

## The Downfall of Tha Inc

Written by Keith ID463

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The Inc, (formally Murder Inc); one of New York's biggest and most profitable record labels is being rocked by a now-escalating federal probe into drugs, murder and money laundering in the rap industry.

At the center of the investigation are two men who came out of the streets of southeastern Queens.

Kenneth (Supreme) McGriff, a drug baron who helped fuel the deadly crack epidemic of the 1980s, was a king of the streets who became a model for gang-sta rappers.

Irving (Irv Gotti) Lorenzo founded the Murder Inc. record label, promoting and producing music that parlayed the thug life into a multimillion-dollar business that set trends in popular culture for youth across America.

Now the powerful label that gave the two fortune and infamy is being chipped away by the investigation, and indictments are looming for them, sources say.

Prosecutors say McGriff funneled drug money through Murder Inc. At least one informer has told the feds that McGriff is the true owner of the record label.

In the past month, the four-year probe gained momentum as authorities indicted four people, working their way up both sides of the case.

A Queens couple was charged with a killing that law enforcement sources say was ordered by McGriff, and an accountant and a business manager who worked for Lorenzo's label were accused of white-collar crimes involving \$1 million in alleged drug trafficking cash.

At the same time, Murder Inc., which Lorenzo since has renamed to the less sinister-sounding The Inc., saw its top acts, Ja Rule and Ashanti, continue a string of hits.

Rapper Ja Rule's "R.U.L.E." debuted at No. 7 earlier this month, fueled by the Billboard Hot 100 hit "Wonderful," featuring R. Kelly and Ashanti. It marked Ja Rule's eighth top 10 hit and Ashanti's 10th.

In the acknowledgments on the album, Ja Rule refers to McGriff by his street name: ""Preme, I'm sittin" under the tree and that apple's about to fall in my lap. ... Hold ya head. ... We'll see U

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soon."

"I don't know what's coming, but I do know that money my client used to start his business was legitimate," said lawyer Gerald Lefcourt, who represents Lorenzo.

McGriff's attorney, the usually responsive Robert Simels, did not return numerous calls. But in the past, he has said his client had only limited, legitimate involvement with Murder Inc. and that authorities are targeting McGriff because of his notoriety.

The case began with an ex-con's alleged renewal of his criminal career and reached to the top of the music industry. The Inc. has sold more than 14 million CDs. It is a subsidiary of Universal Music Group, the largest music company in the world.

The investigation is being spearheaded by the Brooklyn federal prosecutor and includes agents from the Internal Revenue Service; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the FBI, and city cops.

So far, the indictments mirror the fierce, drug-fueled aspect of gangsta rap, as well as the lucrative corporate side.

Two weeks ago, McGriff associates Dennis (Divine) -Crosby, 38, and Nicole Brown, 42, were indicted in the slaying of Eric Smith, a rapper known as E-Moneybags, who was shot dead in July 2001 in Queens Village. The triggermen fired some three dozen shots into Smith's Lincoln Navigator.

Crosby and Brown allegedly videotaped Smith before the killing, which sources say was in retaliation for the shooting of a McGriff crony. The tape was found at a Baltimore apartment used by McGriff, the sources say.

The suspects are eligible for the death penalty for carrying out the hit, a Brooklyn federal prosecutor said at their court appearance. But Brown's attorney, Jeremy Orden, said, "There's no way the federal government is going to seek the death penalty."

Brown and Crosby also were charged with participating in a drug trafficking enterprise involving kilos of heroin and cocaine.

A day earlier, Ron (Gutta) Robinson, 29, manager for Ja Rule, was arrested outside The Inc.'s midtown office on an indictment charging he conspired with others at the label to launder more than \$1 million in drug proceeds.

Robinson appeared nervous and upset at his arraignment. His live-in girlfriend signed the \$500,000 bond at his first appearance. The next day, he returned with his parents, and they co-signed the bond as well.

Robinson, the son of a federal inspector and a social worker, lives in Stony Point, Rockland County. In the mid-'90s, though, he lived in Hollis, Queens, ground zero of gangsta rap and the

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boyhood home of Lorenzo and Ja Rule.

A source close to the case said the allegations against Robinson are surprising: "He represents a great client. I can't imagine he would need to launder drug money for anybody."

Nine days earlier, an accountant for The Inc., Cynthia Brent, 39, of Maplewood, N.J., was indicted on charges of conspiring to conduct improper financial transactions, involving drug cash, for the purpose of evading taxes.

Brent appeared shaken and tearfully embraced her husband and her father-in-law after they signed a \$250,000 bond to gain her release Nov. 8. When she left court, Brent tried to prevent photographers from snapping her picture, pulling down a cap on her head and obscuring most of her face with her coat collar.

Sources familiar with the investigation said she and Robinson are under pressure to cooperate against Lorenzo and McGriff; reports the [NY Daily](#) .

McGriff and Lorenzo's story resembles the script of a Jimmy Cagney movie: two guys from the neighborhood - one a criminal and the other a legitimate success - whose lives stay entwined. McGriff, 44, was an inspiration for Queens rappers who saw him as a larger-than-life figure, having run the Supreme Team drug organization in the 1980s that earned \$10 million a year. He went to prison for 10 years.

Lorenzo, 34, meanwhile, worked his way up from a deejay in neighborhood parks to an impresario who was given his own label after bringing successful local talent to Island Def Jam Records. Lorenzo has maintained that McGriff is just an old friend whom he was trying to help.

Released from prison in 1997, McGriff got involved in the rap industry, producing a movie, "Crime Partners," partly funded by Lorenzo, and providing "security" for Murder Inc. According to court papers, however, he provided menace and muscle and was paid thousands of dollars and given hotel stays and other perks.

Feds say he still ran a drug organization in southeastern Queens and in Baltimore and allegedly ordered eight killings. Federal agents began scrutinizing him in 1999, on suspicion of drug dealing and for firing guns at a target range in Maryland.

He was convicted of federal weapons possession in Baltimore and sentenced to 37 months in prison in June 2003.

Also, McGriff was arrested by New York cops in July 2001 near a Harlem marijuana spot, a .40-caliber Glock pistol in his waistband and \$11,000 in his pockets. He pleaded guilty to gun possession.

The gun was traced by ATF agents to Las Vegas, where it was legally purchased in 2000 by Rory Domingo Lorenzo, a brother of Irving Lorenzo.

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Local and federal authorities then intensified their probe of ties between McGriff and Lorenzo and zeroed in on the Murder Inc. link.

On Nov. 4, McGriff appeared in Manhattan Supreme Court to be sentenced on the 2001 gun charge. Assistant District Attorney Anthony Capozzolo called McGriff "a remorseless criminal" and asked that his five-year sentence be consecutive to the 37-month term McGriff already is serving for the Maryland gun case.

Justice Michael Correiro said the plea deal bound him to sentence McGriff concurrently. McGriff, with pale green eyes, shorter and slighter than expected for a criminal legend, smiled but politely declined to comment.

Detectives fastened leg shackles and handcuffs on the man who prosecutors say held keys to Murder Inc.'s midtown office and escorted him out of the courthouse for the trip back to Gilmer Federal Correctional Institution in the remote mountains of West Virginia.

On the strength of a string of top 10 hits from artists Ja Rule and Ashanti (r.) - who between them have 18 - the powerful record label The Inc. has grown into a multimillion-dollar success story.