyclef Jean and Gladys Knight speaking as character witnesses.

"The hearing was like right out of a movie," says Fab 5. "The most incredible aspect was when Barry Hankerson got up and addressed the judge. He gave the most impassioned speech about giving this brother a second chance. After that, the judge just ripped the prosecutor for being too aggressive. As far as courtroom dynamics go, that hearing was one for the records."

On his lawyer's advice, Jimmy copped to the gun charge and received a five-year sentence with time served. In April 2000, he went back to prison for another 11 months. Once he got out, he spent the next year and a half consulting for various labels, as well as sports figures such as Mike Tyson. In 2003, he partnered with Bryce Wilson and officially renamed his company Czar Entertainment.

"I kinda felt like the Henchmen thing went as far as it could go," he says. "Sometimes people take that name to mean dark or villain-like, and it just kinda gave me a bad rap. And me being in jail didn't help matters much. So moving forward, it's a whole lot of talking differently and dressing differently. 'Cause my belief is nobody knows who you are until you tell them."

And if we know anything by now, it's that there's more to Jimmy Henchmen's story than jail cells and record sales.

You'd think Jimmy would feel comfortable at Czar Entertainment's offices, but today is different. The reclusive exec is not looking forward to his impending photo shoot. To make matters worse, the stylist has him sporting a tight blue blazer and a pair of all-white shoes. "They got me looking like Kanye West," Jimmy says grimacing.

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