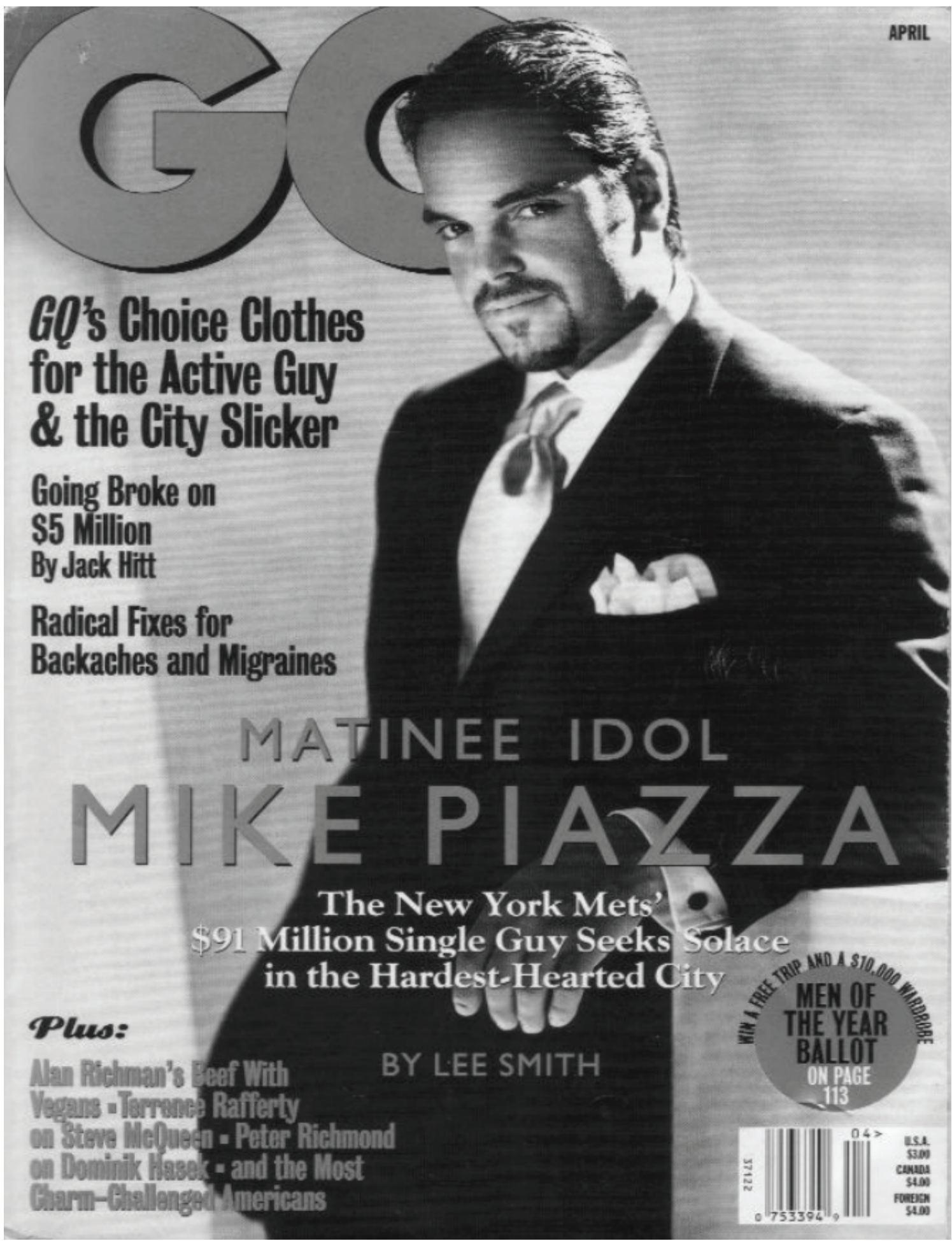


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# The Hip-Hop Guide to Charm:

## Love yourself, and don't hit the journalist

**O**N THE LIST OF WORDS THAT COME UP to describe rap-music stars, *charm* probably ranks pretty low—somewhere between *self-deprecating* and *bar mitzvahed*. But too much of the wrong kind of charmlessness (the kind that mouths off at awards shows or breaks into offices and beats the living opinions out of otherwise fawning journalists) can start to affect record sales. And that's usually when record companies call in the services of Angelo Ellerbee, self-described "tough love" image impresario. Invariably described as a hip-hop Henry Higgins, Ellerbee operates charm-reprogramming classes through the offices of his publicity firm, Double XXposure. In his former lives, Ellerbee has been a fashion designer (at age 12), a dancer, an actor and a music-company flack. Now he teaches young kids how to respond (calmly) to interviewers, how to hold themselves in public and even which fork to use when. He introduced bad girl Mary J. Blige to books and helped polish the public faces of Shabba Ranks and Biz Markie. So does this add up to charm? It's hard to know if that's something that can be learned. But Ellerbee would probably agree with his former client Eric B., who rapped the eternal theme of *My Fair Lady*: "It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at."

**Are these particularly charmless times we're living in?**

I would hope not. But I get so disappointed about how young people are disrespectful to their elders. There is a void when I can hear a 5-year-old cuss someone out in rhythm but he doesn't know the alphabet.

**Can you teach something like charm to a gangsta rapper?**

They don't want to be angry. Those rappers want to tell the plight of their lives. And I say, "Say it—but when you go to do your interview, be able to articulate it. You don't have to go, *"Motherfuckingfuckingbiich."*

**Where does charm come from?**

I think it's magic. I think that it works sometimes totally subliminally.

**Is part of the nature of charm that you don't know you're charming?**

I think that sometimes you don't know what that magic is that takes over your head and why it's working. Is it your personality? Is it the way you look? Is it being funny? All of these things come together to make you who you are.

**But our music stars and celebrities are not all going to be charming, right?**

No, but they were charming to some point. Yes, they're bitches and they're bastards. But even being bitches and bastards, there's a charm and a magic to bring it all in, to make that audience go to the theater or buy that CD. Does Madonna have charm?

**Not with an English accent.**

**Can there be charm in being nasty?**

Are you familiar with [book publisher] Judith Regan? Well, I find this lady full of charm. The first time I met her, I was like, "This lady does not have her wig on tight." And then she got so real. We started talking about everything underneath the sun. And it could have been all surface, but for that time it pulled me in. I was able to fall in love with her just because of that magical kind of thing she had.

**Can charm be a put-on?**

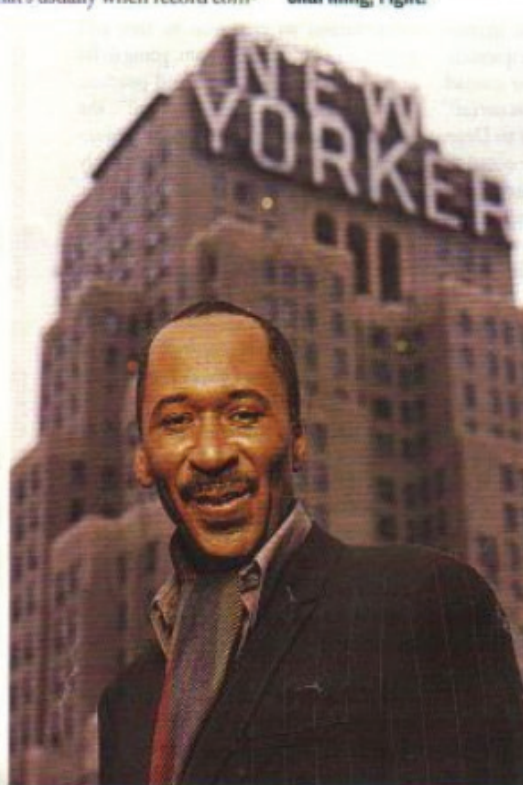
Oh, absolutely. There's a clear difference between being ambitious and being *ambitious*. For the things we just have to have, we're going to be *ambitious*—and that's when that charming personality comes out.

**Is it a fake charm, then?**

No, it's not a fake charm. I'm just for not taking nonsense. But, you know, I think I am the most sensitive, most caring, compassionate individual I know. I worry about the next person before I worry about Angelo. But in the heat of the moment, I could take you to heaven. I could take you to *heaven*.

**Do you try to smooth out your students' rough edges?**

People say to me I've taken rappers and people of the urban community and tried to change them. I say that's absolutely



insane. I want them to have their survival skills. These kids coming into the music industry, they're being ripped off from day one. I get kids who cannot read, and I say, "If you can't read, how the hell are you going to sign a contract?"

**So your "charm" school sounds more like a survival school?**

It's been called a charm school for rappers, but I think what it comes down to is the difference you can make: talking to these kids, giving them a sense of direction, loving them and keeping my foot in their ass because I want them to win.

**Are there role models for charm?**

I am my role model, and you are your role model. If you copy someone, then that's what you're going to be—a copy. And do you know what happens to a copy? It wears away, and it becomes transparent. I tell my clients to take some time out to think about what their rationale is. Take time out to love yourself. And I tell people I am romantically in love with Angelo Ellerbee.

**Is there any way to define charm and sell it or teach it to everybody?**

When you find it, I'd love to know what it is. What is charm? Charm is you.

**OK, take me. If I came to your charm school, what would you change about me?**

Oh no—nothing. Nothing that I noticed right away.

—ADAM SACHS