

Irv Gotti Surrenders To FBI

Written by Robert ID769

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The hip-hop label behind music superstars Ashanti and rap artist Ja Rule was part of a murderous criminal enterprise that protected its interstate crack and heroin operation with calculated street assassinations, federal authorities charged Wednesday.

Label head Irv "Gotti" Lorenzo and his brother Christopher surrendered to the FBI on money-laundering charges Wednesday as federal prosecutors unsealed an indictment seeking to confiscate all the assets of their label, The Inc.

Their childhood friend, Kenneth "Supreme" McGriff, one of New York's most notorious drug kingpins, was charged with murder, racketeering and other crimes that prosecutors said were intended to eliminate and intimidate potential witnesses.

He already is in prison on a relatively minor gun charge.

Prosecutors believe McGriff and the Lorenzos funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars in drug profits through The Inc., a chart-topping label owned partly by Island Def Jam, a Universal

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Music label. A Universal spokesman did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

Irv Gotti's lawyer, Gerald Lefcourt, said The Inc. formerly known as Murder Inc. is a legitimate business financed by cash from Island Def Jam.

"It's just unfortunate that this investigation has constantly been dragging (Gotti) through the mud," Lefcourt said. "Ultimately, he will be vindicated."

Recording in a studio dubbed "The Crackhouse," The Inc. has sold about 20 million records behind Ja Rule and Ashanti, who were not charged in the indictment. Ja Rule's current album, "R.U.L.E.," peaked at No. 7 on the Billboard chart, and Ashanti is now appearing in the movie "Coach Carter," which debuted atop the box office list two weeks ago.

McGriff's lawyer, Robert Simels, accused the government of pushing cooperating witnesses to falsely implicate the ultimate targets of the investigation.

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"I'll be curious to see which one of these creative geniuses have been able to weave a tale that the prosecutors want to hear," he said.

Federal agents began to close in on McGriff and the Lorenzos in recent months with arrests that netted Ja Rule's manager and a bookkeeper for The Inc. At least five other defendants, including associates of McGriff, already have been charged.

McGriff, 44, was founder of the Supreme Team, once one of the city's most violent drug crews. Investigators suspect that after he finished serving about nine years for drug conspiracy in 1997, he set about reviving his lucrative and deadly drug-dealing operation.

Cooperating witnesses have told investigators that McGriff admitted to the 2001 revenge slaying of up-and-coming rapper E-Money Bags. Prosecutors also believe he arranged the Baltimore killing one month later of a suspected informant in his drug organization. Another man also died in the Baltimore shooting.

The Inc. was founded as Murder Inc. in 1997. Gotti changed his label's name last year to deflect negative publicity from the investigation.

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