

# Thirteen Years After B.I.G.

Thirteen years ago Christopher "B.I.G." Wallace was killed in a drive-by shooting that remains unsolved. A fast ride of three years from the time he released his first album *Ready To Die* in 1994 until his death in 1997 made him a hip-hop icon. He is forever remembered for becoming the King of New York in rap circles from reestablishing a respect of his hometown after the rise of West Coast royalty NWA, Dr.Dre and Snoop Dogg. Sean Combs molded and marketed Biggie's sound into a major part of the Bad Boy Renaissance that included Mary J.Blige, Faith Evans, 112 and Total among others. The laidback baritone's preeminent delivery made his native Brooklyn proud and attracted a worldwide following. His misogyny, talk of street life and depression resulting from the weariness of being a poor Black man with limited life options was poignant in an America where everyone across class is purposely self-medicating. Just like his famous nemesis Tupac there was hope that he would transcend those things one day to make progressive and happier sounding raps. In one of B.I.G.'s last interviews with The Source he talked about enjoying California's weather, his new son and looking at life in a different way. And of course the evil irony is that he was murdered in the same place he made these declarations. There are always discussions about what his status would be like today in the hip-hop world. Fortunately for him the music that he recorded before his death has held up and will continue to do so for future generations. He is lucky in that sense to be frozen in time artistically at a high point while people were still excited for him. Longevity is nice but it also gives artists time to live through a heyday and make bad music that can reflect negatively on the choice material. How does he hold up? There have been very few rappers if any to bring skills, charisma and enthusiasm to the party since B.I.G.

died. Too many lyricists stack rhymes nicely but bore audiences on film. Or the kid who makes great videos and hit songs can't really rap.

Has there been aggressive media campaigns to promote the next most important rapper in the world? Several. But Biggie's appeal was instant among the commercial listening set as well as the cratediggers, purists and hip-hop specialists. The guy who called himself 'Black and ugly as ever' really did grab the girls with his gemini charms and wit. Rap fans are not all in agreement about Drake, Nicki Minaj, Lil' Wayne, Gucci Mane etc. These artists are making a living but they are not leading a movement of civic pride the way of Biggie. Perhaps they will in time but today they are well paid hardworking artists who have yet to make iconic status as Biggie did in the post-consciousness, Golden Age blinged-out rap era. As we remember the way he transplanted that Brooklyn vibe into an international point of reference in hip-hop our only hope now should be that his and Tupac's killer or killers will be brought to justice.