

LIL WAYNE - THA CARTER II

Although there has been much debate on the subject of who is or who isn't the "King of the South," Lil Wayne isn't worried about all the fuss as to who really lays claim to the title. As a veteran rap star, budding entrepreneur, and young scholar studying psychology at the University of Houston, Wayne's experience in the rap game, coupled with his amazing growth as an individual has placed him in a position only a handful of people in this industry reach.

"I've been in this game for thirteen years, so I'm not concerned with having to prove myself," Wayne says. "I don't have to prove anything, because my growth as a rapper and as a lyricist can be heard in my music." Indeed, with the release of his fifth solo album *Tha Carter II*, it's obvious Dwayne Carter AKA "Weezy" is a top-notch rapper whose lyrics and artistic vision tower over the competition.

Wayne, 23, was born and raised in New Orleans' notorious 17th Ward in a neighborhood called Hollygrove. As a child, the aspiring rapper listened to and idolized early Cash Money recording artists like Pimp Daddy and UNLV, who he cites as some of his early influences. A few years later, Wayne met Cash Money CEOs Ronald "Suga Slim" and Bryan "Baby" Williams (The Birdman) who would take him under their wings and help mold him into a prolific and profound artist. In 1995 at the age of 12, Wayne made his debut on Cash Money recording artist B.G.'s album, *True Story*.

In 1997, the rap prodigy, along with Juvenile, Young Turk, and B.G. formed the New Orleans' super-group the Hot Boys and dropped their seminal debut CD *Get It How You Live*. The record's independent success garnered the young teenager legions of fans throughout the South and Midwest. He further distinguished himself as the MC to watch on the Hot Boys' platinum selling Universal debut *Guerilla Warfare* (1998) followed by 2003's *Let Em Burn*. In 2000, the group went on to receive a Source Award for "Group of the Year."

At age sixteen, Wayne launched his solo career with the release of the platinum selling *Tha Block Is Hot* (1999), where he earned a 1999 Source Award nomination for "Best New Artist." Clever wordplay, combined with his mature street savvy made the CD one of the year's most compelling albums. The young prodigy's subsequent albums, *Lights Out* (2000), *500 Degreez* (2002) and 2004's *Tha Carter* further solidified Lil Wayne's reputation as one of the South's finest lyricists, but it was *Tha Carter* that finally forced rap fans beyond the South to recognize what die-hard "Weezy" fans knew all along: Lil Wayne was a hip hop force to be reckoned with.

As the newest venture on Lil Wayne's imprint, Young Money Entertainment via Cash Money/Universal Records, *Tha Carter II* is bound to thrill those who have watched this former Hot Boy mature since his first appearance on *True Story*. "Everyday I experience new things, and it's these experiences I express creatively in my songs." Lil Wayne, a perfectionist in the lab, has never been one to waste time. In fact, he has been known to complete five songs in a day. "I could do an entire album in a week," he brags, "But *Tha*

Carter II took me a little longer – a month,” he deadpans. “I wanted to make sure everything was right.”

Approaching Tha Carter II with the skills of a scientist, Lil Wayne dug through the vaults of his own material in order to analyze his distinct style. "Listening to the past few albums, I wanted to change it up slightly." What fans will be hearing on Tha Carter II is a revised and refreshed Lil Wayne, from the scorching first single "Fireman," produced by newcomers Doe Boys, where Wayne drops blazing lyrics, to his second single "Grown Man," featuring Young Money Record's protégé Curren\$y, where he comes at you hard, switching up both vocal tone and flow.

Wayne is no longer the young cocky boy from the South content with just spitting boastful rhymes. Aside from fans, fellow artists have also recognized his maturation as a well rounded musician. Consequently, Wayne's poetic word play has earned him featured collaborations on Destiny's Child's smash hit "Soldier" as well as a guest appearance on Avant's single "You Know What." These collaborations have exposed the gifted artist to a broader audience, demonstrating that his talent knows no boundaries. Wayne's flow and choice of subject matter have also become more versatile. "Receipt" is one song that stands out to him, "Because it's about love, and I've never done a love song before."

Lil Wayne headed up production on Tha Carter II alongside other new up and coming producers. "Really, I listen to every beat that comes to the office, and I receive a lot of stuff. If I like it, I call them and use it." Case in point, while Wayne was working in New York, he bumped into the Pop/R&B singer Thicke. "I'd always rhymed over his song, 'Oh Shooter,' so when I ran into him, I told him I wanted to work with him and use the song, he was cool with it." The result is the hauntingly laid-back bluesy, "Shooter." With lyrics rich with clever metaphors ("So many doubt cuz I come from the south/But when I open up my mouth, all the bullets come out..."), combined with a complex rhyme scheme, Wayne transforms the song into an artful assault on regionalism in hip-hop ("It's outrageous/You know how sick you make us/I wanna throw up like chip in Vegas/But this is Southern, face it/If this is too simple then y'all don't get the basics").

The new CD also features cameos from comrades in rhyme Slim Thug, Kurupt and others. Lil Wayne even pays homage to aural hero Rakim on the stunning "I'm A Dboy" featuring Birdman. "Rakim is one of the greatest MCs ever," Wayne says. "By using the 'Paid in Full' beat on "I'm A Dboy," I'm thanking him for his contributions to the rap genre."

With Tha Carter II, Lil Wayne proves himself more than a contender to the throne, because this winner is already wearing the crown.