



B.o.B. on the J.O.B.

IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS since twenty-year-old Bobby Ray Simmons sneaked into T.I.'s Club Crucial, taking the stage to perform "Cloud 9," an ode to his favorite herb. On the strength of that appearance, the Columbia High student landed a deal with Atlantic Records and T.I.'s Grand Hustle label. Simmons's anticipated debut album, *The Adventures of Bobby Ray*, is expected this summer. This month, he's been invited to showcase at Austin's South by Southwest, the music industry's annual coming-out party for hundreds of new acts. Meanwhile, his single, "I'll Be in the Sky," has been played 3.6 million times at myspace.com/bobat1. The song has evoked comparisons to Atlanta's own André 3000. Below are thoughts from the man who calls himself B.o.B.

» There was this artist named Willie Joe from the Bay Area. We used to do open mic a lot. One day, he was like, "What's up, B.o.B.?" Since then, we've been adding meanings to it, like "Business over Bullshit," "Bring one Blunt," "Barack-o-Bama."

» I played the trumpet in the first grade. In high school I picked up the French horn, and last year I started playing the guitar and the cello. I try to let my inspiration drive me to what I want to do.

» Music is me talking, music is me rapping, music is me beating on a desk. Music is the manifestation of emotion.

» I was *so* ready to get out of high school. I felt like I got a get-out-of-jail-free card by getting a record deal. I'm not against school, but when you know what you want to do in life, just go for it wholeheartedly, and that's what I did.

» I had a lot of influences: Eminem, DMX, Nas. Eminem, I could relate to him at a time in my life when I was angry and depressed, and then I learned to understand that was just an aspect of me, but it didn't necessarily define who I was.

» I give out love and energy and so I get that back, but I'm prepared for not being approved. The act of me doing what I do has been the biggest blessing of it all. —CIARA WALKER