

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

Spend a little time talking to Ronnie King and you can see how he fits in all genre's of the music trade. The comfortable feeling and his openness made for an enjoyable experience. I can understand how he will get this Thugs and Punks Project moving and turn it into a real music event.

Of course I started talking about his days working with Tupac and things just flowed from there. This man has much respect all around the music field. And after this interview you will see why. He is smart and open and you can get the feeling that you know why Tupac and many others call on him for his talents and knowledge. He is a real peep. I enjoyed this very much and I would like to thank Ronnie Kings PR person for hooking all of this up. They made time for me and I know they are very busy people and that just goes to show what kind of people we are talking with here.

If you would like to contact Ronnie Kings PR person here is their e-mail Route66@socal.rr.com. And again thanks to them and to Ronnie for making this possible.

RapNewsDirect: I know Tupac was more than an artist to you, he was your friend. So if you don't mind I'd like to go back to the Death Row days for a bit.

Ronnie King: Ok

RapNewsDirect: I read that you met Tupac thru Johnny J. How did you hook up with Johnny J ?

Ronnie King: I was a well known studio musician in Los Angeles, making all kinds of records, working in all kinds of music, just not rap,hiphop but punk rock Met Johnny thru a talent manager. They got stuck one day , and I had just got off the road with the Offspring and met at the studio and we knocked out a track , and after that Johnny looked at me and said dude your on the team.

RapNewsDirect: Was that at Death Row?

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

Ronnie King: Oh yea, actually Death Row was at Can Am Studios. That was the place

we use to record all the records. Death Row didn't have their own studio but they had this studio they had booked out called the Can Am. It's in the valley of Los Angeles. It was a great facility. It had 3 or 4 studios in there, and each room had somebody working in it. You'd have Snoop in one room, Tupac in one room, KC and JoJo in one room. And there were lil production rooms where the producer would be working, it was really great.

RapNewsDirect: Is that where the Makaveli album was done?

Ronnie King: Everything was basically recorded there, yea.

RapNewsDirect: Did you meet Big Syke thru Tupac?

Ronnie King: I met Syke right about the same time, Johnny J was producing some music for Syke to. So it's sorta like it all combusted together, it's like I really tapped into a core group of people. And I'm so glad I came thru Pac, because he was definitely the most respected rapper out of all the rappers that were at Death Row, you know what I mean.

RapNewsDirect: So you didn't know Tupac before he came to Death Row?

Ronnie King: No I didn't. I met Pac at Death Row.

RapNewsDirect: When I spoke to Hurt M Badd he spoke on how "quick" Tupac worked in the studio. Did that "quickness" work for you or did it make you uncomfortable how "quick" things moved?

Ronnie King: Naw, it totally worked for me. He was moving at the same speed I run at, ya know.

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: 5 and 6 tracks a day?

Ronnie King: Aw dude , we use to do 6, 7 easy. Starting from like 9"oclock at night til 6 in the morning. The whole thing was Pac was like us, but the music was like - Johnny would go in and throw the drum beat down : and he would do that in about 30 min.'s, Johnny's quick to.Johnny's real quick, he really knows his shit. I'd come in but the keyboards and music on top, then Pac would be writting while we were putting the song togeather in about an hour. So realalisticly we could be in and out of a song in a couple of hours, ya know what I mean. Everybody would have to pay attention and the quickness of it really...In one of the movies you seen Pac saying to some of the other people he worked with saying " look we can always go back and mix it and let a guy who wants to splice it or fuck with the sounds; let them deal with that. But when we're creating, come in to create and I saw alot of rappers go in that booth and come out without a verse on the song cause they couldn't put it togeather.

RapNewsDirect: Do you feel there was an "urgency in the way that Tupac worked? I mean do you think that he knew that something was up, that he just felt urgent with what he had to get down?

Ronnie King: Umm, he was a professional like any of us. Johnny's the same way. We just have an urgency to create the music and not let it get diluted by "outside forces", ya know what I mean. So when we get on a track we want to get it down as quickly as possible because that's where the energy is at, with the music.

RapNewsDirect: Now you where there for Hit Em Up; was that a "planned track" or was that one of those tracks Pac decided he would go in and just drop?

Ronnie King: Ya know, once again that is just Johnny J's brilliance. Ya know Pac use ta just listen to Johnny's beat's and say oh I want that one, I want that one , I want that one, ya know.

RapNewsDirect: And he could pick whatever he wanted?

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

Ronnie King: Johnny had so many beats that it was just like easy ya know. Pac would just go in there and ya know knock em out just like that.

RapNewsDirect: Where the poeple that where there, including Tupac; were they aware of the magnitude of Hit Em Up? I mean did they really know that that would be the ultimate diss song?

Ronnie King: Naw..naw..naw. We're not really thinking about the outcome so much, just the creation of it and the creativity of it.

RapNewsDirect: I mean, wasn't that track laid just for Biggie? Wasn't it a "personal" thing?

Ronnie King: Me personally, I don't really know if that was the intent at first but at the end of the whole process turned out to be that way, and then of course everybody really just..I worked with Eazy E to, so his songs and stuff like that and that kind of mental attitude was just basically ya never know what is going to happen with songs, ya know what I mean. (RND- Right) You can make them but you really don't know where there going to go or what the validity of it is going to be, or how people are going to take it, ya know.

RapNewsDirect: What was the atmosphere in the studio that night when that was dropped?

Ronnie King: Nothing out of the ordinary.

RapNewsDirect: Just a normal "drop"?

Ronnie King: Just a normal fucking everyday at the studio, because thats the way Pac was. He would come in intense. He would come in intently in the studio every night. So it wasn't that was anything out of the ordinary. Because to get as much music as he got done thru his life, every night was intense. It wasn't like one night wasn't intense and the other night was more intese than the other, it was like every night when you went in there you knew you were going to work up some music, ya know.

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: On the "One Nation" project, do you have anything on that album?

Ronnie King: Naw, naw I don't.

RapNewsDirect: Do you think we will ever see the "One Nation" project as Tupac wanted? I have heard it is done and just sitting there, do you think they will ever put it out there?

Ronnie King: Ya know what, there is so much more music out there. I know Johnny and myself we've done, gee I mean on every cd since Pac died, I mean we got like 14, 15 songs on them. We've recorded probably 100 songs. I mean there is so much more out there that we haven't dealt with, ya know what I mean.

RapNewsDirect: How many of the unreleased tracks do you think your on?

Ronnie King: Aw man, at least 50 or 60, at least; that have not come out yet.

RapNewsDirect: Do you have an estimate of how many unreleased tracks there really are out there?

Ronnie King: A I think there's a ton. You can only have so many songs on a cd, ya know.

RapNewsDirect: Hurt M Badd told me there were 20 tracks layed for the Makaveli album and they used 10.

Ronnie King: Yea, now that could be with the Makaveli stuff, but see it's like all the different producers that he dealt with all have these catalogs of his music. So theres a lot of music still out there. And that's something to be said for alot of artist that just go in the studio and write one record and then they bounce. If your going to be in this music business, you have to really stay

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

in that studio and stay writing all the time.

RapNewsDirect: There's different people that say they have unreleased Tupac tracks.

Ronnie King: Oh yea, everybody says they have it.

RapNewsDirect: Daz says he has some .

Ronnie King: Daz I understand has quit a few.

RapNewsDirect: How do they determine who owns the music.

Ronnie King: It's the writers that were there at the time basically. And we have key sheets and stuff like that, that are in the studio. So if Daz is the producer it will say on the key sheets that Daz is the producer and that Pac is the writer and if there's any other writers in the room. They write it all down, they know who's doing what.

RapNewsDirect: So it goes back to the writer and the producer that owns it?

Ronnie King: Well no, um anything done at Death Row, Death Row owns it. Basically it's a co-op.

RapNewsDirect: And now anything that is Tupac's, Afeni has the final say on it.

Ronnie King: Exactly, she has the right to that side of it. Like Death Row just came out with the Nu Mixx Klassics", and that's because Suge has the right to do that.

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: The rumor is that Darren Vegas, Death Row producer responsible for the Nu Mixx's , has or is going to be let go by Death Row over fan out cry of the Nu Mixx's; and Death Row is looking for producers now. Could you see yourself going back to Death Row?

Ronnie King: Always dude, for me it's all music ya know and it's like I just getting off the road with the Offspring right now. It's like I don't really judge the people about their music and how it gets done. It's just that if you know you make good music it's always going to get out there and everybody is going to be really happy about it. There are still quit a few people that are up there working and doing stuff. I don't know much because I haven't been up there for awhile.

RapNewsDirect: Where you ever under contract with them?

Ronnie King: Naw, I never was.

RapNewsDirect: You just like freelanced with them.

Ronnie King: I just stayed with em, yea. Naw I came thru with Johnny J and Pac, and when you come thru like the higher archei of that time you could just basically just ; you were cool no one was trippin a trip.

RapNewsDirect: Do you have any contact with Suge now?

Ronnie King: No

RapNewsDirect: I write him just ta let him know not all of us have forgot Tupac's homies.

Ronnie King: Oh really, that's good.

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: I just want him to know, I mean he's one of Tupac's homies

Ronnie King: Totally

RapNewsDirect: I feel everybody is wasting time talking about who Tupac would ride with now , and they don't even care about the homies he did have.

Ronnie King: Yea, he had so many friends and so many acquaintances; he was a leader. Not only was he politically minded but he was very socially minded at the same time. As you can see in the new movie that came out, he was a great artist. Like there are a million great artist in the world. Like I said I worked with Eazy E and I know that Eazy was just as powerful as Pac was in what he was doing.

RapNewsDirect: Yea, Eazy brought awareness to the street.

Ronnie King: Right, and all the great artist that I work with even on the punk rock side. Brian Holland from the Offspring is brilliant. The guy has sold 35 million records, I mean ya got ta have some kind of something to be able to touch that many people. The music is the core and has always been the core of what makes records and why we're even talking today. It's because of the music not because of the backlash of what people think it is.

RapNewsDirect: Do you have any contact with any of the old Death Row family, like Snoop and Daz?

Ronnie King: Ya know what, I just did Snoop's new record Paid to be the Boss. I played keyboards on a track with him and it was really fun. And I see those cats around town and I am in all the studio's , so I see everybody all the time.

RapNewsDirect: I know you see Big Syke cause he's your friend but what about the rest of the Outlawz?

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

Ronnie King: The Outlawz sure I see them all. Actually I just saw everybody at the movie premire. Seen everybody; Noble, and.

RapNewsDirect: Are they fun to work with?

Ronnie King: Aw, their great, their just like Pac ya know cause when I met those guys they were like 17 years old. And now their a little older and they've all had their record deals and naw their all cool man. They all just keep making their records. And ya know the westcoast of course has been a little dry in the last couple of years. The eastcoast has been killing us as far as radio play.

RapNewsDirect: Isn't that because MTV, VH-1 and BET , none of them really want to push any westcoast music, their all pushing eastcoast music ya know.

Ronnie King: Well and I just don't know if it's really out there. Ya know I just finished writting a song with the Eastsiders on their new record, I mean they are really the only guys that we really have that the westcoast can really sit on and say here man they can represent us again.

RapNewsDirect: Well we got Kurupt is going to drop an album and Crooked I is going to drop an album, but those guys aren't going to get any air play. You can pretty well be assured that the air play won't be there.

Ronnie King: I know, I know. New York sound it's just a sound, we had it for a long time, ya know what I mean, so.

RapNewsDirect: Well do you have any plans to work with the Outlawz in the future?

Ronnie King: The Outlawz, sure I'm sure I will. Also right now I'm touring with the Offspring again and I'll be done with that probably in a couple months. Me and Syke we have about 7 or 8 tracks for a new record coming out, and I'm sure that will have all the Outlawz on it. Syke

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

always has them on his records.

RapNewsDirect: Did you get to work with Storm? She could spit fire.

Ronnie King: She wasn't around to much when I was around. like I said I was usually around Johnny and Pac and then ya, when we made records basically there were just a very few people in the studio with us ya know. And then the Outlawz would come in and spit, Syke would come in and spit, and everybody would just come in and spit and that was the main thing because I think everybody knew that once they came into the studio they had to really perform so there was a great intensity to make some great music.

RapNewsDirect: What do you think about all the "biting" of Tupac's music and stuff that's going on now, with the mixes and the re-mixes.

Ronnie King: Ya know what, I think it's great. I think if they didn't , he would die off. And the fact that people keep re-mixing him and we keep putting records out on him. We just did a song, Johnny and I did a song on Tyrese's new record, we did a re-mix of How Do You Want It. And Tyrese did it in his own style.

RapNewsDirect: On the Resurrection Soundtrack, are you happy with the way Eminem handled that, and the producing of the tracks?

Ronnie King: Beautifully, yea.

RapNewsDirect: You don't think it would have been better if they would have brought like a westcoast producer that knew, well back from the day like a Johnny J , a Hurt M Badd? Somebody who knew Tupac's beats.

Ronnie King: Obviously that wasn't Pac's style of music but the thing is you gotta keep going forward with it, ya know what I mean.

Interview With Ronnie King

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Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: But don't you think if they keep mixing and re-mixing that we will lose Tupac along the way somewhere?

Ronnie King: Naw, I don't think so. I don't think so because oneday someone is gonna really find that core sound again and it maybe a brand new sound. And they think like aw shit this is like, ya know what I mean.

RapNewsDirect: Did you like the Resurrection movie?

Ronnie King: Loved it. We went to the premire in L.A., and it is a very very great movie. Awsome, awsome how they did that man put it all together like that.

RapNewsDirect: Do you think it was a good representation of Tupac?

Ronnie King: Totally. It was brillant. I personally don't know, I talked to a couple of the editors, and producers of the movie, and they told me how they did it; they took bits and pieces of interviews and stuff like that but the way they put it together just , man it was great. It was amazing. And then to hear our music on it, the two of us were just like extra special.

RapNewsDirect: Do you have any thoughts on all the "beefs" that seem to be in rap today?

Ronnie King: Aw man it's subtle to me now. Like I said I was with Eazy back in you know in '91 when the shit was crazy, I mean it was, it was nutts. And then of course with Pac and all that shit going on, I mean it seems like everybody is basically knows where everybody else is at. It's like the south has their shit and ain't nobody trying to say Oh well that's not as cool as the New York shit. And the New Yorkers have there stuff and we have our stuff on the westcoast; it seems like everybodies real , set in their own groove and that their able to come to the table with their own shit. I've done some records down in Hueston with Rap Alot. Their bringing people from the west to come down and record on their type of music. I don't really see being any harder than what it was before, personally.

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: So the lil beefs between 50 Cent and Ja Rule, and Daz and Kurupt.

Ronnie King: Yea, that's always going to happen, I guess someone is always going to say that, but I don't think it's anywhere as intense as it use to be.

RapNewsDirect: Do you see Tupac's work ethic among any of the artist that you work with today?

Ronnie King: Totally, totally. Ya know I get a chance to work with all the great artist , um Mariah Carey who I did a record with has the same , I mean she sings her ass off in like a few hours, ya know what I mean , she gets the music done. Syke is the same way. . We can do 7 tracks in a night. I mean we've done , Syke and I have done 5 records in 10 years.

RapNewsDirect: You mean Syke will drop 7 tracks in one night?

Ronnie King: Aw man he's sick. Johnny's sick and the Outlawz , I mean everybody , I don't know I seem to think we are in a group of people who really do understand what it is that we are doing. We're not guessing and making records, we all make great records wether we're together or not. Most of the artist I do work with are very very tight.

RapNewsDirect: The Punk rock crowd, do they understand who Tupac is?

Ronnie King: Love it. It was so funny, I walked into the Offsprings rehearsal studio about 2 months ago and they have a huge picture of Pac in their studio. And I looked at it and I said What do you guys know about Pac? And they were like Dude we love that dude man. That's

why when we saw that picture we wanted to put that picture up in our studio.

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: So they can relate to Tupac?

Ronnie King: Aw, they love it man. They love the fact that no it's not only as a musician, as really a speaker of the times. That is what all of us try to strive for ya know. Cause we try to speak what we're trying to say.

RapNewsDirect: Well how did you get Big Syke involved in the Thugs And Punks project?

Ronnie King: Syke and I did a couple of tracks about 3 yr's ago with the Punks and Thugs thing with Tim Armstrong from Rancid. And we started it off from there. And those tracks are still in the vault somewhere and I'm sure very soon, once this album starts getting created and all that I'm sure those are going to come out. Syke is just a smart guy. He understands that it is just music to. Theres no lines or whatever and Syke came in and just ripped it. What we did a couple of years ago with Tim from Rancid, then when I was asked to do some re-mixing for the new Offspring stuff , I thought of Syke because Syke was just so open to it ya know. And I think Syke will be up to really , he might really be the guy that helps people bridge you know those lines.

RapNewsDirect: Do you find less of a racial boundry in Punk music compared to rap and hiphop?

Ronnie King: When people get into that racial boundry shit, that is just ignorance really, personally. Because here I am I'm white and I played with Tupac Shakur. And just because people don't know that ...

RapNewsDirect: Well Johnny J is white isn't he?

Ronnie King: Johnny J is a mexican. When it gets into that , it gets really lame. Because what they don't understand is that since the beginning of music, even in the Motown Stacks days when it was all black people making black music there was still white dudes behind them helping to make the music. and they didn't care. Nobody cares. The musicians and the artist don't care about that shit it is just the people that are sorta like.. and it happens on both sides of the deal. I play the keyboards and in punk rock bands your not suppose to have keyboards just

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

guitar's and basses and stuff. But we flipped it for years and when they hear it they say that is really dope. Some people can't quite handle it and they go off, Keyboards in punk rock, that sucks. Or white in black music oh that sucks. So that is just ignorance coming out.

RapNewsDirect: Do you see the Thug and Punks project as a natural evolution for rap music?

Ronnie King: I don't know, I can't say that it is a natural evolution for anything, all I can say is it is just the idea behind it has always been getting real guys together to record music regardless of what they do or who they are. That's the whole thing. Hey if Big Syke can do a song with the Offspring, then that means that Puff Daddy can do a song with Willie Nelson, ya know. Ya know what I mean. It's all about making the music. In the studio and what we do it's not clouded. We aren't sitting there thinking Oh man what we going to do, we going to make a song for the white people or the black people. We just get in there and put it all in the pot and we're brilliant enough people, writers and producers to be able to say Here man this is like a new sound.

RapNewsDirect: Well do you find that some rap artist are hesitant to work with punk artist or vice versa?

Ronnie King: Really, personally I don't see that at all. When I'm with the rappers their like dude I wanta fuck around with the rockers, and the rockers really do want ta fuck around with the rappers. So me personally I don't see that. In my world I don't see that at all. I see everybody wanting to get to each other. Lets make some music.

RapNewsDirect: The reason I asked is because street credibility is important to rappers and I was not sure if the street is ready for it.

Ronnie King: Well ya know what the coolest thing is about this Punk and Thugs deal is that everybody is street in their own worlds. Punk rockers are the street musicians of that world. The thugs are the rappers from that era, or that side of it. So basically it's two sides of the same coin.

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

RapNewsDirect: Ok, well I'm not real informed on punk music, so I'm not going ta try to front ya or play it off like I do or anything, but can you fill us in on this Punks and Thugs project and how your working with the Offspring. What can we expect from that?

Ronnie King: Well the Punks and Thugs is an evolving colaboration between real street punks and real street thugs. Everybody getting together like a friendly picnic and making music. The names and the faces are not all filled in yet, but everybody I've talked to on both sides of the specrum are very interested in doing music together. Their making it in a way that is not ment to be contraversial, it's not ment to be anything but like hey I want to get with this cat. When Pac was alive he wanted to do shit with Alanis Morrisette, he wanted to fuck around with No Doubt, it's like that's just how it is.

RapNewsDirect: So there's not a list of rappers that are like signed up or what ever, ready to go?

Ronnie King: Well we are getting the list together right now, the thing is that we're moving on it in a way that is natural, not one where we are trying to put this rapper with this punk band or this with that, ya know what I mean. We are going to let this whole deal play itself out naturally. So when I'm in the studio and I see somebody and I think Hey man heres a track, here's this and that, different interest are going to be played into it so right now the way we have been doing it is just let everything come naturally and that way it's not like we're trying to make some kind of planned out thing. And if you look into my history I've been doing it for 10 years so, this isn't something new we just decided to do to create contraversy or something.

RapNewsDirect: So is this going to be like an album?

Ronnie King: Ya know what, I have a vision of it being a record yea, and it also can be a touring group to. It could really be an event.

RapNewsDirect: Like a rock the Mic tour.

Ronnie King: Yea , or something like all these different brands of people and styles can get

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

together like that. Some people are going to like it, some people aren't , but from where it's starting and for where it's naturally going , all I can say right now is that everybody is interested in doing it.

RapNewsDirect: Well look at Ice-T, he bounced from rap to rock to rap.

Ronnie King: Body Count is still going out and playing shows. All I know is I can't tell ya when the record is coming out I don't know who is going to be on it but those on it are going to know and feel what we are doing.

RapNewsDirect: Well we really want ya to keep us up to date on this, and fill us in on the progress. You got me looking forward to this.

Ronnie King: Yea I think it is going to be a real natural event, and I can only thank the Outkast for coming out and moving the bar up a little bit more for this type of thing to be able to take place.

RapNewsDirect: I think the Outkasts show that it's time for a change, people are looking for something a lil different. You can hear Outkast at the mall, in the burbs and in the hood, seems everybody is bumping their stuff.

Ronnie King: Exactly, and let me tell ya, I spent 3 weeks with those cats up in atlanta at their studio, when we were recording Better Dayz, I talked to Andre and listened to some demo's and Bubba Sparxxx was up there. They got a thing up there where they aren't really worried about anybody. Their just making their music. It's like Let us make our music, if you like it you'll buy it, if you don't then you don't . The rest is just political, ya know.

RapNewsDirect: Well I think you won me over. I'll be watching the progress on this and we will want updates from ya to.

Interview With Ronnie King

Written by Westside ID91

Thursday, 23 September 2004 11:11 -

Ronnie King: Ok we will.

RapNewsDirect: I really want ta thank you for giving me some of your time, and your PR person for setting all this up. I really do appreciate it all

RonnieKing: Good , good, keep up the good work.