



## OL' DIRTY BASTARD

(RUSSELL TYRONE JONES)

DRUG OVERDOSE

**Born:** November 15, 1968

**Died:** November 13, 2004

"He was one of my favorite rappers," said Kanye West. "I would have cut off a piece of my finger to have his voice."

Russell Jones, raised in the "Brooklyn Zoo" (providing subject matter for his later track of the same name), formed Wu-Tang Clan with his cousins Robert "RZA" Diggs and Gary "GZA" Grice in the early 1990s. The movie *Mad Mad Kung Fu* provided his pseudonym.

Dirty won over record company executives with a rendering of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" but became better known for unhinged ranting. Gold teeth and dreads added to his cartoon psycho image, captured on 1995's *Return To The 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version*. An implausible cameo on Mariah Carey's "Fantasy" initiated a lasting friendship.

Success could not keep trouble at bay. In 1993, he was convicted of assault; in 1994, he was shot in the stomach. Publicity of 1997's *Wu-Tang Forever* was dominated by Dirty's derangement; *The Independent* spotted him "lolloping up and down the hall in a Versace shirt over a ketchup-and-Bailey's-spattered vest, merrily chanting 'Pussy, pussy, pussy!' to a tune existing only in his head." He claimed to be on Earth "only until I've finished building my spacecraft...I'm studying electromagnetic frequencies at the moment."

Father of thirteen kids, Dirty was arrested in 1997 for non-payment of child support. In 1998, he disrupted the Grammys to bemoan Wu-Tang going unrewarded. For the hit "Ghetto Superstar," he announced his new name: Big Baby Jesus. "I know y'all are nervous," he told his collaborators, "because

you've never heard the voice of God before." Dirty also rechristened himself Unique Ason, Dirt McGirt, and Osirus. "I just want to take it from one spot and move it to another spot like I'm fucking with the computer," he declared.

Despite hits with 1999's *Nigga Please* and "Got Your Money", arrests kept him in the headlines, notably for threatening security at a Des'ree concert. In 2000, Dirty spent a month on the run from rehab. He performed with Wu-Tang in New York, then was captured when crowds gathered to get his autograph in a Philadelphia parking lot.

In 2001, he was imprisoned—"in an unsafe place where the government is trying to kill me"—for cocaine possession. On his 2003 release, he signed to Roc-A-Fella, whose CEO Damon Dash cast him in the movie *State Property 2* as a nose-picking cook.

"I just wish I wasn't fucking with them drugs," Dirty said. "That's the biggest mistake of my life...That's what kills motherfuckers." In November 2004, at a Manhattan studio, he complained of chest pains. Shortly afterward, he died from an overdose of cocaine and painkillers.

Mariah Carey and Kurtis Blow were among mourners at Dirty's Brooklyn funeral. "To the public he was known as Ol' Dirty Bastard, but to me he was known as Rusty," said his mother. "The kindest, most generous soul on Earth." After the funeral, Dirty's body was cremated.

Fourteen months later, Wu-Tang returned to the road. "He'll be in our hearts," said GZA, "and he'll be in the hearts of the crowd."

**LEFT** Ol' Dirty Bastard with the Wu-Tang Clan onstage in New York, New York June 1, 1993.