





It's been six long years since the Terror Squad's femme fatale first flowed ferocious. Now, with her solo album finally on its way,

REMY MA

is stepping out from behind the extralarge shadows of Fat Joe and the late Big Pun to make moves on her own.

They Don't Know

words **Anslem Samuel**

images **Matt Gunther**

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WAIT A MINUTE.

Remy Ma's supposed to be gangsta. And gangstas don't dance.

But here she is, in the rough cut of the video for her Swizz Beatz-produced debut solo single "Whuteva," a crown-rockin' Remy bustin' out a few impressively intricate moves.

"I'm no fuckin' Ciara, Paula Abdul or anybody, but I could get it poppin'," she says. Sitting in the plush backseat of a turtle-top van, headed to a promo show in Hartford, Conn., the First Lady of the Terror Squad explains the incongruous images on the screen of the overhead DVD player. "It's not like dancing is part of my routine, but at the end of the day, I'm still a girl, you know what I'm saying? I go to clubs, I have favorite songs, I got my lil' dance moves. I think every chick that ever lived in the hood at one time or another went to the community center and performed dance routines at the basketball games in the summer. So I'm like, 'That's nothing. I could do that.' The song is mad fun, so it was on some fun shit."

Wearing a black Baby Phat tracksuit, complemented by several "breezy" bracelets that clinkety-clank with every movement, Remy leans back and gets comfortable. It's a two-and-a-half-hour trek from her stately brick house in Fort Lee, N.J., to Hartford's Hot Club. Accompanied by her manager, Jennifer; her older brother, Remel, who doubles as her hype man; a hulking security guard; and a nosy magazine reporter, Remy will do her best to enjoy the ride. The fresh bag of herbal refreshments should help.

The upbeat "Whuteva" is a definite break from the thugged-out records that have become Remy's calling card. Since her debut on Big Pun's 2000 posthumous release, *Yeeeah Baby*, Ms. R-to-the-Eazy has delivered nothing but the uncut raw on any track she's appeared on. But with her long-awaited debut, *There's Something About Remy: Based on a True Story*, due in December, the Bronx native plans to show the world that there's more to her than has yet met the eye (or the ear).

"I feel like a lot of people don't really know who I am," she says, lighting up a carefully rolled blunt. "Even though I been in the public eye since '99, people still really can't tell you what type of artist Remy Ma is or what category she goes in. It's still a mix. But I feel like by the end of my album, you should feel like you know me or something about me. 'Cause it's based on a true story—literally, it's accounts from my life and things that I been through."

Remy's definitely been through a lot in her 24 years. A 30-second bio of her childhood reads like a war report. "Drugs, violence,

guns, killing, jail, parents on drugs, kids don't go to school, drop out, fights," she says, nonchalantly exhaling a thick curl of smoke. "Just like every other hood. No new stories you ain't heard before."

What you won't hear often in Remy's story is its promising beginnings. Growing up the second oldest of five kids in the Castle Hill section of the Bronx, she was a straight "A" student who excelled in poetry, spelling bees and storytelling contests, which required her to memorize entire books word for word and recite them back to a panel of judges. But as she got older, Remy's focus shifted from academics to a cappellas. Battling cats at the lunchroom table, she earned a rep in high school as a formidable MC. A chance meeting in 1999 with the late Big Pun (who, despite selling over a million copies of his debut album, *Capital Punishment*, continued to live in the Bronx) convinced Remy to pursue rap professionally.

"Without Pun I wouldn't be where I'm at," she says. "From the first bar that I spit for Pun, he never told me no lies. He said, 'I'ma call

crazy like that, but it was hard. That's when Joe was like, 'I got you. Just 'cause Pun ain't here don't mean you ain't part of the Squad.' After that, I grew up pretty fast."

After mourning her mentor's passing for months, Remy reemerged on the scene with a vengeance. Holding her own alongside Busta Rhymes on M.O.P.'s now classic "Ante Up (Remix)," the 19-year-old MC quickly positioned herself to be one of the game's hottest new stars. It wasn't long before she landed a recording contract with Loud Records. But the company folded in 2002 before Remy could release an album. Stuck in label limbo, she kept her name hot in the streets by doing prominent guest appearances and hitting the mixtape circuit. Despite all her efforts, though, a new deal was hard to come by.

"Nobody wanted to sign this street, hardcore girl rapper 'cause that wasn't what was poppin' at the time," says Remy, sucking her teeth. "I don't know what they was looking for, but they wasn't feeling it. So I was just doing the mixtapes crazy, doing a lot of shows with Joe and features on his albums. For a few years that's all that I was doing. Then we decided to do the Terror Squad album and that's when things started to more or less fall into place."

Well, not exactly. Although Joe and co.'s second full-length, *True Story*, produced the Grammy-nominated smash "Lean Back," which tore up airwaves and dance floors all summer 2004, overall album sales topped out at a disappointing 400,000. Remy, who actually got paid as a guest artist for each track she contributed to the TS album, had yet to

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you.' He called me the next day like, 'Yo, I got you. I'ma put you on.' He was recording *Yeeeah Baby* at the time, and gave me my own song on that album. What nigga you know that just met someone and give them their own song on their album?"

On February 7, 2000, though, two months before the public would hear "Ms. Martin" or anything else on Pun's sophomore album, the 28-year-old rapper died from a sudden heart attack. Beyond the personal loss, the tragedy hit Remy on a professional level. A high school dropout with a baby on the way, she saw hip-hop as her only way out the hood. "When Pun passed, I was like, 'Oh, my God, what am I gonna do?'" she says. "I wasn't stressed out on welfare or living in a shelter or anything

secure a solo deal of her own. After fielding various offers, she finally decided to reunite with former Loud head Steve Rifkind at his freshly minted SRC Records/Universal.

"I had a lot of routes I could have went for double, triple the money that I got over at SRC, but Steve asked me to give him another chance," says Remy. "He said, 'I understand how much money you're supposed to be getting and how much they're offering you, but we got you 100 percent. We owe you.' Joe also felt like it was a good idea. Even though we been through our ups and downs through the years, I always value his opinion and I try to go with what he says more times than I don't." She shoots a sly smile and adds, "But after the first album, everything's always negotiable."

Remy Ma

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Remy pops an advance copy of Def Jam’s latest R&B sensation Ne-Yo’s album into the van’s CD deck, and she and Remel sing along to the grooves of “Stay With Me” like karaoke champs. But the impromptu jam session gets cut short when little sis’ cell goes off. The person on the other end of the line says Funkmaster Flex is playing Remy’s second single “Conceited” on the radio and droppin’ his world-famous bombs of approval. Remel shouts out, “Yo, turn the radio on! Turn the radio on! Turn it to Hot 97!”

As the song blares through the speakers, Remy nods her head in approval. Hearing her record on air means that someone’s finally listening—not just to the music, but to her. “I don’t know if Universal was putting me in their second group of priorities or what, but they wasn’t doing my promotions right,” she says. “I was speaking to radio program directors and they was like, ‘No one from your label is pushing your songs.’ So I went on my own radio run and got my spins. I had a big meeting [with Universal execs] and showed them everything I did without their help. And it’s not like I’m a new artist that they never heard of. They know who I am and that I delivered good material. I just felt like I had to explain that to people for them to understand. That’s the only way shit gets done correct.”

Taking matters into her own hands is nothing new for Remy. Coming out of the shadow of established artists like Big Pun and Fat Joe, she knows she has to go for self. “I been doing a lot of shit on my own,” she says. “’Cause it’s hard for Joe to be there with me every day when he’s his own artist signed to a whole other label. He’s helped me as much as he can and did as much as he could. But now I gotta do me. Like I can’t be under Fat Joe forever. I need people to understand that I’m my own artist.”

“I feel like I have a lot to prove. I been waiting a long time, and the people been waiting. So I can’t just give them 12 cuts. That’s why I have next to no features. I got 17 tracks, and it’s all me. I pretty much tried to touch every part of me—like every thought, every emotion that I had. I feel like no rapper, especially no new artist today has come with such a thorough project. I’ll put my album up against anybody’s that’s coming out. Old artist, new artist, whatever.”

Arriving at the Hot Club, Remy and her crew are escorted to the back entrance, where they’re greeted by radio reps from Hot 93.7 FM. The VIP area is jam packed with local industry heads, half a dozen or so cameramen and a select few stargazers. Remel goes out into the crowd to hand out promotional items, while Remy cuts into another room for a quick wardrobe change. She returns a few moments later wearing a pair of skintight jeans with a pistol belt buckle, a sleeveless V-neck top under a matching bubble vest and a sparkling TS piece that rests snugly on her chest.

Copping a seat on a nearby couch, Remy looks lost in her own thoughts. The tranquil moment doesn’t last long, however, as a local VJ asks to do an interview for his show. At first she shoots him a piercing stare, but her tough exterior fades once the cameras are on. After the typical queries about the new album and being a part of Terror Squad comes the million-dollar question: “What’s your take on the beef between 50 Cent and Fat Joe?”

“I’m not condoning they beef,” she says flatly. “I’m not hypin’ it, I’m not saying the shit is cute. ’Cause at the end of the day, that shit is stupid. I listen to G-Unit shit, so for me to say their shit is wack, I’d be lying. And Joe is my nigga, that’s family regardless of what, so this shit is just crazy. I just want 50 and Joe to go cop my album and just leave me out of it.”

Management gives the signal. Checking her makeup one last time, Remy grabs a wireless mic and takes to the stage. The instant “Whuteva” comes blaring through the speakers, a sea of hands from the audience begins rocking to the rhythm. Remy’s performance of “Conceited” receives a similar response. So when she announces that that’s the end of her set, the eager crowd begs for more. Pushing the club’s 2 a.m. curfew, she obliges, squeezing in a pair of freestyles and one more cut from her album.

After the show, Remy stays around to sign some autographs and pose for a few pix. She’s nothing if not appreciative of her fans’ support. “It’s a great feeling to know I managed to stay in the game this long,” she says. “I been here since ’99. We going into 2006 and I’m just now dropping my first album. So for y’all to even wanna talk to me, and still wanna know what’s going on with me right now, like that right there is an honor to me.” ♠