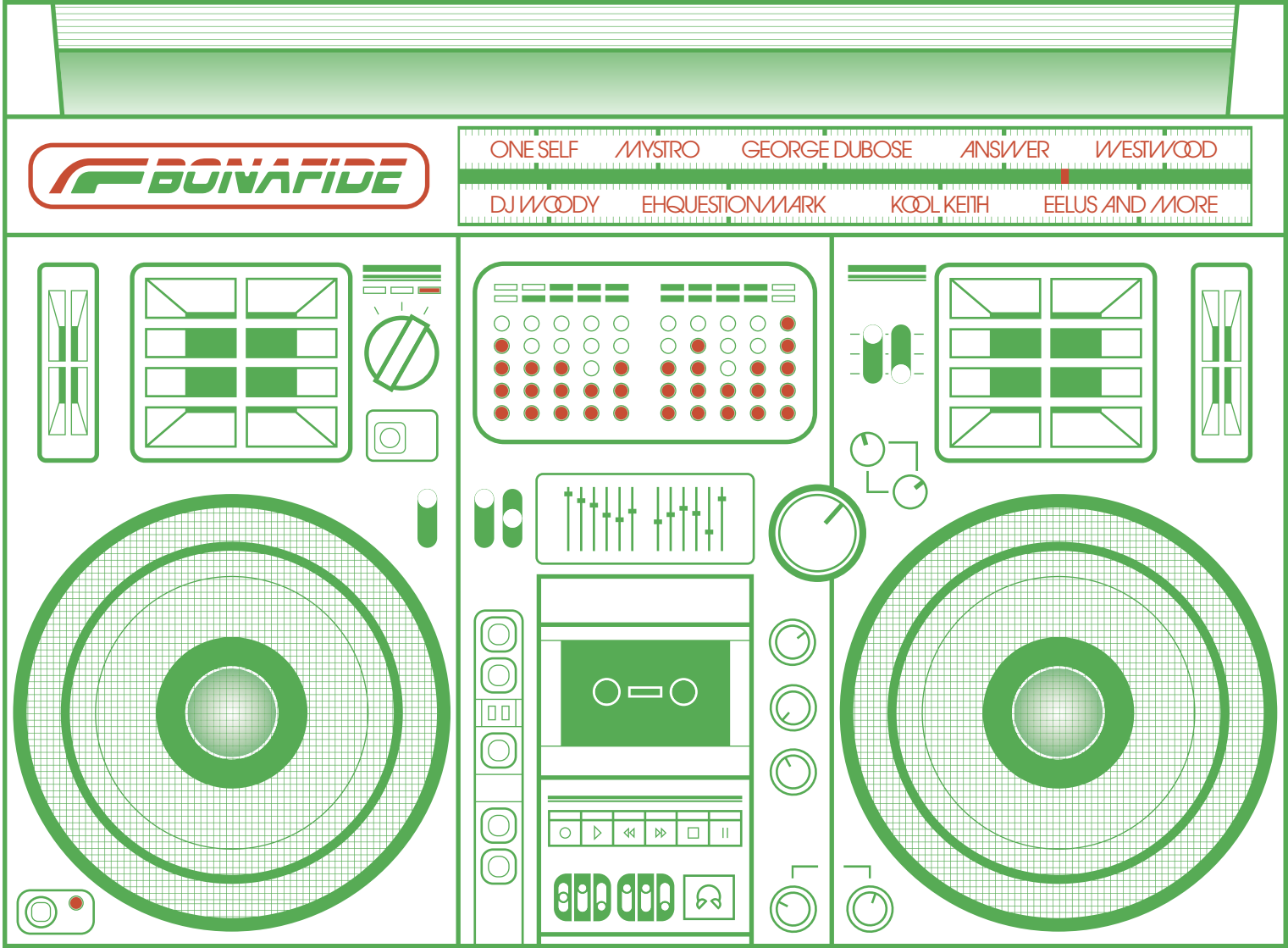
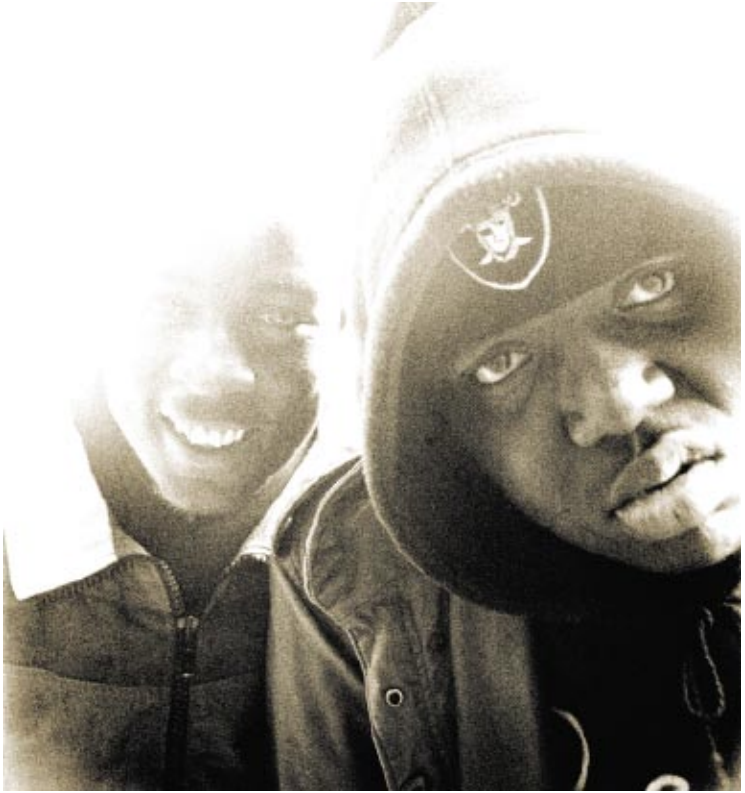

BONAFIDE 01
BONAFIDE
ONE SELF
MYSTRO
GEORGE DUBOSE
ANSWER
WESTWOOD
DJ WOODY
EHQUESTIONMARK
KOOL KEITH
EELUS AND MORE
BEST BEFORE ARMAGEDDON
£3

GEORGE DUBOSE

THE GODFATHER OF HIP-HOP PHOTOGRAPHY

A trip last February to the Beautiful Losers exhibition, Milan, highlighted that our potted history of the record covers wasn't exactly watertight. We realised we had missed out influential heads, and furthermore might be wrong in theorising that the evolution of music packaging has lead to visuals being fine art. Perhaps it hasn't been a linear progression, maybe it was down to different philosophies producing different types of work. Bonafide decided that the best thing to do would be to go back in the day and speak to an OG creative heavyweight. That someone was George DuBose.

DuBose has been producing record covers for over 30 years. He was the first photographer to shoot Madonna, is credited with most of The Ramones covers and produced important record covers for '80s and '90s hip-hop pioneers such as Biz Markie, Big Daddy Kane and RUN DMC. We caught up with the godfather of hip-hop photography and asked him about his colourful life in film and his approach to creating iconic artwork.



The Notorious B.I.G and 50G - G.DuBose

"SOME DESIGNERS ARE CONTENT TO FLEX THEIR CREATIVE MUSCLES AND PRODUCE WONDERFUL DESIGNS THAT HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE STYLE OF MUSIC CONTAINED IN THE SUBSEQUENT PACKAGE. "

How did you become involved in photography and what has driven your career?

As the result of a happy LSD trip in college, I decided to change my life's direction from the study of law to the study of photography. My photography career has been focused on making my clients look their best in a photograph. The graphic design aspect to my work came much later when I was encouraged by Tony Wright, the creative director of Island Records to design my own projects after I had taken the photo. Needless to say, I always treat the photos that I am designing with respect and let the photo influence the rest of the overall design.

You have worked with many people from what is an iconic age. Your images, especially from the Cold Chillin era, essentially document the birth of hip-hop music. Can you summarise your initial feeling about working with hip-hop artists?

At first, I thought that hip-hop was a part of 'new wave'. I was part of the 'downtown' art scene and would hang out at the Mudd Club, CBGBs and when I was on the guest list, Studio 54. At the Mudd Club we were exposed to a wide variety of contemporary music, Blondie's 'Rhapsody', 'White Lines', Man Parrish and other hip hop music was often played, but we hadn't heard the expression 'hip-hop' nor were we aware of the roof parties in the South Bronx. Unless you knew somebody going to these parties, it was 'no-man's land'. Several of the hip-hop artists, like Fab Five Freddy, would come and hang out with us in the Mudd Club.

It was my later work with XCLAN that led me to realise the depth of messaging that some hip-hop artists were trying and able to attain. From the view of lyrical politics, I am still surprised that Lumumba Carson and XCLAN even BEGAN to work with me at all. In the end, they made me feel as if I was an important member of the XCLAN, owing to the fact that I pulled the covers together in such a powerful way that reflected their philosophy, even though that philosophy could never be mine.

Following on from this did you think the legacy of those artists would stretch so far and create such a powerful culture?



Da Grustler - G. Dubose

Absolutely not, my generation was used to seeing trends come and go, it was just another trend to us. I am still surprised at the universal appeal that hip-hop has around the world and that it has become one of the longest lasting musical genres.... ever!

Was your interest in hip-hop purely musical or did you take any interest in graffiti and break dancing?

My interest in hip-hop was purely from a professional point of view. My only contact with hip-hop artists was at their photo shoots or the necessary creative meetings for those covers. I was interested in graffiti and worked with Rammellzee and Bil Blast, I often saw break dancing on public display around Times Square, but I wasn't involved in the culture. I did photograph the New York City Breakers for their publicity shots. Hip-hop was all around me, but I wasn't recognising it as a separate culture. It all seemed 'new wave' to me.

In our correspondence you mentioned that, in reference to a creative approach, your philosophy, as opposed to the work of Saville, Ehqhestionmark etc to creating artwork for records is quite different. Can you elaborate and explain exactly what you try to achieve when you are commissioned to do artwork for a record?

Some designers are content to flex their creative muscles and produce wonderful designs that have absolutely nothing to do with the style of music contained in the subsequent package. These designers think that the cover is an outlet for THEIR creativity. The musician has little or no input. The buying public is not influenced by the cover to buy the music. The buyer most likely already knows what music is contained therein and would buy the record in a brown paper wrapper.

By having creative meetings with the musician, I find it possible to listen to their music and get inside the musician's head. Further discussions with the artist will allow the art director to conjure up images that reflect the artist's lifestyle and the music he/she is recording.

Assembling all this input, it is possible for me as a photographer to come up with photographic images that reflect the musical style, the style of the ..... >> **cont'd**



ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY FOR MARLEY MARL AND CRAIG G'S 'DROPPIN SCIENCE' 12" - 1988



P-FUNK PIONEER BOOTSY COLLINS COLD CHILLIN ON THE ROOFTOPS OF MANHATTAN



MARLEY MARL & THE JUICE CREW ALL STARS STRIKE A POSE FOR MR. GEORGE DUBOSE



ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY FOR KOOL G RAP AND DJ POLOS '92 'LIVE AND LET DIE' ALBUM

THE ORIGINAL GANGSTER RAPPER AND SMOOTH OPERATOR BIG DADDY KANE



"IT'S ABOUT HAVING THE ARTIST'S COVER PRESENT A GRAPHIC IMAGE OF WHAT THE ARTIST IS TRYING TO SAY WITH HIS/HER RECORDINGS."

artist themselves, their taste in clothing, their environment or the environment where they would like to live, the car they would like to drive, etc.

This gives the musician the feeling that the package is 'his/hers'. I want my artists to be as proud of our package as they are of their music. That's the way it is supposed to work, n'est-ce pas?

As the art director of Cold Chillin, what kind of image were you trying to project about the artists and the music being produced?

It varied from artist to artist. Biz, we tried to capture his humor and class clown image. Kane, we always tried to depict as Black Caesar in the lap of luxury. Shante, we tried to glamourise her. Kool G. Rap and DJ Polo along with Grand Daddy IU, we tried to give them the 'gangster' image, sometimes the gangster fashion look of the 1930s or in some cases, a modern gangster look, as on the cover of "Live and Let Die", cop-killing ninjas. Without guns...

From the beginning, I always tried to give my hip-hop artists images that would be comprehendible by the massive white youth market in the US. I finally and clearly achieved this goal when I executed the cover of 'The Diabolical Biz Markie'. We put Biz in a white afro, looking like a mad scientist. The video company turned the white afro into a white powdered wig and put Biz, as Mozart, playing a clavichord. The song was 'Just a Friend' and when one day I heard a white guy humming the



Photo Shoot for Kane's 'Daddys Home' lp

"ONE DAY I HEARD A WHITE GUY HUMMING THE MELODY TO "JUST A FRIEND" IN A NY DELI, I KNEW THAT BIZ HAD FINALLY CROSSED OVER."

melody in a NY deli, I knew that Biz had finally crossed over. It was the video and the white wig that MTV played that got Biz his first gold record.

Of all the record covers that you have produced, what is the one that you take most satisfaction from and what is the reason for this?

That's a very tough question. I am very pleased with most of my covers. I would have to say, any of my Big Daddy Kane covers. Kane and I were always able to create covers that reflected the lifestyle that he aspired to. Biz's 'Toilet Stool Rap', Shante's 'Dance To This', G Rap's 'Live and Let Die'. Many of my rock covers come to mind as well. It's all about reflecting the music found inside the package, not my abilities as an art director/photographer.

Is there any record cover that you wish you had your name on as the creator?

Mott the Hoople - Mott the Hoople, I love the work of M C Escher. I bought that album because of the artwork.

Looking at the work of you produced for Biz Markie, Biz comes across as open minded individual, do you think today's musicians would be amenable to your concepts? Hip-hop in terms of the mainstream, seems to have become warped by money, guns, women. Machismo that might not sit with the types of fun ideas that you would want to document. This does seem to have been evident in the '80's but less pronounced.

I present concepts to the artist that are based upon THEIR music. Their songs often create visual images. After absorbing the flava of the music, photographic concepts come to me by the truckload. I present the most appropriate images I have to the artist and we always are able to find a concept amenable to both of us or meld several concepts together. I never let my personal politics or point of view get in the way of making an image that an artist wants. There are many covers or photographs I have made where there are guns included, fast cars, women and cash money. Look at my photos of Notorious B.I.G; Grand Daddy I.U. had several thousand dollars CASH, spilling down the stairs of Grand Central Station.

I like to draw the line at disrespecting



X - Clan - G. Dubose

women. Otherwise, all fantasies will be considered...

At the end of the day, it isn't about me or my photography or design skills, it's about having the artist's cover present a graphic image of what the artist is trying to say with his recordings. When the artist is happy, I am happy. When the record goes gold or platinum, we know we all have done well.

You mention Kane's lifestyle aspirations. Talking specifics, one of the album covers that catches my eye is Kane's Daddy's Home 1994 LP. For me, the whole look is perfect, reflecting the title but also the whole late 80's early 90's middle-class living style. How did that shot come about and what were the ideas behind it?

Several of the early hip-hop artists aspired to living the high life. Middle-class? Shit, man, that house we rented for the location of Daddy's Home was upper-class defined...mad palace on the water of Long Island Sound in a very chi-chi neighborhood. Some artists have a thing for cars (Tone-Loc); in Kane's case it was houses. Check 'It's a Big Daddy Thing'. Another palace..... Girls, fast cars, big houses. Signs of success...

You mentioned your covers for rock musicians. Who would you say were the most demanding people to work with, rock stars or hip-hop acts?

Both genres produce prima donnas.

I wouldn't say one genre was more demanding than the other. Masta Ace could make me work real hard, with all his changes-of-mind, but it once took me 30 working days to design and shoot "Demolition 23" with Michael Monroe of Hanoi Rocks, sitting next to me at the computer.

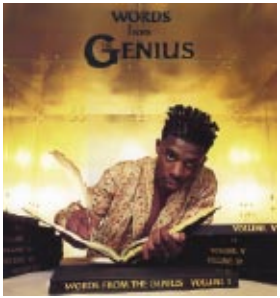
Reading your new book it became apparent that you have worked with a variety of characters and always seem to have built up a level of mutual respect where you can direct the artist and they will follow. Were there ever any situations that you felt intimidated or uncomfortable in? Working with guns doesn't sound the most relaxing of experiences.

I have a military background and the high-

From left: Album artwork for The Genius a.k.a the Gza in his pre-Wu Tang debut lp.

Grand Daddy I.U photo shoot.

Album cover for the Diabolical Biz Markie's 'All Samples Cleared.'







est respect for weapons, especially loaded ones. Otherwise, I have been in Trenchtown, Jamaica shooting Bob Marley and Bed-Stuy shooting B.I.G. and Masta Ace. I will go anywhere as long as I am WITH the bad guys...

The more respect and interest in the artist's character, the more respect they show me and the better cover they get in the end.

In our correspondence you mentioned that you now have a gallery and have recently had an exhibition in Berlin. Where can people see your work and have you anything lined up in the coming years?

The Wonderland (Klein) Gallery is exhibiting surreal, realist and photographic artwork. I will show the work of international artists. Wonderland is not a venue for self-aggrandisement.

I am having exhibits of my own retrospective and/current projects all over Europe. At the moment I have my collection of rock and hip-hop photos in a gallery in Maastricht, NL. In 2007, I will exhibit my own work in Rome and a group show featuring the photos of Mick Rock, Adrian Boot, Chip Simons, Jeffery Newbury, Josh Cheuse, Erik Weiss and myself in Cannes at the MIDEM 2007 music convention and probably Pop-Komm, Berlin, 2007.

Also you worked with Warhol for his magazine 'Interview.' What was 'Interview' about and what was Warhol like to work for? Did he pass on any help regarding design?

'Interview' started as a actors interview magazine, so Andy could get free tickets to movies and be invited to the openings. It grew to be a source for cutting edge artists, musicians and actors. Once when I was 20 minutes late delivering Andy's film and contact prints that I had developed from Andy's previous evening at Studio 54, he yelled at me and taught me the importance of meeting deadlines. I never forgot that experience.

You mentioned designers using record covers as outlets for creativity as opposed to channeling their creativity so that it relates to the music being produced. You linked this to the way record companies commission artwork,

"IT'S ALL ABOUT REFLECTING THE MUSIC FOUND INSIDE THE PACKAGE,... NOT ABOUT MY ABILITIES AS AN ART DIRECTOR/PHOTOGRAPHER."

suggesting that if you are friends with a musician you can produce their artwork. In the past it was, 'you got a design job for a label, you oversaw the development of a body of work and worked with the artist to something complimentary.' That argument interests me and I have 2 questions. 1. During your time in the game have you seen a change in the way the record and design industries work?

It all depends on the relationship of the artist and his A&R contact. If the A&R knows how to image the artist, that's great, but it is also pretty unusual, in my experience. Today, because of the tenuous nature of the music industry, the smaller labels are asking the artists to bring them finished recordings AND packaging. Major labels have the bad habit of working with trendy designers and too often the designers have no real interest or connection to the artist. Nor do they have the interest in developing one. These kind of designers are only interested in stroking their own egos, not providing a service to the artist or helping the artist sell more records. How many covers have been spot varnished with designer jizz? I don't care to know.

2. Following on from this you noted that you wanted designs that complimented the sound. From a theoretical perspective, is it your belief that record cover artwork's first and foremost aim is that, as you are designing for a product, the work should represent and promote the music/artist in a commercial sense? That the artistic merit/creativity (designers ego trip) should come second? I know in the art world and parts of the design world, the idea of putting commercialism ahead of aesthetics is seen as blasphemous.

If a designer is working for a recording artist other than himself, he must accept the commercialistic aspect of the job. Otherwise, stay out of the music business. These kinds of people should just stick to making their own paintings. They need to respect the artist's aesthetics, not their own. They should keep in mind who is going to have to live with the cover, it isn't themselves, it's the artist.

Interview by J. Griffin

IN CONCLUSION.....

Bonafide wanted to discuss record sleeve artwork because of the intimate relationship between the visuals and the music. Within record collections we all have sleeves that are excellently executed and, because they compliment the music, resonate. This makes them brilliant pieces of pop art. As with the world of art, its practitioners have different philiosophies, resulting in pieces that are individual and stylistically removed from each other.

Dubose, and I'm sure he wont mind us saying this, is an OG practitioner. Methodical, commercially aware and a great photographer. His philosophy is to respectfully replicate what is within the sleeve through photography and, in comparision to the artwork for many of the hip-hop records released today, it is original and soulful.

Dubose's work is a brilliant documentation of a genre comfortable in experimentation and exploring its boundaries.



Ehqhestionmark have a different ethic. Their work, with its diverse use of texture and media, compliments Lex's cutting edge sounds. It is, though, a departure from Dubose's. It rarely directly references the artist it is promoting. Instead it hints subtly and it can be ventured that its aesthetics have a fine art quality rooted with the idea of the artist as a creator.

There is no correct approach, instead as Dubose notes, changes in the mechaniations of the music industry, the ephemeral nature of trends and the evolution of design has contributed to the different philosophies. As testmanent to both Dubose's and Ehquestionmarks quality we need only take a visit to our local record shops to see how these people have influenced the packaging that contains the music we buy.