

ENTERTAINMENT

# Knight investigated in notorious B.I.G. murder

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Imprisoned Death Row Records founder Marion "Suge" Knight is under investigation in the slaying of rap star The Notorious B.I.G., who was gunned down outside a music industry party two years ago, police said last week.

Search warrants were served two weeks ago at the record label's headquarters and other locations, and a vehicle owned by the company was seized. There were no arrests and no charges have been filed.

Police would not say what pointed the investigation to

Knight, who is in prison for violating his probation in a 1992 attack on two rappers in a Hollywood studio.

"He was in custody at the time so he didn't pull the trigger," said Lt. Al Michelena of the Police Department's robbery-homicide unit. "We are

investigating the possibility of him being implicated in this. We would certainly consider him a possible suspect.

There was no immediate comment from Knight's lawyer, David Kenner. A telephone message requesting comment was left at the attorney's office last week.

Michelena would not discuss a possible motive. He said affidavits that led a judge to sign the search warrants state probable cause but those documents were sealed.

Death Row became a major rap label, featuring

Tupac Shakur, Snoop Doggy Dogg and Dr. Dre. But the company is now struggling.

Shakur was fatally shot while driving with Knight in Las Vegas, and Snoop Doggy Dogg and co-founder Dr. Dre have left Death Row.

The Notorious B.I.G., whose real name was Christopher Wallace, was shot while sitting in a GMC Suburban after leaving a March 9, 1997, party at the Petersen Auto Museum. The killer was in another car and got away.

The car seized last week is a dark, metallic purple Chevrolet Impala. Michelena

said it matches the description of the car used by the killer.

The car is owned by the company but hasn't been registered for "the last couple of years" and is believed to have not been in use, Michelena said.

Adversarial relations between Death Row and Wallace's producer, New York-based Bad Boy Entertainment, were no secret.

Shakur publicly accused Wallace and others at Bad Boy of being involved in a 1994 robbery in which Shakur was shot several times and lost \$40,000 in jewelry.

## Record producer's star rising fast

PLEASANTVILLE, N.J. (AP) — Rodney Jerkins learned about music production the hard way — sneaking into his older brother's equipment.

"I was 10 years old. Freddie had a drum machine and a Yamaha keyboard. I knew those machines inside and out. I wasn't allowed to touch his equipment, but when he would leave the room, he didn't know it but I would just push buttons until I learned it," Jerkins recalled.

Then one day, 17-year-old Fred Jerkins III caught his little brother in the act.

"When he heard how it was sounding, he said it was pretty good. ... After that, I told my father, 'I need some equipment,'" Jerkins said.

Eleven years later, Rodney Jerkins doesn't have to borrow equipment anymore. His skills as a songwriter and record producer have made him a millionaire and propelled him to the top of the charts.

Only 21, Jerkins has produced records for Whitney Houston, Mary J. Blige, Brandy and others. He was nominated for four Grammy Awards this year, and he wrote "The Boy Is Mine," which won best rhythm and blues vocal for Brandy and Monica.

In the process, he has fashioned a reputation as a studio wizard with a great ear and a Midas touch for selling records.

He's now in the studio

with Michael Jackson, who hasn't released a record since 1995's "HIStory." The record will be released next year, Jerkins says.

But Jerkins has no illusions about success. He uses self-doubt to motivate himself.

"I worry all the time that tomorrow I'm not going to be able to create a song, or that no one will know who Rodney Jerkins is in six months. But right now, I'm a magnet. I'm so creative. ... If I can maintain it 'til I'm 30, I'll have a longer run," he said.

Not long ago Jerkins was another teen-ager dreaming of pop stardom.

The son of piano-playing (See Producer, Page 13)

## Roger

(Continued from Page 1) were "Doo Wah Ditty (Blow That Thing)," "Dance Floor," "Heartbreaker," "I Can Make You Dance" and "Computer Love."

Larry Troutman, left performing in the mid-'80s to manage the group full time and assume the presidency of the Dayton-based Troutman Enterprises, which included recording studios, real-estate ventures and contracting.

Ranked as "one of the most underrated funk groups of the 1980s" by pop-music critic and historian John Bush, "Zapp revolutionized the computer pop of electro with their trademark vocoder talk boxes and bumping grooves."

Natives of Hamilton, the brothers took their inspiration from such funk acts as the Dayton-based Ohio Players and George Clinton's Parliament. Roger, who was born Nov. 29, 1951, also was influenced by cutting-edge guitar master Jimi Hendrix.

Zapp wasn't Roger's first group, though.

"Actually when he started out, he called his band Little Roger and the Vails," said Michael Sampson, public information coordinator for the Afro-American Museum in Wilberforce, who worked

*"I'm in disbelief, he was so bubbly. I can't believe that a spirit like his is no longer with us."* — Annette Lewis, Roger's friend

closely with the Troutman family on the museum's recent exhibit, *Something in the Water: The Sweet Sound of Dayton Street Funk*, in which Troutman and Zapp were featured prominently.

By the time he was 13, Roger was fronting an outfit called Little Roger and the Human Body.

Terry Troutman, however, was the first of the Troutman brothers to get wider recognition when his single "I Truly Love You" on Gram-O-Phon Records hit the R&B charts in 1976.

But Roger would prove to be the brother with a flair for the spotlight.

Working both with the band and as a solo artist, Roger followed the Zapp debut with his own solo debut, "The Many Facets of Roger", in 1981.

His repeated cover of "I Heard It Through the Grapevine", using the talkbox voice device with which he

would become associated, helped that album go gold.

Zapp's second release, "Zapp II", was popular on the dance and R&B charts with the singles "Dance Floor", which was a No. 1 R&B hit, and "Doo Wah Ditty", but failed to cross over to equal success on the pop charts.

"Zapp III", released in 1983, just scratched the top-40 pop charts, while Roger's second solo project, "The Saga Continues", included a cover of "Midnight Hour", featuring the Mighty Clouds of Joy. "Zapp IV", including the moderately successful single "Computer Love", came out in 1984.

Roger hit No. 1 on the R&B chart and No. 3 on the pop chart in 1987-88 with the single "I Want to Be Your Man", off his third solo release, "Unlimited!"

Contributions by Khalid Moss, Carol Simmons and William Weathers.

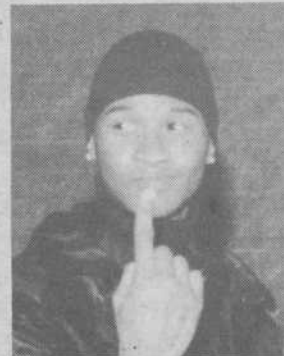
## Singer Usher dislocates shoulder

ATLANTA (AP) — Rhythm and blues singer Usher canceled three concerts after dislocating a shoulder while rehearsing dance steps.

The 20-year-old star was placed under the care of an orthopedic surgeon after injuring himself last week, spokesman Courtney Barnes said.

Usher, who lives in suburban Atlanta, had been scheduled to tour New Zealand and Australia later this month.

The singer — whose second album, "My Way," sold 5 million copies and produced two No. 1 hits, including the Grammy-nominated "You Make Me Wanna..." — will make up the tour dates once he recovers, Barnes said.



USHER

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