

LIL WAYNE'S ON FIRE: KARRINE AND HIS EX-WIFE TOYA SPEAK OUT

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RAY LAVENDER

Good Things Come In Threes

IT WAS 2002 when Earl LaRay Lavender walked in on his girlfriend (of four years) cheating on him — with another woman. She apologized. Then she asked him to join in. Ray happily agreed. The relationship ended shortly after. “I was living a lie,” he says, “the whole time I was with her.”

Five years later, Ray “Ray-L” Lavender, 31, is thankful for the experience — it spawned his controversial, synth-heavy breakout “My Girl’s Gotta Girlfriend,” and some sweet revenge: Ray’s ex came crawling back after seeing the video on YouTube. “They hit me on MySpace — both of ‘em — like, ‘Why didn’t you use us as the girls in the video?’” Ray says with a laugh. “You wouldn’t have great songs if you didn’t go through these things.”

While the Jason Scott-produced single is getting some resistance from radio — “They don’t wanna deal with the issue,” he says — Ray is unrepentant about his racy content. But the Monroe, La., native has been wooing women with freaky R&B since singing R. Kelly’s “12 Play” to girls — and teachers — in the cafeteria at Norcross High School outside of Atlanta, where his family moved when he was a teenager. After stints in two boy bands, graduation, and a failed deal with Elektra Records, Ray moved to Virginia to live with his new mentor Teddy Riley, where he spent two years being groomed by the R&B legend.

But in 2002, acquaintance-turned-friend Akon was released from prison and told Ray he was starting a movement — Konvict Music. “Akon told me, ‘Watch how big you’ll get! You’re about to give R. Kelly a problem!’” Now, with his super-sexy debut, *X-Rayted* (KonLive/Geffen), Lavender is ready to go toe-to-toe with Kells. “Not saying that the album’s pornographic, but the lyrical content *does* get sexual,” he says. “I do wanna be that guy — but better.”

Laura Checkoway

Hammond disciple sometimes lets his preaching get in the way of his massive pipes, but his many fans didn't seem to mind. Speaking of best-sellers, the hugely successful female trio **TRIN-I-TEE 5:7** released **T57** (Music World), their first album in five years, this fall. The New Orleans group has recorded an upbeat, pop-ready stylistic converse to Sapp's choral swaying. They're rebellious and pious all at once. That mix is one Atlanta's **CANTON JONES** has been honing for >>>