

Ian F. Burke, The DreamWeaver

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Entrepreneur, producer, manager, and entertainment consultant Ian Burke is known to hip-hop and R&B artists as “Dreamweaver”—a nickname that reflects his extraordinary talent for building relationships and using those connections to make the most of opportunities as they arrive. Regardless of your own professional aspirations, Burke’s inspirational story serves as living proof that the best way to rise is by lifting others.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

Burke arrived in Atlanta shortly after graduating from high school in 1984. His parents were retiring and planning to move from their home in Mount Vernon, New York to Florida. He wasn’t thrilled about moving to the Sunshine State and started looking for a different option that would give him some independence but still keep him relatively close to his family. After hearing how Atlanta was quickly growing into an urban mecca, he drove down with some friends who ended up being his first roommates.

It’s not uncommon for a young man moving to a strange city far from home to struggle, but Burke felt a connection with Atlanta that only deepened with time. “My parents raised me in New York, but I became a man in Atlanta,” he said. “Good or bad, the city is home for me. I don’t think I could have done this anywhere else. Atlanta allowed me the opportunity to build these relationships. I think I came into my own here.”

While Burke’s first job in Atlanta was a temporary Christmas gig at Toys “R” Us, it didn’t take him long to join the local music scene. He made friends with a classmate at The Art Institutes who played bass in a local band. The band had booked a gig opening for Harold

Melvin & The Blue Notes, but needed help moving equipment. After helping them set up the stage, Burke mingled with the club's patrons—including professional boxer Sugar Ray Leonard. The excitement of the experience inspired him to sign on as the band's permanent roadie.

Burke's time as a roadie proved to be fruitful training for his future endeavors in the music business. Growing up as the son of a musician, he'd always appreciated music. However, this behind-the-scenes work taught him to be organized, as well as proactive, to help give fans an experience they wouldn't soon forget. "See a need, fill a need," he said. "Don't wait for things to become an issue. Foresee, get it done, and it won't be an issue."



The DreamWeaver Ian Burke, Photo by @Richardaevansphotography

The ability to foresee untapped areas of potential has served Burke well over the years. While he won't take credit for creating a distinct musical sound, it's impossible to deny that his talent for branding has had a lasting impact on the Atlanta music scene. The general concept is one he picked up while watching *The Idolmaker*, a film loosely based on the life of rock promoter/producer Bob Marcucci—who is best known for having discovered Frankie Avalon and Fabian. The movie described how he'd pick up fan magazines to see what the world was interested in hearing about, then try to create an act that tapped into the public's current desires. "I adopted a similar method," Burke said. "I never created any of the sounds for my artists. I created the concept—the idea of the artist—and then the producers filled in the blanks."

One of Burke's best-known acts, TLC (then named 2nd Nature), came about in 1990 when he developed the concept of a female version of the new jack swing act Bell Biv DeVoe. He wanted to create a tomboyish, hip-hop image for the act and planned to use one of his clients—a teenager named Crystal Jones—as the prototype. After an extensive search for two more girls, he settled on Tionne Watkins and Lisa Lopes. Producer Jermaine Dupri loved the package he put together on the girls and invited him to work similar magic for a different act: the teen duo Kris Kross (Chris Kelly and Chris Smith). "That's how my whole musical career got started," Burke said. "I was managing *Arrested Development*, I put together TLC, and I worked with Jermaine on Kris Kross. In 1991, all of these groups released records on different labels. All of the groups went multi-platinum, and all of them were nominated for Grammys."

Burke continued to hone his eye for talent during a stint with Elektra Records, where he signed Senegalese artist Akon, the R&B group Mista featuring Bobby V, and D-Roc of the Ying Yang Twins. He made dreams come true for countless aspiring musicians, but continued to stress the importance of nurturing relationships with the broader community. His Church Fire Benefit Concert raised over \$50,000 in donations to assist in the restoration of churches burned throughout the south by asking the simple question, "What can we do as a musical community to help make a difference?"

A PANDEMIC PIVOT

When the coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, Burke used the unexpected downtime to chart a new path. He decided to turn his storytelling skills to television and film with two distinctly different passion projects: a behind-the-scenes look at his work shaping Atlanta's music scene in the 1990s and a collaboration with his brother providing an educational yet entertaining look at marine conservation efforts.

According to Burke, he was initially resistant to the idea of creating a music documentary because he didn't want it to focus solely on his life. He eventually decided to take an approach similar to *The Last Dance*, the sports documentary miniseries co-produced by ESPN Films and Netflix that focused on Michael Jordan while incorporating the history of the Bulls and the perspectives of the players on the team. "I wanted to do something that told the early

days of the Atlanta music scene and just incorporated me into that vision,” he said. “I wanted a story that makes Atlanta the co-star. It’s not just me. There were so many different facets that made Atlanta what it was at that time, and I wanted to explore it all.”

The star-studded promo for *BTS: Atlanta* features Jagged Edge, Mr. DJ, Bobby V, Kandi Burruss, Speech, Goodie Mob, Organized Noize, and others describing the atmosphere in ‘90s Atlanta as “magic” and Burke as the behind-the-scenes workhorse helping artists get their word out to the masses. It’s equal parts nostalgia and music history—an approach that Burke jokes is much more entertaining than listening to him pat himself on the back and say, “I did this.”

Producing the documentary gave Burke the perfect opportunity to reflect on his past accomplishments, but he wants audiences to know that there’s no act he views as his “greatest” success. “Arrested Development won two Grammys. TLC became one of the biggest selling groups of all time. There’s no other hip-hop group to win Album of the Year other than Outkast. Akon is one of the biggest names in music right now. The list goes on and on. It’s like watching all of your kids graduate summa cum laude from college,” he said. “To know that I was part of that story means so much to me.”

Although Burke is best known for his contributions to the music industry, he wanted to be a marine biologist as a young boy. Seeing *Jaws* at age nine scared him away from a career underwater, but he’s always been inspired by the work his brother Les has poured into Junior Scientists In the Sea (JSIS). Seeing an opportunity to collaborate with Les on a project they’d each be able to bring their own unique talents to, Burke came up with the idea of a children’s program delving into the threats facing underwater life and the steps that must be taken to preserve the oceans for future generations.

Burke describes *The Aquatics* as a “docuseries meets scripted TV” concept that places an equal emphasis on scientific knowledge and compelling human stories. His hope is that a superhero take that turns the ethnically diverse cast into the “champions of the ocean” will inspire young people to become more aware of the impact climate change is having on marine life and the world around them. “I wanted kids who wouldn’t necessarily be interested in the science part of it to be interested in the human part of it,” he said. “It’s like when you want to give a dog a pill, you put it in his favorite food and you feed it to him. By the time he eats it, he’s unaware that he just got his medicine.”

WRITING THE NEXT CHAPTER

Burke is currently shopping his Atlanta music documentary and marine conservation series for distribution, but remains confident that the next chapter of his life story will be just as compelling as the ones before. “I’m never leaving the music industry. It will always be a part of me, but I’m taking film production very seriously,” he said. “It’s all about taking talent from one space to another and focusing on weaving a good story together.”

When asked what others hoping to break into the entertainment industry could learn from his story, Burke stressed the importance of continued personal growth. “It’s all about educating yourself and being part of the process,” he said. “You have to have that foundation of knowledge whether you go to school or you’re actually out there doing it for yourself. There’s no real blueprint. A lot of it changes from day to day. It’s about how you put it within your framework.”

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20 Comments



- **Matthew Smith**

Happy to see Ian get a few flowers, finally! Well deserved. Here’s to many more.



- **Rita Mitchell**

Ian Burke’s story is finally being shared. I remember how good hearted he was back in the day. Congratulations and much success to him.



- **India Graves**

Congratulations, Ian! I love this article and it's about time people heard your incredible story. You are destined for even greater things and I wish you the best in this next phase in your life!



- **Vincent "VLEEV" Bryant**

Motown writing Legend Elgie Stover sent me to ASCAP in Atlanta and it was Ian Burke who signed me to ASCAP . His familiar friendly but no nonsense approach is awesome in an industry of stiff stuck up individuals . Now that I am an original music for film composer and producer I look forward to working with him . IAN has always been a solid source .



- **Demia Avery**

What can I say... He is just the man! This cover is so well deserved.



- **Alonzo Robinson**

Ian knowledge and keen A&R ears and Approach to the artist needs and his able to translate as a music executive in the industry has made a power house to be around and a joy to work with for many years.
I learned a lot.
My brother!



- **Nattie Hopkins**

This man should go downing history as one of the best. Happy to see him rising again.



- **Kimberly Everson**

Ian Burke is one of my personal heroes. He moved behind the scenes. He changed so many lives. I hope those artists realize his magic and are sharing the wealth.



- **Steve Mixon**

Ian Burke is the coolest dude I ever met in the entertainment world. Happy to see someone spotlighting him. Looking forward to the bio-doc.



- **Carl Allen**

Ian Burke, it is about time he got his flowers. I have not seen anything else wrwritten about him, ever. Even when that TLC move was out.



- **Leslie Turner**

Love me some TLC, finally happy to meet the man who envisioned that kind of girl group.



- **Annie**

Yea, he is a dreamweaver, I wish I'd met him bak in the day.



- **Melanie Owens**

Man, Ian Burke, the legend the man. I remember when I met him. A cool dude.



- **Jennifer Waters**

It is hard to believe that he did not promote himself more. What he did with those artists is miraculous. I would have never known who he was if you all did not share this story. Salute Mr. Burke.



- **Susan Worthington**

I am happy to see Ian Burke get his flowers. He is so deserving and is very long over due. Job well done to you and your team.



- **McKenzie Arnold**

I did not realize who this was until I saw all of the artists he produced/managed. And I bet this isn't even half of the story. This is a good look. Congratulations on this BIG interview.



- **Alvin Hurt**

Ian Burke, NO way! Ian Burke. Man he is one of the original OG's. He is a legend in Atlanta. I can't wait to see his documentary. When is it coming out? What platform can I see it on? I will never forget how they barley mentioned him in the TCL biopic. If it wasn't for him, we would not have TLC. Job well done. Good article.



- **Milton Isom**

Not his last dance at ALL! I believe this is the beginning of something really strong for Mr. Burke. I am so happy you featured his story in this issue. I am shocked that he interviewed. I never heard much about until I started doing research on the Atlanta sound back int he day.



- **Kellie Hurtmon**

I really enjoyed learning more about the man behind the Atlanta musics sound. Thanks for a well written article.



- **Carlos Hadmat**

I have been ordering where Ian was and what he's been up to. Thank you for this cover.