

How did you begin working with Michael Jackson?

Michael and his people reached out to me way before the *Dangerous* album. I would've been on the *Bad* album had Gene Griffin not messed it up. [laughs] I would've definitely been on the *Bad* album. Gene Griffin didn't want me to be close to Michael because he felt like Michael would've stolen me from him. He didn't want me to be in the same room with Michael. He told Michael and his people that he needed to be in the room with me at all times, just like he did when I worked with Boy George. He was always in the room because he felt like Boy George would've stolen me to be his producer and convince me to be his producer. He was very insecure and protective of me. A lot of people knew back then that I was very vulnerable, because they knew I was with a street, gangster guy. They felt like he was taking my money and different things like that. That is why I didn't get a chance to be on the *Bad* album with Michael. At that time, Gene was taking a lot of my album credits. He didn't write any of the music that his name is on. His name is on records I produced for Guy, Al B. Sure!, Bobby Brown, and all the records I've done, he's taken half of my credit and percentage. But I still prevailed and did all the things I loved to do, and I got my music out there.

What were some of your more memorable collaborations from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s?

Definitely Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Billy Ocean, Guy, Keith Sweat, Johnny Kemp—he was my first one-take artist. We did "Just Got Paid" in one take. Of course, Blackstreet, Stephanie Mills, Whitney Houston, Bobby Brown, and Kool Moe Dee. The whole [debut] album I worked with Kool Moe Dee on, we did it all in London, England, at Battery Studios.

How did your collaboration with the duo Classical Two come to fruition?

Classical Two were two guys who used to hang out at the Rooftop. My guys noticed them and signed them because they were street guys who wanted to get their beat on. I started working on their record, and we were able to get it out there.

It seems like the Rooftop Skating Rink was the place to be back in the day.

Yes, it was. Rooftop was actually the Uptown Records. That's another story.

I'll definitely reveal that at another time. That is how the name came to be, because everyone came uptown.

For you?

Yes. There was no uptown in Queens, Brooklyn, or anywhere else for the matter. There is only one uptown in New York City. I have twenty-five years of true stories to tell, and there are stories that involved everyone I've worked with. They can all write a book, but I can write a bible.

You discovered the production duo the Neptunes at a high-school talent show. What did you see in them at that age that made you want to work with them?

They were collectively and individually talented. They were all super talented in what they knew and did. They were musically, creatively, and visually talented. Pharrell [Williams] said he didn't know how he won. He won because his "big brother" saw the talent and not the concept. A lot of the people out here are conceptually chosen. The Neptunes weren't conceptually chosen. They were chosen because of their talent. They didn't

have a concept when they won the "Teddy Riley future recording talent show." They didn't go up there and sing "I Will Always Love You" or the Luther Vandross song that always wins the Apollo. They didn't do that. They went up there and did what they did. Chad [Hugo] was the DJ, then got on the keyboards, and then played saxophone, and Pharrell was coming up with concepts on the spot and just freestylin'. That's what I saw. I saw a bunch of freestyle, non-conceptual guys who had so much talent. And all I wanted to do was show them the vision, which I've done and put it into perspective and let them take it from there.

As one of the most important producers of the past twenty-five years, can you put into words your influence on music and popular culture?

I don't know if I can put that into words, because I'm not finished yet. The party is not over. ○

Chris Williams writes about pop culture for various online and print publications. He is based in Virginia. Barry Michael Cooper's groundbreaking article "Teddy Riley's New Jack Swing: Harlem Gangster Raised a Genius" (Village Voice, October 1987) was an invaluable resource while writing this article.



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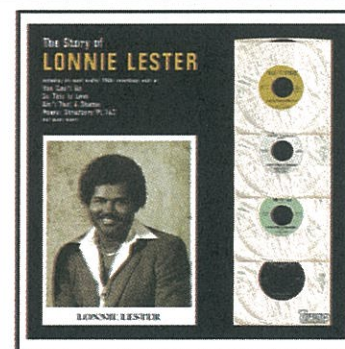


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