

LL COOL J

LL is like a razor! He is as sharp as it gets. All of the hip-hoppers are, man. These cats are incredible! And they're smart!

I met LL when he was 15 at Def Jam, in the very early days of the label's beginnings. My son had been a star breakdancer in Sweden, and I wanted to take him over to Def Jam to meet everyone. The jury was still out on hip-hop at that time. But LL was the first rapper that showed curiosity about where hip-hop fit into the history of black music.

The first time we met, LL asked me, "Mr. Jones, what do the musicians and the singers think of us?" thereby acknowledging that [rappers] were a third, separate category of performer. To be only 15 and have that type of awareness really knocked me out. LL is way beyond his years, and his career is still thriving more than 25 years later.

My passion is for young musicians to understand their roots, and for rappers to learn about the imbongi (the praise shouters from South Africa that Nelson Mandela used in his inauguration) and the griots (the oral historians that Alex Haley focused on in *Roots*). LL has that type of self-awareness, it's why I chose him to write the rap bridge on the new "We Are the World: 25 for Haiti." I was out with [Henry] Mancini one day, and we went down to an exhibit of a lot of South African stuff. I saw this carved statue and this little sucker says, "I wanna go home with *you*." It was like, "I'm yours and you're mine." So that was it. He was instantly "The Dude." Business had gotten bad for a South African farmer, so he got all of his workers into sculpture. One of his workers, named Josiah, was the one who created "The Dude." And it just *stuck*.

That was in 1980, the year we recorded the album, *The Dude*. Ten years later, I'm on the floor of Record One telling the rappers this story and explaining that "The Dude" is a metaphor for the black wisdom of the street and the history of black knowledge and all that stuff—that he's very symbolic. And they got it, man. They really did. I didn't tell any of them that they couldn't use profanity or talk about bitches, and hos, and all that. I didn't say a word about it. They just said, "Let's get together tomorrow at 3:00." I said, "What are you gonna do, talk?" And

they come right back with, “No, to record.” And they did, man. They didn’t play. They came and *knocked it out*.

On Q

LL Cool J

First time I worked with Mr. Jones, interestingly enough, wasn’t on music. It was on *In The House*, a sitcom that aired in the late ’90s. Mr. Jones was the executive producer along with David Salzman, and he actually gave me my first television show.

Mr. Jones taught me a lot about class and how to conduct myself as a businessman. He also reinforced the importance of music as an art form. I’m very grateful for what I’ve been able to accomplish in music, but when I look at what Quincy Jones has accomplished, it makes me want to dig deeper. When you see his collection of 27 Grammys and the *Thriller* plaque with 50 Platinum records and all of the accolades that he has throughout his home, it’s *really* inspiring.

When I did “It’s Time for War” on my *Exit 13* album, I used a lot of classical instrumentation. I got composers to help, and live strings, and musicians and stuff—I was reaching a little higher and was definitely trying to create something that was a little bigger and more sophisticated. That’s inspired by the ways I’ve seen Mr. Jones produce records.

I think of Quincy Jones as the best and most accomplished producer in the world. He is someone who transcends the whole idea that your relevancy as an artist is based on your last hit record. He has been involved in a lot of other things for the past few years, but when it came time to do the second *We Are the World*, to benefit Haitian relief, it was only Mr. Jones who could pull that off. Who else could come back and raise \$100 million for something like that. He just operates at another level. It was amazing, and I was superhonored to be part of it. Mr.



Jones asked me to write the rap bridge, so I tried to write something that was really “high road.” He agreed with the direction and wanted it a certain way. He came up with this idea to do a Greek chorus, so we stacked the vocals a *lot* of times—even many more than the dozen or so that usually make up the Greek chorus. He was a joy to work with, and I was humbled to be part of it. I just kept my mouth shut, wrote my lyrics, delivered my performance, and let him do the rest.

He let me go for it, but one thing is for sure about Mr. Jones: he’s going to be totally honest. What he didn’t want was for me to be so focused on trying to make it “street” that I missed the message. It was about really speaking from the heart and saying something that was relevant to *We Are the World*. Once I had his approval, I went with it. I’m very happy I did, because the song has obviously done extremely well and raised a lot of money *and* awareness for the people of Haiti. I always like to be involved in anything he’s doing, and when he calls on me I’ll always try to be there for him. He’s a real good guy; I have a *lot* of respect for him.

I recently did the remake of “Secret Garden” for his new album, *Soul Bossa Nostra*. He wasn’t there when I recorded my part, but he called in on the speakerphone and told me exactly what he wanted and how he wanted it. He was very clear in his communication about what he was looking for—that’s an executive producer’s job. When the track was done, it was great.

Mr. Jones’s son, QD3, has produced quite a few songs for me. One song we did together in the ’90s was called “Back Seat of My Jeep.” It did really well and was a big underground song. He’s a very talented producer, too.

To me, Quincy Jones is “Mr. Jones” because I respect him so much. It’s funny, because he’s all, “Call me Quincy, man!” I’m not trying to make him feel old; I’m just trying to figure it out. So whenever I’m not around him I call him Mr. Jones, and then when I’m around him I’ll call him Quincy if he insists. I spent a lot of time around him when I was coming up, and I learned a lot from him just by how he carries himself and how he lives his life.

I think the most important thing I’ve learned from him is to keep my attitude right. He has a free spirit and good energy. He is an excellent model of how to treat people with kindness and respect. He’s just a good guy. I also learned from him that dreams don’t have deadlines. One thing about



Mr. Jones is that, no matter what, he always seems to come up with something really interesting to work on, whether it's a global cause or a project that people care about. I find that very encouraging because I'm in the hip-hop industry where your relevance is based on whether or not you're on the radio. But Quincy's relevance is based on his body of work; he has definitely encouraged me. He has made me believe that, with the right focus, it's still possible for me to go on and do more great albums in the future.

Mr. Jones taught me to always make sure there's room for the vocal track. The vocal needs to have its own place where other frequencies aren't encroaching on it—it needs to have space to *live*. And, I learned about creating an exposed line that's the foundation of the song. Everything else hangs off that line, musically *and* sonically.

Another great thing that Mr. Jones taught me was about goose bumps in the studio and how they're God's divining rod. When you hear your music and it gives you goose bumps, you know the track is right; you know that it's time to leave it alone. Any time I've had that happen to me, it's worked out to be accurate. I did a song called "No Crew Is Superior" that's used on *NCIS: Los Angeles*. When I recorded it, I got that feeling. When it was released, it was received well on the Internet, but download sales weren't that great. But when the show came out, it did *really* well. No one can predict the future, but thus far, those goose bumps have turned out to be accurate for me. It almost gives you a prescient type of power.

Quincy Jones is eternally youthful. *Young* is a chronological condition, but *youthful* is a psychological, psycho-emotional condition. He's always youthful and always open. I have a lot of love for Mr. Jones.

FRANK SINATRA and Lena Horne: The One That Got Away

When you like to push the envelope, you learn the importance of giving everything your best effort, trusting that, if your plans are meant to be, everything will work out. You also have to realize that, even when you've given your best effort, if it's not meant to be,



there's nothing you can do to force the issue.

Frank was very excited about an idea I had for an album featuring Lena Horne and him in 1983. I [had] produced an album for Lena called *The Lady and Her Music* in 1981. It was on my label, Qwest Records, and was one of the biggest albums she ever did. We had recorded her show on Broadway, and that record was on fire—it won two Grammys! So, we already had her audience's attention, and they would have

been very interested in this new project!

It was an amazingly ambitious plan that would have resulted in a wonderful 3-disc album full of solos and duets, starring two of the all-time greatest singers, along with many of the best musicians and stars the industry has ever seen—it was going to be spectacular! A lot of heart and soul went into the planning of this project, which would have resulted in an ultra-deluxe album. [It was my] vision to record an extravagant collection of music with an amazing all-star band, including Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Carter, Jerry Mulligan, Ray Brown, Toots Thielemans, George Benson, Herbie Hancock, Michael Jackson, and more!

I had scheduled day and night recording sessions at A&M studios, in Hollywood, during the week of the Grammy Telecast. The studio was booked for two days before the Grammys and three days after. It was a plan you cannot believe; it would have been a dream album! We had selected the songs, scheduled the musicians, booked the studio, the arrangements were being written, and everything was in motion. We were swapping some of the all-time best songs back and forth between Frank and Lena to get just the right ones for each of them. If I had Lena slated to sing "Stormy Weather," but she didn't feel as comfortable with that song, I'd just say, "Well then, we'll let Frank sing that and you can sing "One for the Road."

I worked so hard on that plan! To me, this was the ultimate canvas for these two fantastic vocalists. All I had left to do was to get Frank and Lena together to



talk through the material before we started tracking in the studio.

That's where the project got caught up in the swell of bad timing ... First, Don Costa, Sinatra's good friend and conductor, died, delaying the meeting. Then Horne had vocal problems. Then Sinatra had back-to-back gigs in Atlantic City and Vegas. And by the time the two next found time in their schedules to talk, they'd both lost the momentum they needed to carry them through the week's worth of sessions the album would've taken. Still, setting aside that album was a great personal disappointment to everyone involved and, indeed, to the music world as a whole.

HANK CATTANEO: "Frank never got involved in choosing his partners for the Duets recordings except with Ella Fitzgerald; that was the only recommendation he made. He did say it would be great to get Ella. We tried, but unfortunately she was too ill by that time." ...

FRANK SINATRA: "We were ready to do the album, and she [Lena] had a vocal problem—a nodule on her vocal cord. Quincy Jones tried several times to get it back on track, but consequently we didn't do the project. It was quite an undertaking—it was gonna be three albums."

—from *The Sinatra Treasures* by Charles Pignone
(Bulfinch Press, 2004)

We were very excited about this project and it was definitely one of the biggest disappointments of my life that we couldn't get it together. Shortly thereafter, I produced *L.A. Is My Lady* for Frank, which was great, but I always regretted letting Frank and Lena's album get away. The important conclusion to this entire event, though, is that we all remained great friends through everything! As far back as 1961, Lena, along with Lenny Hayton, graciously wrote the liner notes for *Quintessence*, not to mention that it was also thanks to Lena that I got my first scoring job for *The Pawnbroker* in 1963. That was something I'd dreamed about since I was 15! And, Frank and I remained as close as brothers for the duration.