

## SMITH

CONTINUED FROM LAST PAGE

is the producer's coolest and scariest invention. Once, art rockers and avant-gardists made futuristic Muzak on these things. Wrenched out of time, Dre's sound is anachronistic, stranded like a toy robot in amber. A dying ember he's trying to cop a light from, Dre's sub-Moog mood is full of longing and, beneath that, loneliness. His synth whistles in the dark, the guillotine live drums and ultralow-frequency bass beneath it connoting all the danger that creeps between the bungalows. Dre's high-end warble is the only sound that gets through when your heart is pounding. I hear it when I think of those Dre videos, his big bullet head implacable, his face inexpressive (but for the de rigueur mad-dog scowl or the truly demented grin). He's whistling in the dark, beating down his fear until it glows like a hubcap. Until it's as hard as his head.

Snoop's own warbly, unpredictable voice cuts in and out of the tracks. Curling the end of words downward, then leaping up a register, rolling rhymes around within a single line, poking holes in unexpected cadences—he makes you want to trace his raps with a finger in the air. Snoop is the most technically satisfying rapper in years. His voice and attitude sometimes betray a '70s soul ethic that's as archaic as Dre's synth. On *The Chronic* he transmuted Donny Hathaway's "Little Ghetto Boy" into "Li'l Ghetto Boy"—he wants to speak to kids the way Curtis Mayfield or the Chi-Lites once spoke to him: with rueful voices, their courtliness preserving their humanity. Those voices

are the absent fathers that Snoop loves, and tries to strangle. Listen to the Dramatics backing Snoop and his crew the Dogg Pound on "Doggy Dogg World": "What you gonna do? You've got the key! It's your world! What you wanna be?" they sing at the end. The Dogg Pound seem to think they're complementing the Dramatics, but they really argue with them, telling them there's no room for vealour or kindness in the ghetto. The Dramatics' self-knowledge is an orphan in Snoop's neighborhood, where to question your motives or examine your conscience is to hesitate on the trigger. That's the justification, anyway; the result is that responsibility, guilt, remorse, shame all disappear in a fog of Indo smoke. No wonder Snoop cares more about the chronic than about bitches. He needs it more.

You don't need to be a Blood or a Crip to like *Doggystyle*. All you need is a couch. Mix yourself up a drink, find a spot where the springs don't poke you, and you've got America's hoopride. For what is "Gin and Juice" but a more perfect Ween song? It's a stoned-faced tribute to losing time, brain cells, and more. Snoop's a slacker with if not courage, at least a gun, and the desire to let everyone around him know that emptiness is no joke. It's what will someday get Beavis and Butt-head elected president.

Dre and Snoop make the most repressed music ever to go platinum. "Real niggas don't give a fuck" is the chant. It runs laps around the old "What are you rebelling against?/What have you got?" beyond even the once-shocking gang-banging brother versus brother tenet. Snoop's don't-give-a-fuck is total, baroque

even, and it's what tips his hand. You can look at his contempt as the pinnacle of hardcore, I guess. But for once I think I see what right-wing enemies of pop culture always say they see—mere entertainment. On *Doggystyle*, ghetto life is doctored and reduced to a broad pop myth of the urban frontier—kill or be killed. It's the ulti-

mate computer game, starting black cutouts that shoot each other over and over again. "Murder Was the Case" could have been brilliant—the young G gets shot down, sees his life pass before his eyes, and makes a deal with the devil. But the music is a William Castle production, all tubular bells tolling for thee, Satan-speak-

ing-in-a-moment-ghost bass and Dre at his keyboard in a Cross Colours cape. There's no message to the young G here, just a groovy little monster movie for the matinee set. A drive-by narrated by the victim, it should hemorrhage realism all over the li'l ghetto boys Snoop wants to talk to. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 94**

## JERRY HUNT, 1943-1993

When John Cage performed in Dallas in 1975, the private reception afterward was dominated by a thin, intense-looking guy whose spindly limbs swept the air as he spoke. He was comparing episodes of *I Love Lucy* to the Beethoven sonatas as varied manifestations of a recurring structural formula. I thought he was brilliant and nuts at the same time, and those two words have come back to me every time I've seen Jerry Hunt perform. I had no idea he was anybody significant, but five years later I saw him again at New Music America, making high-tech electronic music by hitting a suitcase with a stick.

Hunt was a bundle of nervous energy, never boiling over, but eternally simmering. His doctor made him cut down on his 40 cups of coffee a day, and after he gave up chain-smoking—not early enough, tragically, to prevent him from dying of lung cancer three days before his 50th birthday—he chewed nicotine gum vigorously, even onstage. He was the fastest talker I've ever interviewed. His music was a personal, hermetic religion. His works, with titles like *Chi-*



*manzzi (Olun): core and Bitom (stream): link*, were based on a private geography of Texas towns meshed with the angelic tables of the 16th-century magus John Dee. Bells on his wrists jingled as he banged endless tremolos on the piano. Electronic sounds would burble, video images would flip, as he whipped fishing poles toward the audience. Every gesture in his repertoire seethed with inscrutable meaning. When I told a friend Hunt had died, and that I wished I understood his music

enough to describe how it worked, she said, "No one knew what Jerry was doing. Make up something."

Hunt lived in a barn on his mother's property, somewhere north of Dallas. When you called up, his mother would answer and switch the call to the barn. He's survived by his lover, Stephen Housewright. Unfortunately, his primary exposure outside new-music circles came from a pointless controversy. He had collaborated with Karen Finley (even *she* couldn't upstage him), and when he was later on a panel that gave her a grant, right-wingers trying to discredit the NEA trumped up a conflict-of-interest complaint. Even had they investigated Hunt personally, they wouldn't have comprehended his level of artistic purity. Luckily, before he died, he got one fantastically characteristic audio document of his work onto disc: *Ground: Five Mechanic Convention Screams* on the O.O. label. His death November 27 makes no more sense than his music did, but the latter was an astonishing feat of manic intensity.

—KYLE GANN

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