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Get Low

HOW'S SLIM THUG GONNA MAKE GOOD ON HIS EARLY GLORY?

INTERVIEW ANSLEM SAMUEL // IMAGE ESTEVAN ORIOL

Takes a lot of balls for an artist to name their album *Already Platinum*. But if you ask Slim Thug, the title of his 2005 major-label debut was more about stating the facts than making any cocksure prophecies. An underground legend in his hometown of Houston, the 6-foot 6-inch MC first made his mark in 1998 as a key figure on Michael "5000" Watts' independent Swishahouse Records roster. By 2000, Slim's fan base had grown so big that he decided to break out on his own and start his own label, Boss Hogg Outlawz.

After a string of smash street albums, like *Tha Boss, Vol. 1* and *Boys-N-Blue*, further secured his stature in the Lone Star State, he decided it was time to go national and signed a solo deal with Geffen/Interscope in 2004. In an effort to bolster Slim's standing, label head Jimmy Iovine paired him with superstar production team the Neptunes—Virginians Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo—who wound up doing the bulk of the beats on *Already Platinum* and releasing it through their Geffen distributed imprint, Star Trak. Arriving in the midst of Houston's rap resurgence, the project seemed sure to live up to its title. Instead, the album stalled out at gold (450,000 sold), while other H-Town artists—Paul Wall, Mike Jones and Chamillionaire—were all indeed certified platinum.

Two years later, Slim has regrouped. (A guest verse on Beyoncé's No. 1 pop hit "Check on It" helped.) He recently released an album, *Serve & Collect*, with his group the Boss Hogg Outlawz on Koch Records. Now he's readying his next effort, *Boss of All Bosses*, for a summer release (through Geffen directly this time). In the face of industrywide sales woes and a splintered Swishahouse camp, the bass-voiced rapper talks with XXL about coming back hard again.

Back in '05, Houston had the spotlight, in terms of rap, but it doesn't seem like the buzz is there now. What happened?

It's like, me, Mike, Paul, Cham and all these niggas is family. We all came from the same muthafuckin' place, and I don't know if they don't get along or what they business is, but I'ma try to keep the movement going, man, 'cause that's what's important. I feel like that's how we killed 'em, and how we gonna kill 'em is if we move as a together force, rather than just going artist for artist. It's just, the music business is fucked up right now, so shit gets switched.

What do you mean by that?

I think the sales fucked up right now, period, and we don't know what the fuck to do, just like everybody else don't know what the fuck to do. All we know is we gotta do us. Just put the shit out. I don't give a fuck about no sales, man. Everybody want to go platinum and sell a million muthafuckin' records, but it don't make you. As long as the people love it, and I'm getting show money—fuck waiting on the album to sell a whole bunch of records. It ain't hard to do no album, man. We should drop them hoes every eight months, since the

sales tippin'.

So what are you doing differently on your second album to compensate for that?

Man, really, I'ma give people what they want. I listen to the fans and what they wanted from hearing the last album... My fans really want to hear me with Houston producers, so I'm giving a whole lot of that, like Mr. Lee and the cats outta Houston with the fire. I also fucked with a lot of other producers, too, like Dr. Dre, Timbaland, JD, Swizz Beatz, everybody. I hollered at everybody.

But you just said fans wanted to hear you with Houston producers. Why all the big names from elsewhere?

'Cause that's what I want to do. You gotta give the people what they want, but, at the same time, you gotta do you. I like working with Pharrell, man. I think he's the truth, and I love what we did on the last record. The only reason he won't make it on this album is because with him you gotta pay damn near \$100,000 for one beat. I ain't hating that, but a nigga can't afford all that shit. I respect business, so I ain't trippin'. I ain't done with the album yet, so maybe we could still work something out.

Being that you're from Houston, do you think having the Neptunes produce most of your first album confused your core audience?

Honestly, I think it did. I ain't gon' lie. The whole thing is, I've been doing this shit for years, and I was tired of doing shows in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. I signed my deal before Mike, Paul and Cham. I was damn near done with my album when they got they deals. So we was still trying to figure out how to break ourselves as worldwide, international artists. It just so happens, after I'm done with my muthafuckin' album, "Still Tippin'" start poppin'.

Yeah, that Mike Jones record really opened the door for y'all.

"Still Tippin'" was actually my record. It was a record I came up with for a Swishahouse compilation called *The Day Hell Broke Loose*, and it popped. They was like they got this artist Mike Jones, and they [gave the record to him] to make his shit pop. I ain't trippin' on none of that. It was a good look for everybody, and I ain't bitter 'bout it one bit. Mike Jones my nigga. Paul Wall my nigga. That started the movement. How you gon' be mad at that? Can't be.

But being that you were the biggest thing in Houston, it had to feel funny to see the guys under you go platinum while you barely went gold?

It's hard for me to sell a lot of records, 'cause I don't do radio songs. I do songs I want to do, and a lot of my content be too bad for the radio. I ain't coming in on this album like, "Look, I'ma do this here for the radio." Or, "I'ma be more simpler and do some shit like Mike Jones and sell records." Nah, I just do me, and I get feedback from the people who be down with me from day one. I listen to my city. I listen to my state. 'Cause, regardless of what a nigga sold, they always been behind me. ♠