

HEADLINERS

Afrika Hot!

Rising Rap star Afrikan Boy talks to Headliners reporters after a performance in East London.

Afrikan Boy has a bright future ahead of him following his appearance on M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes Remix" and his underground hit "Lidl" (about shoplifting Lidl!). The 20 year-old South London MC from a Nigerian background, managed to get his head out of the library after studying for his undergraduate dissertation on the Psychology of Magic, to take the stage at [Rich Mix](#) in East London for the monthly [Vinspired Malawi Lake of Stars Festival](#) showcase. He gave Headliners reporters an exclusive backstage interview.



Describe yourself and your music genre?

This is always the hardest question because everyone asks me that. There is not really a particular genre that I stick to, I like to stay away from everything that's been done already, so if I hear a beat that is something strange to me, but still sounds really cool, like that "City Of Haiti" [new song] beat then I will be like "Cool." So there is not really a genre to it, I just hear the beat and express what comes out, I guess rap then.

What kind of work are you doing now?

My University work [laughs]; I'm in my final year studying Psychology and Sociology, I got my final project coming up, which is like 10,000 words and I just came out from the library. Apart from that in the music side I'm recording my album at the moment and just recording constantly, not always the album but recording in general.

What influenced you to pick up the Mic?

I started MCing during the golden era of grime. So when Kano and Dizzee were still on the radio and Tinchy was still going, that was the time I started writing. So I started as a normal grime MC but I adapted my style because everyone was writing back then. Everyone was MCing so for me to be different I had to talk about things that were true and that would make people laugh. I had to not be ashamed of it, which was the key thing, especially with making "Lidl." It was a true story but the only thing that would stop someone from writing that song or performing it is because their ashamed of it. That's what I try to tackle. Some people even feel weird pronouncing my name, they are like; 'Can't we call you something else? Because it feels a bit weird.' But yeah I like to do that to people, that's why I do Psychology.

When did you make "Lidl"?

I think I was in college. The events that I talk about in "Lidl"; me and my friend Hugo, it was a Sunday after church (laughs), it was near our area in Charlton and was in the summer, me and him went to steal some chicken (laughs). I wrote the song whilst I was in college. It just came to my head.

How did the Afrikan Boy name come about?

I give myself many nicknames. I call myself the Eba Eater, Captain Africa, and Young Naira. There was Links Man or something ridiculous like that. Then I just chose Afrikan Boy. I didn't choose Nigerian Boy because it's not about that. The name isn't the fact that I'm African it's just a name I give to my raps. That's why the name is so plain; people add so many different connotations to it just because of the person behind it.

Are you doing it by yourself or are you signed?

I've always done it by myself. For now, I mean people have offered me deals particularly around the peak of "Lidl." There were loads of them (offers) and I was like 17, I was still in college getting E.M.A! People offered me good contracts but I didn't sign it because I will never sign a contract if I don't have a lawyer and I couldn't afford a lawyer so I just thought there's no point of me signing a contract and at the time I don't think I was ready anyway. So many things happened too fast for me. You have to really take your time and understand if you're really in it for the money and if I was I would've signed a contract time ago or I would've done 50 remixes of "Lidl" and milked that cow but I chose not to even shoot a video for it. I've never uploaded a YouTube video for it; I just let it be what it was.



Would you feel like you've influenced people to come out of their shell?

I guess the greatest message you can get from me is to be really comfortable with who you are. When I was in Primary School it wasn't cool to be African. People used to call me "Tunde." I guess it just comes when you come to terms with who you are and then you're cool. I mean even if it's with your body or your appearance. It's just coming to terms with who you are and embracing your heritage. Because for me I say my parents were born in Nigeria, I was conceived in Nigeria and then I was born here because my mum came here. So I've got all the culture from living here as a typical London boy but I've still got my another side, my other perception on it. It's really good when you can have two cultures like that, I've forgot the question you asked me now (laughs).

When you first picked up the mic did you ever dream that you would be this big?

I still have to switch into Afrikan Boy mode sometimes because there are so many different sides to me. I never thought things could go the way they are going. I appreciate every single second, even you guys taking time to ask me questions. That's like me asking you guys questions, that's how I see it, so I appreciate everything.

You just do it. The changing point was when M.I.A. messaged me to work with her. I said "yeah" and then I went on tour in America and I met Dizzee Rascal. That for me was the biggest thing ever, I met Dizzee and he was like "wa gwan blood", I was like "yo fam" (laughs). That was really great, coming straight from college, straight from the ends (local area) onto a stage in front of thousands and if I go back to the ends people won't believe me until they saw it on T.V.! It's amazing, you have to learn to adapt and just keep on working. Once you realise its possible then things change.

What would your advice be to young and upcoming artists?

Being young and upcoming, try to stand out in your own way, try and be comfortable. If its rap just remember that there's nothing wrong with what you rap about. You don't have to rap about stuff loads of other rappers rap about. Just do your own thing and it will make you stronger.

Always keep your faith, because there will be down times. Keep on practising everyday. Like me I always write bars (lyrics) everyday, I just fall in love with it and have fun with it, that's how I made "Lidl." I didn't know it was going to be this big. That's why the song annoys me so much!

You say you've got a passion for music but obviously everyone needs money. So what's the money saying?

The money side is what I call Young Naira. That's my materialistic side; you can't escape it, its reality. Money is motivation to a certain extent for me to work harder. If I don't work harder and do the things that I'm doing then there won't be no money. Then again I'm in uni as well because you need to be able to guarantee yourself money in the future. As much as I love music, I've got my degree there as well. I'm still going back to the library after this. Once I graduate I can get a job and still come and do shows. That's where you are about money properly because people think about money and be like; "nah bun (burn) uni!" (You need to) think smart boy because if no one signs you for a deal for like a year you can have a job. For a nice year you'll stack money, you've got to think smart.

As the night went on, the audience at Rich Mix in Bethnal Green, witnessed the heart of modern African British music, the DJ mashed up African music with a heavy bass beat for Afrikan Boy to show his true colours and passion about his heritage and life. He lit up the audience and shared a few moves with them on the dance floor. The night as a whole proved to be another success by the Lake of Stars team.

About this story

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