

# HAMMER IN LOVE!

Frances Chan flew off to LA to meet wannabe rap champ Hammer and found him full of huff and puff about his own brilliant self.

HERE comes the Hammer - in cycle shorts, customised Hammer jacket, matching cap and trainers, and he dances into the room, his body bobbing to the tiny ghetto blaster in the corner playing his own music.

Typical! Hammer loves Hammer. And he works very hard at this love. I wait for hours for him to arrive at the swanky Le Mondrian hotel in Sunset Boulevard, LA, because he was up all night staring in front of a tv screen. Hammer was staring at Hammer: he'd just finished editing the final whiz-bang effects in his *Too Legit To Quit* video.

But he's looking pretty lively, and he barely stops to nibble at the humungous hotel room array of fairy sandwiches, crackers and fruit wedges. He's already full - full of himself!

"I'm very happy with the new album," he announces. "It's a smash for me! SMASH! No sales yet, it's not even out in the stores yet, but it's a smash for me already! It's a good album regardless if it sells one million or fifty million. But my record company and I both care, because we want sales in order to do the next one, and it's business."

Since our interview, the release of *Too Legit To Quit* has hardly caused a wild rush to the record stores. But Hammer was confident it would challenge the world-beating sales figures of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album.

"My goal is to go out there and break the record if it's possible. If it's ever possible, NOW is the time. The last album wasn't the time. The next album



isn't the time. THIS is the time and opportunity to try and exceed the thrill of it."

Hammer's feelings about Jacko is like he views him as a heavyweight boxer. He knows his opponent has great strength but he's just dying for the chance to get in the ring and kick his ass. The *Too Legit To Quit* feature-length video actually sees Hammer challenge Michael to a duel! Is he serious?

"YEAH! I'm not gonna stop. Throughout the duration of this entire project, I will continue to say, 'Michael, where AAARE YOOOOOOOU?' Because I want to put on the world's biggest event in pop music!"

Will the duel ever happen? The challenge is in Michael's corner, but I don't see him selling tickets.

Still, Hammer has other plans to consider. He's set up his own record company called Bust It in his home town of Oakland, San Francisco, and is developing the careers of his own musicians as solo artists, such as Oaktown's 3.5.7. And he's pretty chuffed about being turned into a doll! Toyshops all across the States are currently selling a Hammer doll, and the real-life Hammer thinks this is a major step forward for mankind.

"First of all, not that many artists get offered to be made into a doll. And how many black dolls do you know about? So when Hammer became a doll, I looked at breaking down some barriers.

"I looked at the opportunity for white kids and Asian kids and Latin American kids to be able to pick up a doll that's black, and say, 'Hey, this is just like any other doll.'"

Well, right on! But what we really want to know is - why didja drop the MC from your name, man? And why aren't you wearing them baggy pants?

He replies, "Most people realise that MC simply stands for Master of Ceremonies. So it wasn't my name anyway. That's just what I am. MC is what I do, Hammer is my name."

Actually, his real name is Stanley Kirk Burrell, but what the heck. Now about those famous pooh pants which he's swapped for smart dark suits. "That's just what I've been dressed like the past couple of days," he says.

"I will wear the baggy pants on stage for a couple of songs. I need that freedom. But in general, I change my look, I change my music, and I'm takin' everything to the next level."

He means his progression of albums. On his first album *Let's Get It Started* his biggest hit was *Turn This Mutha Out*, a stanch dance number. *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* made him a household name with the massive *U Can't Touch*



Hammer: an Energizer battery running on kilo-hype.

*This* and *Pray*. Both these songs sampled other people's tunes heavily, but on his latest record, you can hardly notice any. Why?

"Well, number one - critics! Hehehehehe!" he giggles and shrieks. "I wanted to show critics that I sampled

## DO YOU BELIEVE THE HYPE?

EVERYONE was there. The French, the Canadians, the Japanese, the Italians, the Danes... and one bewildered New Zealander! We'd all been invited to the private party preview of Hammer's album at the Citrus restaurant on hip Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles. When Hammer arrived there was instant big fuss and commotion, but he was pretty cool in his pin-striped suit, sipping orange juice, always flanked by some members of his posse, and ALWAYS wearing sunglasses. He chatted about each song on his album before they blasted the sound system in our faces. He didn't seem to mind being shunted around the room shaking hands with miles of strangers, or smiling beautifully while cameras flashed constantly. He was patient when middle-aged men with ponytails and suits hugged him and slapped him on the back. He reminded me of an Energizer battery - he just kept going and going and doing what was required. Capitol Records presented him with a special award for sales of *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* - over 20 million albums! But the company president said he's predicting 30, 40, 50 million sales for *Too Legit!* It's all too much. The executives' wives boogied and rattled all that gold jewellery, the middle-aged men all hugged each other, the Italians talked very loudly with their hands, and all the hype and hurrah just made me plain hammered.



records because I WANTED to - not because I NEEDED to. Number two - for the whole genre of rap. Radio said 'unless you use an old groove, we're not gonna play it!' So I'm stepping out with this album and saying 'Listen, we can create tunes of our own and they can still be good.' This album challenges radio."

Hammer has made his social conscience quite clear with songs like *Brothers Hang On*, and liner notes expressing his message of living in peace and harmony. He's always put social issues in his music, but he adds, "when *U Can't Touch This* broke big, the whole social consciences went out the door. So the concerns have always been there but it took an album for me to structure to make it more obvious. For the people who get this album, it has the chance to touch their hearts and to stimulate thoughts in their minds."

One person who stimulated certain thoughts in Hammer's mind was Sinead O'Connor. She publicly dissed him last year - and then sent him a bill for the cost of her air tickets to England, when he said he would pay her to get out of America!

"Yeah. Oh man, I paid. \$5000 worth of tickets. She ended up using them later. But I don't dislike her. I think she's cute! Little bald-head girl! Hehehehehe!"

And he throws his head back, sunglasses still on, and shines those perfect white teeth with absolute confidence. God knows if it's legitimate.

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