

A man in a white suit and sunglasses stands in a garage. He is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, white trousers, and brown loafers. He has several gold chains and a watch. Behind him are two classic cars, one dark and one lighter. The scene is lit with dramatic, low-key lighting.

ALL FVLLS DOWN

Four years ago, superproducer **SCOTT STORCH'S** beats dominated the *Billboard* singles charts, while he amassed a \$70-million fortune. Today, he's a survivor who's overcome financial ruin and drug addiction and now struggles to secure album placements. How did it all go wrong?

Words **Thomas Golianopoulos**



Storch plays piano at his Palm Island mansion

Scott Storch doesn't consider marijuana to be a gateway drug. After all, he was a pothead for 20 years before ever snorting cocaine. Now fresh out of rehab, Storch still smokes weed. He claims that it doesn't jeopardize his sobriety. It's more like a performance-enhancing drug.

"Every day I come in [to the studio] I have to make three hot [beats]," he says. "That requires a lot of mental energy and focus. That is where the weed helps. You get fatigued, stop for a second and then you smoke a joint. It sets you back into where you're re-inspired and recalibrated."

It's July 2009, and Storch is pacing back and forth in The Hit Factory. He's in a Christian Audigier-designed Van Halen T-shirt, jeans and dirty periwinkle Timberlands splattered with spilled bong water. An expensive watch and flashy chain complete the look. In the past, Storch would wear \$5 million worth of jewelry, but that was before he blew \$30 million in less than three years.

And here he is. After completing his in-patient rehabilitation in April 2009, Storch has made over a thousand beats and considers a hundred or so of them to be keepers. Tonight, he wants to preview some of the music, but first he lights a big, fat joint. "Look," he says, flaunting a "Six Months Sober" key-chain from Narcotics Anonymous.

"Sex months?" asks Storch's longtime engineer, Wayne "The Brain" Allison. He squints closer. "Oh, six."

"Sex months? What are you thinking about?" Storch responds. Naturally, that sparks an anecdote about getting freaky in rehab. "There was a place you had to go," he says, his voice trailing off. "I should shut up."

Storch's jowls are still a little puffy, but the dark circles under his eyes have faded. That's not the only change. "This is the first time that I have a guy who sells weed who is my friend," he says. "You don't want to be around some guys. I mean, this guy has been to St. Tropez. He's cool."

It's unclear whether he is being sarcastic. "Certain people, you just don't want to be around them. What did he say in *Pineapple Express*? 'Lingerrrr!'"

Like most people, Storch acts kind of goofy when stoned. And hungry. Over the next three hours, he inhales four cans of Coca-Cola, a Starbucks strawberry Frappuccino, a snack bag of Cheetos and half a pack of Zingers. "I'm just going to sit on my ass, smoke a bunch of weed tonight and do nothing," he says. "Go to sleep early and get in here early tomorrow, to get back on my schedule."

Nowadays, Storch keeps early hours for a music producer. He's usually in the studio by

2 p.m. and out at midnight. It's a departure from his days on the Bolivian marching powder. "We would work 20-hour days," Allison remembers. "I used to say, 'I'm not doing all those drugs. I can't work this long.'"

"He was repulsed by me," Storch says. "He would be wearing a respiratory mask because I was blowing my nose all the time." Both of them laugh.

"I'm glad he's better now," Allison says sincerely. "Things are great."

Storch adds: "We're making money now."

It comes back to money because—let's be frank—it always comes back to money, especially for Scott Storch. His father was a stenographer who liked to play the ponies. Scott, too, was infatuated with wealth at an early age. When he was a 15-year-old piano prodigy, he drew a picture of him and his then-manager in a Mercedes driving toward a sign reading "Money \$." This teenager would later become the poster boy for conspicuous consumption.

He amassed his fortune as the go-to hit-making producer for Beyoncé, Chris Brown, Jadakiss, Christina Aguilera, Baby, Lil Wayne, Ice Cube, DMX, Busta Rhymes and 50 Cent, to name a few. But as Storch racked up money, he gorged himself on the finer things in life. Trips on a private jet were routine, not a luxury. Thirteen cars weren't enough, even if one was a \$1.7-million Bugatti. The 90-foot yacht didn't cut it when a 117-footer was available. And where else would you call home but a \$10.5-million, 30,000-square-foot castle on Miami's exclusive Palm Island?

"[I] WAS MARKETED AS THE GUY WHO WAS BALLING."

Of course, he wasn't alone. Storch exemplified a society that not only created but encouraged monstrosities like \$175 gold-dusted cheeseburgers, \$10,000 bottles of cognac and \$53.4-million bonuses for CEOs. As we all know, that era is over, gone along with millions of people's jobs, homes and 401(k)s.

But Scott Storch's fall was more tragic than a garden-variety corporate flameout. In an economy buoyed by false commodities—I'll trade you my toxic mortgage for your collateralized debt obligation—Storch actually peddled something tangible: a Scott Storch beat.

Storch made his first million after co-writing the Grammy-winning hit "You Got Me" for The Roots in 1999. He entered the business as the group's keyboard player but quit in the mid-1990s to focus on producing. After

struggling for a few years, Scott got his big break working on Dr. Dre's *2001*, which sold over seven million copies. While it didn't make him a household name, the right people wanted in on his brand. "Every door flung open for me at every label," he says. "[The labels said,] 'We want that. Can you make that for us?'"

Storch later moved to Miami and obliged, flooding the marketplace. His beats had certain characteristics—Middle Eastern melodies, dramatic intros—but weren't easily identifiable, and his going rate quickly reached \$100,000. Unlike most producers, Storch didn't sample, so his bottom line wasn't affected by shared royalties. By 2006, Storch was worth a reported \$70 million (that included cash, investments, his publishing catalogue and assets).

Despite the impressive curriculum vitae, Storch wasn't a star. He was regarded as a studio wizard, not a marquee name. Meanwhile, his superproducer brethren—Timbaland, Lil' Jon, Pharrell and Swizz Beatz—had become celebrities. Maybe it was because he lacked a branded public persona. That would soon change. Storch cultivated a decadent image that was part *Scarface* wannabe, part Sultan of Brunei. Basically, it was new money running out of control.

"[I] was marketed as the guy who was balling," he says.

Storch played the role to perfection. He showed off his luxury cars—a fleet that included a Mercedes SLR McLaren and a Ferrari 575 Maranello—in magazine spreads and on *MTV Cribs*. "He always had an attachment to

automobiles," says Rich Nichols, a former manager who met Storch in 1988. "Scott had a BMW while he was in [The Roots]. I don't think anyone else in the group had a car."

He also had a thing for jewelry. "I would wear a \$2-million watch," Storch says. "I would have, not 30-carat rings...30-carat stones, bro. Thirty-carat-fuckin' rocks, where one stone was 30 carats, like, clean, brilliant."

But his greatest expenditure was private jets. He even once flew from Miami to New York just to eat dinner at Mr. Chow's, the gauche Cantonese restaurant favored by industry scenesters. "I was Mr. Excess," Storch says. "It was, Do whatever you want with any girl you want—all the fuckin' superstar bitches. Go to St. Tropez, Brazil, go to Vegas on a private jet from the club. Leaving Club Space at 10 in the morning, and it's like,



'Let's go to Vegas. Get the whole floor at the hotel.' Crazy shit. I was doing it big."

But he still needed to blow off steam. On July 28, 2006, Storch went to Los Angeles. His manager, Derek Jackson, says it was Storch's first vacation in years. "He never came back," Jackson says. "I couldn't get him to focus. All he was concerned about was Paris Hilton and this socialite life... I called her Hurricane Paris. Then you saw the drugs come into play, and it changed his personality."

Earlier that year, the producer and the

heiress started dating, while they were recording Hilton's vanity project, *Paris Is Burning*. Storch produced nine records, but the album tanked. Still, he was hurled into the spotlight by association. "All of a sudden, I was in pictures with Paris, and I'm catapulted into that world," he says.

Did he enjoy the attention? "The pictures snapping and the paparazzi jumping out of trees? Yeah."

To the *Us Weekly* and *tmz.com* crowd, Storch was merely Hilton's latest boy toy. The fact that he created the indelible piano riff

on "Still D.R.E." was irrelevant. "He became more of a socialite than a producer," Jackson says. "I felt like there was a great deal of confusion when it came to who he was, what he was and what he represented."

Especially since he grew up with his parents and older brother in a middle-class family in Fort Lauderdale, before his parents divorced when he was a freshman in high school. From there he moved with his father to Philadelphia and taught himself how to play piano. After becoming fixated on music, he dropped out in the ninth grade. "[At] 14,

I made the decision that if I had to be a poor musician or a rich lawyer, I would be a poor musician," he says. "All my parents would tell me is, 'You'll never make money in music.'"

Within a decade, he'd made millions in the music business, and now, instead of him chasing work, work chased him. That cre-

dinner with O.J. Simpson," says Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, drummer for The Roots. "We get to this restaurant; it feels like the Bada Bing. I [sat down], looked to my left, and was like, 'Holy shit, it's O.J.' Ten drinks later, O.J. [says]... 'Yeah, Bob Dylan wrote this song about this boxer named Hurricane Carter and

friend Adam Linder, Las Vegas showman Jeff Beecher and his date, and Storch's gorgeous Brazilian model girlfriend. "You look awesome," he tells her.

Storch is in storyteller mode, so he recounts "the DMX story." After spending \$15,000 to place X in rehab, Storch received

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ated a whole new set of problems. "I remember [Jay-Z] told him, 'Don't get a big head,'" says Storch's former collaborator, the rapper Robert "EST" Waller. "It was like, 'Okay, you wanted to be successful. Now you're going to see what success is.' I don't think Jay saw what was going on, but he knew how [success] changes you."

But even after that warning, Storch acted as though he still needed validation. "It's like there was a competition [with] this girl I had a crush on, Paris Hilton," he says. "I always felt like I had to do it bigger and bigger, especially after we broke up. I thought I was in love with Paris. I was in love with the idea of having a girlfriend that big." He flew Hilton to the French Riviera—that's \$250,000—and bought her a Maybach. Then again, that's his M.O. He reportedly gave Lindsay Lohan a million dollars in jewelry and a Bentley to Lil' Kim (more on that later). More damaging was his posse of sycophants. "Yeah, I could see people taking advantage of me," he says. Storch estimates that, at one time, he employed 15 to 20 "assistants." "When I got up, my cars were fueled, washed and started. Everything other than doing drugs, fucking, making music and watching TV was done for me."

Rich Nichols remembers visiting Storch on Palm Island. "He had security with automatic weapons tucked in their pants," he says. "It took his hangers-on 10 to 15 minutes to decide what car they were going to drive. These guys were completely broke and arguing, like, 'I don't want to ride in the Maybach. That's wack.'"

Storch even developed some unlikely friendships. "One time, he took [me] out to

how he wasn't guilty. I want the rappers to make me one.' I tell Scott, 'How is this your life?'... He's like, 'Hey, man, it's been a long time since St. Albans Street in Philadelphia.'"

These days, Storch is tightening the circle. Tonight, he's eating a late alfresco dinner at Carpaccio's, an Italian restaurant in tony Bal Harbour, up the road from Miami Beach. He's joined by his investment-banker

a call from the rapper three days later. "He was trying to get into this club where I knew the owner," he says. "I was like, 'Come to my house immediately.'" (There was an arrest warrant out for DMX. He was later apprehended at Storch's Palm Island home.)

The party then moves to Linder's oceanfront penthouse condo, where he is lighting firecrackers on the terrace. It's now 1 a.m. Storch moves to an office for an interview but is interrupted by the house phone. "Don't tell me it's the front desk already," Linder says, barging into the room. He's concerned it's the neighbors complaining.

"It's not," Storch replies. "I have to loan somebody a hundred bucks. He got fired. It's going to be one time and that's it."

"Do you love him like your boy?" Linder asks.

"I'm not going to support him."
"Do you love him like your boy?"
"Yeah."

Storch's friend, a middle-aged White guy in a button-down shirt and jeans, hangs with Linder during the interview.

Storch then turns and says, "This house that you're in, energy-wise, is one of the best places you can be." During the summer, he split his time here and at Miami's Fontainebleau Hotel. He currently lives in a condo

in Miami's W Hotel. After rehab, Storch avoided his Palm Island mansion. "The vibes I get in there are..." He trails off. It was foreclosed on August 2009. "Yeah, I snorted off of every fuckin' surface in the fuckin' house. A lot of bad things happened in there."

By late 2006, Storch's cocaine addiction was ruining his career. He went AWOL on drug binges and left artists such as Janet Jackson waiting in the studio. Even when Storch made



Storch with Lil' Kim (top) and Paris (bottom), 2006



STORCH/LIL KIM: JOHNNY NUÑEZ/WIREIMAGE; STORCH/HILTON: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREMAG

“I DIDN’T MAKE ANYTHING GOOD ON COKE. COCAINE IS NOT A GOOD DRUG FOR A PRODUCER.”

it to work, his beats were underwhelming. “I didn’t make anything good on coke,” he says. “Cocaine is not a good drug for a producer.”

He appeared gaunt and sullen in paparazzi photos. Celebrity blogger Perez Hilton even posted one where Storch clearly has cocaine residue on his nostrils. It was evident that he was physically deteriorating. He was also falling apart emotionally. Questlove was stunned after running into his old friend inside a Miami restaurant in early 2008. “[Scott] was talking all this crazy paranoid shit, like, ‘Watch out for who your real friends are, because they are going to backstab you,’” Quest remembers. “[Scott then] said, ‘Yo, man, I just want to go back to how it used to be. You and me in a room, no distractions, no nothing, just making music, man. You know how much I miss dialing 215...?’ He recited my father’s phone number and corny outgoing message verbatim. He is reciting a phone number and answering machine from, like, 22 years ago! It was like, ‘You are the loneliest person in the world right now.’”

Storch entered rehab on February 20, 2009. He went to Hollywood, Florida’s Recovery First, a tough joint—no yoga or cushy massages—where he attended 60 hours of weekly meetings and detoxed without meds. “It was a fuckin’ nightmare,” he says. “The first week you’re there, you are fighting the shit. By the second week, you realize how badly you needed the shit. You’re starting to sober up and feeling good all of a sudden, which you haven’t felt in a long time.”

Nowadays, he attends the occasional meeting and isn’t worried about relapsing. “Coke? No, I’m over it. I don’t have any desire to go back to that,” he says. Still, remnants from his not-so-distant past surface. During an interview, after ignoring his ringing cell phone, Storch says, “I don’t recognize numbers. I don’t know who that is [calling]. People that shouldn’t be calling me are calling me, drug people. It’s hard sometimes.”

Recent legal woes are further reminders of his coke phase. In February 2008, a judge ruled that Storch owed \$509,000, after he reneged on a \$100,000 personal loan. More embarrassing were accusations that he stopped paying child support. “It’s been resolved,” he says. “Not only that, but my older son is turning 18, and now I can just support him the way I want to, which is very well.

But I’m not going to be supporting his mother and her husband.”

The latest mess involves a Bentley he leased in February 2006. It was due back in March 2008 but wasn’t returned. On April 10, 2009, just days after leaving rehab, Storch was arrested for grand theft auto. “Yeah, I didn’t do anything,” he says. “It was a car I had leased for somebody, a celebrity, and they didn’t want to return it beyond the lease. And I went to jail for it for a couple of hours. That shit pissed me off. That shit really pissed me off. It made me look bad, and I was doing somebody a favor.”

Was that celebrity Lil’ Kim?

“Yeah. Like, we parted, and she was like, ‘Please let me keep the car.’ I bought Charli Baltimore a car for a business deal and then found out she was already signed. She didn’t want to give it back to me, and I had to let her keep the car for a year. She got my license taken away from me for fuckin’ running the EZ Pass. This was recently.”

Have you spoken to Kim?

“Not so much. [A month after this interview, the *New York Post*’s Page Six reported that Storch and Kim were spotted together at a Miami nightclub.] No one gives a fuck.”

What do you mean?

“People don’t give a shit about me. All these people who I was so generous with, who I was so good to, it’s all about them.”

Does that hurt you?

“Yeah. I’m a harmonious person. I like being peaceful. Nice guys sometimes get shit on.”

So, can Scott Storch make a comeback? He certainly has the talent. But he is reentering a decimated music industry where major labels rarely write big checks to producers. Let’s face it: The bling era is over. Storch also needs to rebuild his reputation, after burning bridges with some of his former collaborators. Yet he’s still talking shit about Justin Timberlake (“He’s going to deny that I was involved in [‘Cry Me a River’]? Fuck him, again. Your falsetto sucks.”), Christina Aguilera (“That [last album] was a little *Cabaret*-ish.”) and Brooke Hogan (“She should have been a wrestler.”). Paris Hilton, however, gets off easy. “I talked to her three days ago,” he says. “She still looks to me for real opinions and real-life shit, because she doesn’t get much real in her life. She’s a victim of a bunch of yes-men around her.”

This is obviously a pivotal moment in Storch’s career. Maybe that’s why his manager, Derek Jackson, was concerned after learning that Storch’s ex-girlfriend, the former adult-film actress Heather Hunter, was interviewed for this article. Jackson insisted that there be no mention of Hunter in Storch’s *XXL* article. For the record, here’s a sample of her remarks: “[Scott] is very caring, very generous and a sweetheart. He is a very talented producer.”

Jackson initially had trouble lining up work for Storch, but lately they’ve been on a roll. Storch placed songs with Chris Brown (“Brown Skin Girl”) and Gucci Mane (“Bingo”) and produced Usher’s “In My Bag,” a potential single off *Raymond vs. Raymond*. There are also records with Jennifer Hudson, but Storch is most excited about reuniting with Dr. Dre to work on *Detox*. “I’m going out to L.A. the day after tomorrow,” he told *XXL* in December 2009. “That is sort of like home for me. If I have my way, my visibility on that project will be equal to what it was on [2001].” Business appears to be on the upswing, but, more importantly, Storch is healthy, sober and motivated. “I’m doing well. I’m happy. I’m inspired. I’m ready to kill shit,” he says. “I feel like I’m ahead of schedule with what I want to accomplish...The phone is starting to ring, and there is momentum right now.”

Back at The Hit Factory, Storch parks himself at the computer storing his beats. He knows that his career hinges on the quality of his music. He’s now holding his cigarette cupped in his left hand, kind of like Robert De Niro’s character in *Casino*, and searching through files. Each beat is labeled with the date it was created. Each beat is excellent and showcases Storch’s wide-ranging tastes. “This,” he says, “reminds me of [English rock band] the Psychedelic Furs.”

He plays another. “This one reminds me of early Depeche Mode.”

He plays another. “This is some Jay-Z straight late-night-radio [record], with Funkmaster Flex dropping bombs on it. I can hear Kanye on it. I can hear a lot of people on it.”

He plays another, a theatrical, elaborate track perfectly suited for a pop singer. Storch mumbles something. It’s too loud, so he repeats himself. “I love this one,” he shouts with a smile on his face. He then rises from his seat, nodding his head to the beat. ♠