

Tears of a Hip-Hop Clown

First, Scott Storch blew up, becoming the biggest—and brashest—producer in hip-hop. Then he blew through \$30 million in a coke-fueled bender.

STANDING IN A DIMLY LIT ROOM INSIDE MIAMI'S HIT FACTORY STUDIOS, SCOTT STORCH bobs his head to a tinny beat looping at jackhammer volume. "Play that again," the producer tells his engineer, who is seated at a Mac G5 desktop. Storch grimaces. He grabs the mouse and scrolls through a seemingly endless list of tracks. "No. That isn't right." ¶ It's not just the beats that are amiss: For years, the hit-making producer was never seen without his over-size, oh-my-God-what-a-douchebag aviators, but today you can see his eyes. In his glory days, Storch would wear his sunglasses as he flaunted his fleet of 20 luxury cars, 18,000-square-foot mansion, and yacht; when he had Kim Kardashian or Paris Hilton or Lil' Kim on his arm; when he was high-fiving hard-partying bros like celebutard Brandon "Greasy Bear" Davis; when he rolled up to the MTV Video Music Awards. It was great theater: the shlubby wigga bathed in diamonds and flashbulbs, his bling-era excess reflected in the shades. ¶ But now his eyes look tired and sad and very bloodshot. In the course of a three-year Tony Montana-esque cocaine bender, Storch hoovered his way through \$30 million before filing for bankruptcy and enter-

ing rehab early this year. Now 35, he's back in the studio 10 hours a day, trying to recapture his mojo. But where he used to work with Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and Justin Timberlake, he's now crafting beats for Gucci Mane, an up-and-coming Atlanta hip-hop artist best known for beating a murder rap in 2006. As Gucci tries to match rhymes to the music, Storch, wearing faded jeans, white sneakers, and a pink T-shirt—a Jacob the Jeweler diamond watch his lone vestige of bling—pulls a Ziploc bag of weed from his pocket and begins rolling a joint on a nearby speaker.

"Yo, is that that California shit?" Gucci asks. "That shit fucked me up last night."

CRASH PAD: With his mansion in foreclosure, Storch stays at a friend's or the Fontainebleau hotel (below).



Storch nods and gives a forced smile. A few minutes later, when Gucci turns his attention to a song called “911,” Storch decides he needs another spliff. The instrumental tracks pulsing from the speakers are vintage Storch—staccato rhythms, sinister keyboard flourishes—but maybe too much so: The overall effect is a little dated, a little tired. Storch announces he’s hungry, then struggles to explain his pizza order to a studio employee: “No, that’s two cheese slices with ricotta, not two ricotta slices.”

He fishes out his money clip, which holds nearly a grand in cash, and makes a show of peeling off a pair of \$20 bills to cover orders for himself and the crew in the studio suite. It’s a conspicuous display, but no one seems to notice, and soon Storch grabs a two-foot bong and lights a bowl. The hit makes him cough so hard he has to step out into the sultry Miami night to get some air.

of studio work, and chose the beat prodigy to produce the single “Still D.R.E.,” which became a hit. With Dre’s blessing, Storch set up shop, founding Tuff Jew Productions, and the work started pouring in. In short order, he turned out some of the biggest hits of the early and mid-2000s: Chris Brown’s “Run It!,” 50 Cent’s “Candy Shop,” Beyoncé’s “Me, Myself and I,” and others. And Storch’s beats, which he sold for \$100,000 apiece, were ubiquitous. He was on every major pop, R&B, and hip-hop artist’s speed dial. He quickly amassed a fortune of more than \$70 million, and he couldn’t spend it fast enough. “It was out of control,” he says. “I was clubbing, drunk, and had more money than I knew what to do with.”

At a party in Los Angeles in 2005, Storch was yanked into a bathroom by a friend—he won’t say who—and given a line of cocaine. Almost immediately, he was addicted, using an eight-ball a day, often more, and support-

that late-night shit anymore,” he says. “It completely fucks up my routine. If it’s just me, I’m out of the studio by 11.” He’s sitting behind a glass desk in a beachside penthouse that belongs to Adam Linder, an investment banker who cashed out before the crash. Storch sometimes stays with Linder—one of the few friends who stuck by him through his coke addiction—bunking in the bedroom next to that of Linder’s 6-year-old son. Other times, he sleeps at the Fontaine-bleau hotel. But Storch can no longer be found at his gaudy Greco-Roman mansion on Palm Island. “It’s a drug den—too big, too much space,” Storch says. There’s also the fact that the house is in foreclosure, and though Storch and those around him stress that he still has the keys and is trying to sell it (not that he has a choice—in addition to the \$7 million mortgage, he reportedly owes \$500,000 in property taxes), he is essentially homeless.

medicinal-grade weed, onto the table. “Sure, it was fun. But the thing is, I didn’t make one good bit of music when I was high on coke. Not one bit.” He shakes his head and leaves the room. Twenty minutes later, he joins Linder in the lounge area of the condo, and reclines on a couch as Linder racks up a game of pool. Storch and Linder have an easy, needling repartee, like a nebbishy, hip-hop version of Vinny Chase and Johnny Drama.

“Where’d you go?” Linder asks.

“Downstairs to get something to eat,” Storch answers.

Linder: “Better not have been my wife.”

After a bong hit, Storch loosens up a bit and the conversation turns to his sexual conquests. Tops among them? “Kim Kardashian—she was amazing,” he says. (She denies she and Storch had sex.)

“Dude, she really is so fucking hot,” Linder affirms from the pool table.

But there were others, lots of them. “Three or four at once. I made Wilt Chamberlain look like an angel,” he says, his face darkening. “I feel bad about that—being a pig. You meet a lot of good people, people that aren’t as fucked up as you, and you manipulate them and take advantage of them.”

The words hang in the air like the haze from the bong—today they’re a regret, but for years they were his credo. Lost in his string of successes was the fact that musicians rarely wanted Storch’s Midas touch more than once. Christina Aguilera wrote the song “F.U.S.S.,” an acronym for “Fuck you, Scott Storch,” after he made what she thought were outrageous travel demands for his entourage. Storch got into a feud with South Florida’s other hip-hop impresario, Timbaland, over credits on Justin Timberlake’s “Cry Me a River,” and received a lyrical bitch slap from Timbaland. Storch seems contrite, but he’s also angry over how he’s been portrayed. His financial collapse has been chronicled with the sort of schadenfreude usually reserved for hedge-fund managers. He has been labeled a dead-beat dad (he’s the father of two sons—and a warrant was issued for his arrest after he failed to show at a child-support hearing in June, though his attorney says the matter has been resolved) and a car thief. “There’s some chick at the *Miami Herald* that has it in for me,” Storch says. He points to the hulabaloo over a \$250,000 Bentley he gave Lil’

Kim. In April, Storch was charged with grand theft auto after failing to make payments. According to Storch, he leased the car for Kim and she was supposed to return it but did not. The charge was later dismissed.

“This fucking guy,” says Linder, gesturing toward Storch with a pool cue, “tries to do the right thing and nobody bothers to contact him to get the right story.”

It’s a touching dude moment, one buddy defending the honor of another. Back in the day, Storch was surrounded by five assistants who bowed to his every demand but few real friends. There’s billionaire oil heir Brandon Davis. After a long night of partying at Storch’s Palm Island spread, Davis, whom Storch considered a close friend, stole one of

he filed for bankruptcy.

While Storch is pushing his comeback story on anyone who’ll listen—he’s shot a pilot for the de rigueur reality program—he hasn’t exactly been welcomed back by the music industry. “I’ve been bending arms,” Jackson says. “The stuff he was doing right out of rehab wasn’t impressive.” But Jackson says that Storch is starting to regain his touch, pointing to his recent work with Chris Brown in Orlando. “I had to beg Chris’ manager,” Jackson says, “but the shit is strong.”

“People have too short a memory,” Storch says, referring to his hit-making prowess. For now, he is taking spot producer gigs when he can get them: a track with Jennifer



THE NOTORIOUS P.I.G.: (Clockwise from top left) Storch with Paris Hilton; with Kanye West; flashing bling; with Lindsay Lohan in his Bugatti; with Fat Joe and Lil Wayne; with Kim Kardashian; at his Palm Island mansion; with Lil’ Kim; with Brandon Davis, Hilton, and Nicky Hilton; at Diddy’s White Party in Saint-Tropez.

IF STORCH’S FALL WAS FAST AND FURIOUS, his rise was only slightly less so. Born on Long Island and raised in Philadelphia and South Florida, he tasted success early, playing keyboards for the Roots as a teenager in the early nineties. He hated touring, so he made the move to the studio, where he had a preternatural ability to come up with intricate, memorable beats. Storch, who grew up idolizing Gershwin and 2 Live Crew, eschewed sampling and instead composed each rhythmic phrase himself. After he contributed to tracks by Busta Rhymes and the rapper Noreaga, his friend Eve introduced him to Dr. Dre. Dre tutored Storch on the finer points

ing a group of 10 or 12 hangers-on who had become his new best friends. They partied at his \$10 million mansion on Miami’s Palm Island and blew rails on his \$20 million 117-foot yacht, the *Tiffany*. Whenever they got tired of South Beach, a Gulfstream jet was on call. “We’d be at a club and I’d decide to take everyone to Las Vegas,” he says. “Do more coke, fuck a bunch of girls. Be up for two days and decide at 11 in the morning to go buy a Rolls-Royce. I probably bought 10 cars when I was high.”

THE DAY AFTER HIS SESSION WITH GUCCI, WHICH ended at 6:30 A.M., Storch is spent. “I can’t do

“I was burning through about \$250,000 a month, mostly on partying,” he says, his voice low and measured. “I was spending money I had no business spending.” And his coke-fueled sense of invincibility had him believing he couldn’t fail as a star-maker; he became convinced he could make hit records for his onetime girlfriend Hilton and the unlikeliest of pop divas, Brooke Hogan. The results were disasters, and made Storch a punch line. “I was doing blow 24-7. It was out of control,” he says. “I love Brooke, but I did that shit because her father was putting all sorts of pressure on me.” He tosses a bag of Blackberry Kush, some of California’s finest



BUZZ CUT: Storch has finally kicked the coke habit that bankrupted him and now relies solely on weed.

Storch’s \$100,000 diamond-studded watches. Storch called Davis and told him he had evidence of the theft on his security cameras; then, says Storch, Davis broke into tears and begged Storch not to turn him in. He didn’t. But the truth is that a coke-addled Storch was not easy to be around. “People tell me they couldn’t talk to me when I was high,” Storch says. “I was uninterested in anything. My attention span was like two seconds.” Eventually, broke and alone, Storch reached out to his manager, Derek Jackson, who convinced him he needed help. In April, Storch checked into an intensive inpatient rehab program in Hollywood, Florida, and in May

Hudson here, two cuts for Usher there. And he’s hustling: He says he had a call with Alicia Keys—though his manager seemed not to know about it—and the night of the Gucci session at the Hit Factory, he passed a CD to Nelly Furtado’s manager, who was in a nearby studio. It’s a far cry from the days when superstars begged him to serve up his magic beats. “I’ve got to prove myself to the people that write checks,” Storch says, as he steps onto Linder’s balcony and stares at the Atlantic 35 stories below. It’s gray and overcast, but he slips on his white sunglasses anyway. “People will see that everything is intact.” ■