

Lost in the legend of Sean "Puffy" Combs's cultural-moment-defining birthday bash last November 4 is the curious story of the first notable to "arrive." That is, the first player, one who had arrived—in terms of "blowing up"—years before 29-year-old Puff, but with much the same mind-set and in much the same style.

There he was—"like the first boy at a high school dance," says hip hop writer Nelson George—at a minute past 10, strolling solo into Cipriani Wall Street. He looked around, shifted caterpillary eyebrows side to side, and spotted a place to alight: *Ah, a throne.*

The ticket clutchers, all giddy with big-night expectation, were just starting to drift into the cav-

West Coast, East Coast: Meet the Gold Coast, and the player most, Donald J. Trump, 52, is such a player he doesn't even *listen* to hip hop music. "The problem is," he explains, "my life is so *wild* I just don't have time."

And yet Trump has blessed the mike on numerous rap records. Last year his voice could be heard on Method Man's megasmash *Tical 2000: Judgement Day* (Def Jam) and Pras's somewhat-less-than-megasmash *Ghetto Supastar* (Ruffhouse/Columbia). "I hear I'm all over the place," Trump says offhandedly, although, he admits, he's never actually listened to any of the tracks.

"I'd never heard of Method Man," he confesses, "until Russell [Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam]

kinship are strong—on both sides. Method Man breaks it down this way: "I like Trump's style. It's like 'I'm rich, fuck y'all, I build my buildings and put my name on them. Fuck y'all.'"

How weird was it walking into my dad's booth at the U.S. Open and seeing Puff Daddy there? asks Trump's daughter Ivanka, 17, a hip hop fan. "Or going to the Grammys, the phone rings, and my dad's like, 'Yo, Puff, what's up?' And I'm like 'You are *not* talking to Puff Daddy!'"

Trump was hip hop before he himself knew. For one thing, he was rich—a billionaire who reveled in his money. And he didn't care who cared. He was a real estate mogul, and he built big, and he built flashy, and yes, he put his name on everything from Trump Tower to Trump Plaza to Trump Parc to the Trump International Hotel and Tower. When people dissed him—whether it was city government banks, or the media—his response was indeed, *Fuck off.*

"Every time I see Tina Brown (media queen and former editor of *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*), The Donald says, 'I give her the finger.' (Brown printed some player-hating pieces about him. "She treated me like total shit!") The Top Ten Comeback Tips from Trump's 1998 best-seller, *Trump: The Art of the Comeback* (Times Books), read almost like a rap song. (The Lox's '98 Bad Boy Entertainment hit, "Money, Power & Respect," comes to mind.) "Be paranoid...Be passionate...Be lucky...Get even." Puffy is currently writing his own book on the art of blowing up, possibly inspired by Trump's many best-sellers.

"Trump is respected by people in hip hop because he's not a corporate guy," says George, author of *Hip Hop America* (Viking Penguin

ermous marble hall. (Cipriani's, a grand ballroom of a lunch joint, is Manhattan's latest testament to the fact that the '80s, *his* decade, never ended—conspicuous consumption only got more acceptable.) Waiters already tipsy on free Cristal sailed around in tight tuxes, hoisting lacquered trays. This might have been a coming-out party of sorts for hip hop—the scions of Manhattan society had been angling for tickets for weeks—but the man whose rock-star name is The Donald seemed used to it all.

Casually, he mounted the stairs ascending to the comfy VIP section and settled into a centrally located armchair. He leaned back, looking studious and pleased, a corporate king in his trademark blue suit and shiny Ferragamo shoes. If Canibus, say, had sat in that chair, somebody would probably have popped a cap in his drink faster than you can say "L.L."—that was *Sean's* chair. But that was The Donald up there. And he had just anointed himself First Guest of The Birthday Party.

The word NOTORIOUS flashed on the wall above him in blue neon graffiti.

Trump Daddy smiled.

asked me to call and leave him a message."

"Hey, Method Man," he freestyled onto the Wu-Tang rapper's answering machine. "This is Donald Trump, and I'm in Palm Beach, and we're all waiting for your album. Let's get going, man—everybody's waiting for this album!"

Sure. You can picture it: Trump, Puffy, and Martha Stewart, all playing Nintendo on the 50-inch screen down at Mar-a-Lago—the opulent seaside estate Trump bought from the old-money Post family and turned into a controversial party-hardy, celebrity-studded playhouse. (It's also where Puffy was reportedly caught getting busy in the sand with an unidentified woman last spring.)

"I know who Method Man is *now*," Trump adds.

But "Pras?" he asks, voice drifting off. Still not quite sure.

"Now, after knowing you," Trump says on Pras's album, "I know that you're gonna be right up there, and I hope very soon you're gonna be in the leagues with me. So good luck, man. And do good!"

But no matter if Trump Daddy can't keep it all straight in his slightly oversize head. The feelings of

1998). "He's a self-made entrepreneur, and that's key to the hip hop mentality. They respect him for being a 'fuck you' hero."

By midnight that night of The Party, Cipriani's was packed and pounding with the music of the hip hop superstars now constellating in the room: There was Mase and Jay-Z and Missy Elliott and Heavy D and crazy Busta Rhymes clowning, his mouth opening in a ghoulish laugh. Puff Daddy still hadn't arrived yet. His big entrance would come right after Muhammad Ali's.

And there was The Donald, amid all the flashing neon, still up in the elevated VIP section, still sitting in The Seat.

Meanwhile, Fergie, Duchess of York, and Kevin Costner didn't seem to be able to find chairs.

Stripper girls in Plexiglas booths were rubbing at their leather thongs, making men in baggy zoot suits go crazy.

"I think Puff Daddy is a great guy," said Trump.

A security guard ventured over and asked him to find another seating arrangement. "Sean said he

wanted me to sit with him," Trump said blandly. And he never moved.

I've been around the world / And Ay-Ay-Ay / I've been player-hated."—Puff Daddy, on his 1997 hit "Been Around the World"

Trump can relate. A whole battery of power players from the upper echelons of New York society—including Victoria Newhouse, wife of media mogul S.I. Newhouse Jr., and billionaire David Koch—are reportedly gearing up to try to block Trump's most recent development: Trump World Tower, the world's tallest residential building (some 90 stories), set to rise on a plot of land smack-dab across the street from the United Nations. Newscasting legend and elder statesman of classiness Walter Cronkite has called designs for Trump's pet project "gross."

"Those people are going to end up moving into my building," Trump told *The New York Observer*. "Cause it's much better than where they live."

The naysayers never did understand him. Not his love of excess or publicity or gold-plating. They never got that Trump...is *Trump*.

"He's shunned socially by old money," says Jessica Rosenblum, president of Stress Entertainment and a longtime hip hop maven. "But now hip hop is saying, 'Hey, you're our kind,' and he's saying, 'Hey, cool.'"

"Donald doesn't *have* flavor," offers one recording-industry executive, who asked not to be named, "but he knows where the flavor is."

Cut to Puffy and Donald shaking hands at the Polo grounds in Long Island's exclusive Hamptons residential area—in effect thumbing their noses at all those stuffy longtime residents who, not so many decades ago, would have found some convenient way to keep either one of them from attending their lawn parties. Now, those very same people routinely pull out all the stops to try to get into one of Puffy's Hamptons parties—where Trump can always be found, possibly sitting in Puffy's chair.

Hip hop has seen itself in Donald Trump, and vice versa. "He has been taken by the energy and the chutz-

pah of the rap world," says George, "especially the entrepreneurs."

"The Hamptons has a certain rigid society," Trump says. "And people like Puffy and Russell and Andre Harrell [president of Bad Boy Entertainment] have done really well within it. The reason is because they're fun. The Hamptons people are boring."

By the same token, some people in the hip hop world seem to think Donald Trump is fun too. "There's a lot of people out there who have money but they're not all accepted. Donald is," says DJ Funkmaster Flex, with whom The Donald spent time at Interscope Records honcho Ted Field's Fourth of July party last summer in the Hamptons.

If Bill Clinton is, as Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison insists, "the first black president," then, using the same weird logic, Trump may be the first African-American billionaire. He doesn't see color if it gets in the way of having a good time, and he seems to have the best time when he's kicking it with his homies. "I think that these hip hop guys are smart, and they're fun, and I don't give a shit, because if I didn't like them I wouldn't bother," he says. "Because I don't *need* anybody, and I don't *need* anything."

Hey, Russell," The Donald says. "Will you send me a lot of money, please?"

On a fine winter morning, Trump is poised on his own throne high in Trump Tower talking on the telephone to the godfather of hip hop.

"We told Donald he was the illest man alive, and he called a doctor," says Russell Simmons through the white noise of the speakerphone.

"I love ya," says The Donald with a smile.

"We told him he was the *shit*—and he said, 'Fuck you, too!'" says Simmons.

"I love ya, Russell, I love ya, baby," Trump says. "I was really mad about that one—Russell calling me 'the shit,' he continues, hanging up the phone. "I thought Russell liked me! Kara Young had to explain it to me."

It was Simmons who introduced Trump to model Kara Young—now a former flame of *both* men—after he

and Marla Maples split. It's Simmons and Harrell whom Trump hangs out with several times a week into the wee hours at Moomba, N.Y.C.'s watering hole for the ultrachic. It was Simmons and Harrell Trump picked as judges for last year's Miss Universe pageant in Hawaii. "You know I own that, right?" Trump asks.

The skyline of Manhattan stretches out before him like a personal kingdom.

"I own the Empire State Building, too," he says. "Did you know that?"

What could be more hip hop than self-promotion? The Slick Ricks, the L.L. Cool Js, the Jay-Zs, The Donald's right up there with them in representation for self. He tosses a copy of *Crain's New York Business* across his mahogany desk. It rates his Trump Organization the third most successful privately held corporation in New York City. (*Forbes* sets Trump's net worth at \$1.5 billion.) "We're bigger than we were!" Trump crows.

It wasn't so long ago, though, that he was a mess. After his celebrated rise in the '80s, he plunged to more than \$900 million in debt in 1990. The Donald admits he stopped working as hard. "I was having too much fun!"

But now he's back. And "a lot of people in the music business can relate to that," says Funkmaster Flex. "He made it happen, and he came back to make it happen again."

"Trump," says Rosenblum, "has a ghetto personality."

And he couldn't feel more at home within the culture of hip hop entrepreneurs with whom he has recently become so chummy. "They're all money and they're all great businessmen," Trump says. "They have a real sense of where the market's going, and they have a sense of the future—and that's the ultimate businessperson."

Stumbling onto a concept, he adds, "I think hip hop has done more for race relations, and more respect among everyone, than anything. Because these guys really are respected. I can tell you—the most important white people have *total* respect for these guys." ▀