

FIRST ISSUE | 2020

UNDRGRND

STARTING A
RAP CAREER
FROM
SCRATCH

SMITTY
PARTIES

DAMIEN
BRUZ



#1805


- MIKEY G
- POFSKY
- THÉREON
- BELLE
- KOLLEGE
- RAFIK
- DEO


THE FUTURE OF VENTURA COUNTY HIP-HOP




"Follow your heart. Don't follow what you've been told you're supposed to do."

- J. Cole (2009)

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 Undrgrnd Magazine


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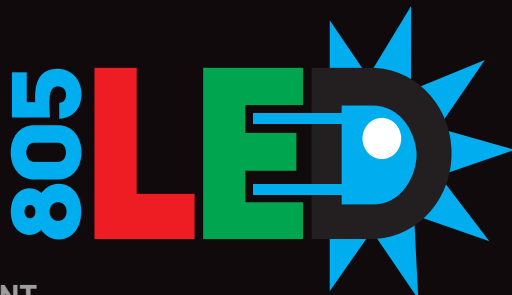
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EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO "THE 805"



LET'S CLEAR THE AIR right away: this isn't XXL magazine. These are not the rich and flashy stars of Spotify's RapCaviar playlist. We're not in Los Angeles or Hollywood. No, this is Ventura County, or "The 805" for short, or "The Five" for shorter.

Go ask an Angeleno what they think of Ventura County. You may hear responses along the lines of "privileged," "wealthy," and "uncultured." While artists like Madlib, KYLE, and Anderson .Paak have found their way out of "The 805's" bubble and into the world of rap prestige, you'd still struggle tremendously to meet somebody who connects Ventura County with hip-hop culture or rap music. However, there is an undeniable movement happening throughout "The Five."

Sure, these artists don't share the same Kendrick Lamar or Lil Wayne rags-to-riches come-up stories that have captivated rap fans' hearts for generations. Most grew up in safe neighborhoods, received adequate education, and been blessed with whatever other opportunities this wonderful place so generously gives its residents. But don't get it twisted: their stories are

certainly worth following.

Nobody in these pages has a label paying them to create. Studio time, online streaming, music videos, and other self-promotional efforts are paid for out of pocket. There are no agents or ghostwriters. Instead, *Undrgrnd* magazine focuses on up-and-coming artists who have to balance their music dreams with their real-world lives.

It was difficult to organize these rappers for the photoshoot and individual interviews, and not because they had to fit me in between sold-out arena tours or meet-and-greets with thousands of rabid fans. Rather, it took strategic planning to find time in between these artists' cluttered schedules as students, athletes, bartenders, gamers, hotel employees, valet drivers, and more. Whatever their unique livelihoods may be, they are all united by the common dream of one day making it big in the rap game.

There are seven artists featured in the first issue of *Undrgrnd*. Two others were invited but could not commit the time due to outside obligations, another testament to just how difficult balancing real life with a startup rap career can be. Oxnard's Eric Davis, (a.k.a.

"Yung Mimosa") had a try-out with the Dallas Mavericks' affiliate G-League team the same weekend as our photoshoot. Meanwhile, fellow Oxnard native, Anton Khabbaz (a.k.a. "Dreamsuite"), had an urgent music-related meeting to attend last minute.

In addition to the seven rappers featured, this issue takes a look at a local event coordinator and a painter who have both made important impacts on Ventura County's underground rap scene.

Creating *Undrgrnd* has forced myself to embody a similar lifestyle to an up-and-coming rapper. Whether we like it or not, we squeeze our energy, skills, and money into a project, all for the hope that the right person finds it. And while I would assume my journalism professors at Boston University's College of Communication would advise against a print magazine in 2020, it's important to be different.

So f**k it, welcome to "The 805," and welcome to *Undrgrnd*.

ANDREW MASON
@andrewmason54

ON THE COME-UP

Examining the never guaranteed, sometimes profitable, and always dramatic life of an underground rapper

MIKHEY GOMEZ reads a text message sent from his mother earlier in the day. The text is in Spanish, but Gomez, also known as rapper “Mikey G,” translates it into English: “I see that you are very happy about your passion and I’m very happy to see you smiling,” the message reads. Gomez pauses. The 24-year-old Thousand Oaks native confesses that his mother had never outwardly supported his goal of creating music for a living. “She’s never hated, she’s just never understood,” he says. “[This] was the first time she’s ever given me props on anything music related...I damn near shed a tear.”

Proving one’s value as a rapper—not only to hip-hop fans, but to family members and friends as well—is just another part of being an underground musician. Music is a business of unpredictable success, cut only for those who crave criticism and are comfortable with failure. It requires a will to invest the time, effort, and money it takes to get noticed and move up. And even when all the right steps are taken, nothing is guaranteed.

Luckily, the Ventura County, nicknamed “The 805” or just “The Five,” provides more opportunities than most parts of the country to infiltrate the mainstream rap world. Located directly northwest of hip-hop-hotbed Los Angeles, Ventura County’s geographical position makes it advantageous to up-and-coming artists trying to gain traction and kickstart their careers. Kyle Ebrahimi (a.k.a. “Théreon”) is a 22-year-old musician from Thousand Oaks, who uses his close proximity to the “City of Angels” as motivation for his own work. “We’re only an hour from Los Angeles, which is the fucking craziest place to be for rap music,” Ebrahimi says.

Other artists, such as Gomez, back up this sentiment, crediting “The Five’s” placement in the shadow of a bigger city as an inspiration to grind and create music. “It’s definitely an underdog mentality [in Ventura County],” Gomez says. “The Bay Area and LA [run] the popular whole [Californian] scene.” And Jacari Jackson, a rapper and popular

video game streamer based in Oxnard, believes having the approximately 60-mile buffer from Los Angeles helps him stay focused. “In LA, everybody wants to be an artist,” says Jackson, known simply as “Rafik” or “Tophonee” to his followers. “I don’t have to deal with that type of distraction.”

However, trying to work your way to hip-hop stardom from a county known more for wildfires than for music presents its challenges. Only a few of Ventura County’s artists, such as Oxnard’s Madlib and Anderson .Paak, and Ventura’s KYLE, have made a significant stamp in rap lore. In fact, “The 805” is far from adopting a rap culture, according to Michael Pofsky (a.k.a. “Pofsky”), a 22-year-old rapper from Newbury Park. Pofsky wishes the local community focused more on encouraging its people to pursue their dreams and take creative risks. “It feels like it’s hard to be an artist out here,” he says, citing the safe, family-oriented lifestyle of many of the county’s approximately 850,000 inhabitants.

As Ventura County’s emerging rappers quickly discover, a general lack of local hip-hop history is just one obstacle in the difficult journey to music glory. Without a large following or connection to a record label, external funding is nonexistent. As a result, it’s up to the rappers themselves to come up with the money to cover expensive studio time, show fees, travel costs, and other self-promotional efforts. To pay for these costs, artists often balance their rap dreams with something less flashy: a minimum wage job. Still, there are times when these minimum wage jobs do not provide enough funds to consistently cover the price of making music with industry-standard quality.

De’Amante Cane (a.k.a. “Deo”) is a Newbury Park-based rapper who doubles as a Vans store employee. Cane says he feels his music career is sometimes jeopardized because he must prioritize using his paycheck on non music-related responsibilities.

“As far as [recording], it’s like ‘damn, I can’t record this weekend, because this week I gotta pay for rent, or I gotta fix my dumbass car,’” says Cane, 22. “Real life definitely plays a role.”

One trick used to maximize budgeting is to strategize when renting studio time, which can cost hundreds of dollars per hour in Southern California depending on the quality of the studio. Artists on the come-up routinely book studio hours between midnight and early morning, when prices are the cheapest. “Is this your lifestyle? Are you down to be up at three in the morning making a record?,” asks Gomez,



an attendee of multiple graveyard-shift recording sessions during the making of Pofsky's *RHYTHM.I.C.* project in early 2019. "Are you down to invest that money that you just made at work into yourself, into studio time?"

Although it's rarely the financially safe route, being an underground rapper requires one to embrace day-to-day financial adversity, with hopes of one day securing a stable music career. 20-year-old Isabel De La Cruz (a.k.a. "Belle") feels the pressure that this lifestyle manifests. "You have to pay for rent, for gas, and food," the Newbury Park native says. "It's hard to manage at times and it does get stressful, but I think that if you really enjoy doing music, you're willing to push through all of that."

The process of saving money, getting into the studio with engineers and producers, and recording music with professional quality, is only half of the equation. Once a track or album is mixed, mastered, and completed, it must reach listeners' ears. And without an established name or massive fanbase, this can be the most difficult part of the beginning stages of a rap career. Kado Brown (a.k.a. "KollegeKado"), is a rapper from Ventura who regularly finds creative ways to spread his music. "You gotta find the platforms or moves you can to expand and have your sound stick with somebody," says Brown, who promotes his music in a variety of ways online, including on Spotify, Apple Music, Twitter, and Instagram. "You could be improving but it might just fall on deaf ears...it's easy to get discouraged."

Thoughts of quitting music are seemingly unavoidable for new artists, especially when streaming rates and profits remain low. To help curb these negative feelings, some rappers from Ventura County claim that surrounding themselves with people who also share their same vision goes a long way.

Pofsky is one artist in particular who sees the importance of creating an environment where individual local artists feel comfortable collaborating on music and supporting one another. "A lot of people don't like to see other people win, and that's why they'll never be

successful," says Pofsky, whose *RHYTHM.I.C.* album featured six guest artists, including Gomez and Cane, on nine of its 11 tracks. "I wouldn't say there's beef or hostility [among Ventura County's rappers], it's just very cliquy...a lot of people hate, but that's regular." In 2020, Pofsky plans on helping out with the creation of both Gomez and Cane's upcoming debut albums, likely in an A&R (artists and repertoire) role. "It's really cool that Pofsky is doing all the different things he's doing," Cane says. "He's literally bringing all us artists together...to push each other to succeed."

Despite the cooperative spirit encouraged by those like Pofsky, an unhealthy lack of artist-to-artist support remains. This animosity between rappers is both existent and unnecessary, according to Brown. "We can be in competition without being enemies, and I think people don't get that," Brown says. "I'm not hurt by it, but I realize it's not really a have-each-other's-back type of thing."

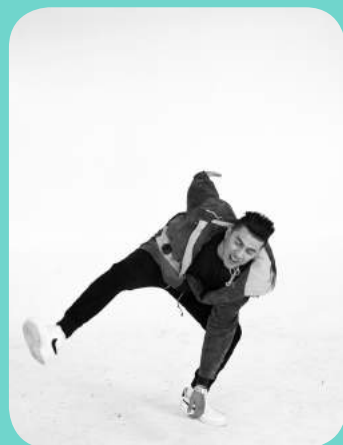
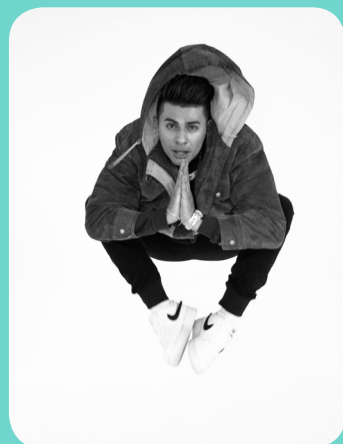
While the seven rappers featured in *Undrgrnd's* first issue are certainly not the only locals taking a stab at this unique career path, they are perfect examples of those who are. Whether or not they fulfill their dreams of making an impact on the rap world, these creatives deserve to have their stories heard. All seven are cementing themselves as pioneers in this current wave of local rap, all the while tackling the multitude of obstacles that life throws at young adults.

But "The 805's" underground rap scene still has plenty of growing to do. If its members truly want to have longevity in the music world and eventually make a serious pierce into the Los Angeles market, it is key for more artists to embrace and reinforce one another. As for Gomez, he now has the reassured support of his mother. And while he promises he is ready to have a musically productive year in 2020, he reminds himself that the future of Ventura County hip-hop may very well rely on the camaraderie amongst the area's artists. "By ourselves they might be able to ignore," Gomez says. "But together as a unit, they can't ignore us for much longer...it's about to pop."





MIKEY G



STATS

LEGAL NAME: Miguel Angel Gomez Jr.
RAP NAME: Mikey G (alter ego: "Guapo")
AGE: 24 **HEIGHT:** 5-foot-10-inches
HOMETOWN: Thousand Oaks, Calif.
HS: Westlake ('13)
COLLEGE: California Lutheran University
YEARS RAPPING: 10 ("It started with poetry and shit")
OCCUPATION: Supervisor at the Four Seasons Hotel in Westlake Village (2018 Employee of the Year), event coordinator, student
BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Dr. Dre; JAY-Z; J. Cole
NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: "Sprinkle Me", "Prop 64", "Super Saiyan"; Appears on: Pofsky's "Respect"
DREAM FEATURE: Bob Marley; Kendrick Lamar; Larry June; Dom Kennedy
DREAM 805 FEATURE: Madlib; Anderson .Paak
FAVORITE 805 PERFORMANCE VENUE: The Alamo (Newbury Park); The Factory (Ventura)
FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Los Dos Amigos (Thousand Oaks); Toppers (Thousand Oaks); El Taco De Mexico (Oxnard)
FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER: Myself; gmbatz
NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Myself; KollegeKado; Pofsky

Q AND A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805": "The community. Everybody fucks with each other, even people that went away to college. We really care about one another...people would die, and kill, and work their ass off to come here and live in Southern California. And I love it because [Ventura County]'s not super watered down like LA or Hollywood."
2020 MUSIC GOALS: "Release at least two EPs...work with more producers, and build my following."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: A debut solo album ("It's gonna be a body of work, not just a bunch of loosies...it's getting to the point where I have to put it out there"); a music-themed podcast

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "Building my home studio [in 2014] was a big pivotal point for me. It's no longer standing anymore...but people were there creating and I definitely created a bunch of great music there."

ON SUPPORT: "If you got the backup of your family and your friends it feels good. You feel damn near unstoppable. Not everyone's going to support you [though], I understand that."

ON HATERS: "Ignore them, man. Keep smiling...they see something in me that they're lacking."

NEXT STEP AS AN ARTIST: "Release everything. I've held back for so long...I want to become a full character. I want to evolve into 'Guapo.'"

ON QUITTING: "I used to have those moments a lot, sadly. I'm happy to say now I don't really have those thoughts...there's something so therapeutic about [writing music] that I don't think I will ever stop."

ON RAP AS AN OUTLET: "If I wasn't blessed with the skills to be able to make music or create, I'd be going crazy...My life wouldn't be that much fun. I'd just be going to work and going home."

DESCRIBE YOUR OWN MUSIC: "You just got your car washed on a Sunday, you're about to pull up to the friend's house and have a barbecue, and got the veggie patties on the grill."

WHAT'S MISSING IN "THE 805" HIP-HOP SCENE?: "We need more musical collaborations...it [used to be] almost not cool to collaborate or support one another...we need more shit like this magazine...they're gonna be like 'what's going on in "The 805?"' These motherfuckers are dangerous."

ON UNDERGRAND: "It's a great look. It's about time somebody fucking did this, and it feels so good and comfortable that it's being done the right way...and it makes me hungrier believe it or not. If I'm gonna have eyes on me then I'm gonna make sure I stand out, and that [readers] remember me, the first edition, the cover, and everybody in it."



BELLE

STATS

LEGAL NAME: Isabel De La Cruz
RAP NAME: Belle
AGE: 20 **HEIGHT:** 5-foot
HOMETOWN: Newbury Park, Calif.
HS: Newbury Park ('17)
COLLEGE: Moorpark College (dropped out)
("I never showed up so it doesn't really count")
YEARS RAPPING: 1
OCCUPATION: Production Assistant for a photography studio
BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Doja Cat; Rico Nasty ("She's fire. She's so cool")
NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: "Counterfeit", "No Valentine", "Plastic"
DREAM FEATURE: Amy Winehouse; Tay Money
DREAM 805 FEATURE: Ryan Cook a.k.a. "Caspas G"
FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Vegan Thyme (Newbury Park)
NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Pofsky ("He's been in it for so long, it's bound to happen")



Q AND A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805": "Being able to be around [people] who I grew up with."
2020 MUSIC GOALS: "I want to focus more on getting visuals out. Letting people know who I am, what I look like...that would be cool."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: A music video for "No Valentine"

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "The first night I ever recorded. I wasn't really ever going to post music, I kind of just made a song because I was bored...it was just a drunken night."

DESCRIBE YOUR OWN MUSIC: "It makes girls feel like they're a boss ass bitch. And males, they can be boss ass bitches [too]."

ON HATERS: "Only females will hate on me. I don't take it to heart because I enjoy making music."

ON QUITTING: "It definitely gets stressful trying to coordinate things to a point where I am just too stressed to wanna continue doing it. But in the grand scheme of things I don't think I will ever quit."

NEXT STEP AS AN ARTIST: "Definitely an album."

WHY'D YOU START RAPPING?: "I started making music at a time in my life where I felt like a loser. I didn't have a hobby...if I make it big, I make it big. If I don't, I don't. I'm still gonna make music just for the sole purpose of it's a good outlet to clear your mind."

WHAT'S MISSING IN "THE 805" HIP-HOP SCENE?: "More venues to perform at for all ages, not just [21 and older]...it would also bring more artists from different areas here."

RAFIK

STATS

LEGAL NAME: Jacari Rafik Jackson
RAP NAME: Rafik (a.k.a. "Tophonee")
AGE: 22 **HEIGHT:** 6-foot-1-inch
HOMETOWN: Oxnard, Calif.
HS: Pacifica ('15)
COLLEGE: Ventura College
YEARS RAPPING: 10
OCCUPATION: Twitch Streamer best known for playing "Fortnite" ("people know me through [Hamlinz's] community"), Tilly's store
MOST STREAMED GAMES: "Fortnite", "Overwatch", or IRL ("in real life")
BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Kendrick Lamar; Smino; Hopsin
NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: "Thomin", "DISScord" (feat. Hamlinz, Lil Sus), "Troubles"; EP: *Space*
DREAM FEATURE: Kendrick Lamar ("If I ever could even talk to him...I want to ask 'what did you do, when you were not known, to differentiate yourself?")
DREAM 805 FEATURE: Anderson .Paak; KYLE
FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Subway ("the Spicy Italian every time")
FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER: Myself, Khroam, LGBrev, or free YouTube beats
NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Myself





Q AND A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805": "The weather...and I think this got voted as the safest county or something like that...eventually I want to move and whatnot, but for now I just enjoy the place."

2020 MUSIC GOALS: "Performing live...and I want a girl singer on my song."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: A second EP ("I want to keep the theme of space")

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "Probably 'Thoom-in'...just because how much positive feedback I got...and people telling me that I should definitely keep making music."

NEXT STEP AS AN ARTIST: "Performing, honestly. I can come out with music but if I haven't performed or shown anybody what I can do they're not gonna know what I'm capable of."

ON HATERS: "I like to read hate comments. It's funny, like 'dang, you took the time out of your day to come to my thing, just to say this'... people will always find a reason to hate you, so why worry about it?"

WILL YOUR LEGACY BE GAMING OR MUSIC?: "If I could choose, I would choose music, because gaming could end. Music is literally forever."

ON UNDRGRND: "All of us are gonna promote it, it's gonna be pretty cool."



KOLLEGEKADO

STATS

LEGAL NAME: Kado Brown
RAP NAME: KollegeKado ("no space, two capital K's")
AGE: 24 **HEIGHT:** 6-foot
HOMETOWN: Ventura, Calif.
HIGH SCHOOL: Rio Mesa ('13)
YEARS RAPPING: 4
OCCUPATION: Aspiring investor/trader, former NCAA Division I football student-athlete
COLLEGE: Moorpark College; Georgia Southern University
BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Drake; Kendrick Lamar; Tupac Shakur
NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: "Blueberry Drip", "Swag Like Chad"; Projects: *Kampus Legend*, *Dirty Gold Saturn*
DREAM FEATURE: Drake; Kendrick Lamar
DREAM 805 FEATURE: Anderson .Paak; KYLE
FAVORITE 805 PERFORMANCE VENUE: Fresh Mex Bar & Grill (Oxnard) ("That's who showed me love, that's where I make money at")
FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Super Taco ("That shit slaps")
FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER: Yung Henny
NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: SlumpBoyz ("They'll be a dope group")



Q and A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805": "Getting to complain about hot weather being 77 degrees... doesn't get better than that."

2020 MUSIC GOALS: "Getting some distribution, and I still want to do a California [coast] mini-tour."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: *One In A Million* EP

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "I signed an ESPN synchronization license for ["Swag Like Chad"] through [Feb.] 2020...if they wanted to spin it for a broadcast, then they could do it and I'll be credited."

ON QUITTING: "If I quit today, what's it for? What am I quitting to? I don't have shit now, so if I quit, I'm just gonna quit to not having shit?...It would be foolish."

ON FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: "I've been trying to financially educate myself more. I've always been able to work with the money that I have just because the way I grew up and my pops been in my life... he showed me how not to be down-and-out type of broke."

ON SUPPORTING OTHER LOCAL RAPPERS: "It is a competition, we all want to be the best...but people need to realize that you can be in competition without being enemies."

WHERE WOULD YOU MOVE TO?: "I recently went to Portland [Ore.]...Portland was smooth, bruh...or I might relocate back to the South."

WILL YOUR LEGACY BE FOOTBALL OR MUSIC?: "It all depends on who you ask...this past year, year and a half, has been pretty heavy on the music."

ON UNDERGRAND: "This solidifies me as a pioneer in 'The Five'...this is the right spotlight that we all need."



théreon



stats

LEGAL NAME: Kyle Ebrahimi
RAP NAME: Théreon (from the Old English term “there on”, meaning “on that”)
AGE: 22 **HEIGHT:** 6-foot-3-inches
HOMETOWN: Thousand Oaks, Calif.
HIGH SCHOOL: Westlake (‘16)
COLLEGE: Moorpark (dropped out); Recording Connection Los Angeles
YEARS RAPPING: 2
OCCUPATION: Car Valet Attendant
BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Pharrell Williams, Pierre Bourne, A\$AP Rocky, Pusha T, Curren\$y
NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: “Jack Jones”, “Working Girl” (feat. Sway), “White Sand Beaches” (feat. Isaac Thursday); Albums: *Under the Table*
DREAM FEATURE: Larry June; Quentin Miller; Pusha T
DREAM 805 FEATURE: Ally Baron; Anderson .Paak
FAVORITE 805 PERFORMANCE VENUE: My house
FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Holdren’s Steaks & Seafood (Newbury Park); Lure Fish House (Westlake)
FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER: Stone Rose; Elijah Klever
NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Jack Kleinick (a.k.a “Uncle Jack”)

Q and A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT “THE 805”:

“Everyone’s connected. It’s kind of small, and I like that...I also love the wilderness.”

2020 MUSIC GOALS: “Sign a deal with a record label, whether it’s an independent one, a big one, whatever it can be... work with Quentin Miller...and open up for an established rapper, preferably at a festival.”

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: Collaboration project with Stone Rose

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: Recording a song with Cj Francis IV (“All She Need” by LaVoyde Shep)

IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC VIDEOS:

“Visuals help you understand the audio... it looks like you’re doing the shit that musicians do.”

ON WORK ETHIC: “I don’t know too many from where I’m from that work as hard as I do, musically...I just have more time on my hands, maybe.”

ON HAVING A HOME STUDIO: “[Other rappers] have to go to the studio and they have to have someone record them and someone mixing them...I’m blessed that I have, one, the equipment, and two, the knowledge...to create music whenever I want.”

WOULD YOU EVER QUIT?: “You’ve gotta fail a bunch to succeed, and that really applies to music.”

ON UNDRGRND: “This is a great project. I’m super happy to be a part of it...I think it’s going to be very successful [because] all the people a part of it seem to have the same energy.”



DEO CANE

STATS

LEGAL NAME: De'Amante Cane

RAP NAME: Deo Cane

AGE: 22 **HEIGHT:** 5-foot-8-inches

HOMETOWN: Born in Galveston, Texas; raised in Newbury Park, Calif.

HS: Newbury Park ('15)

YEARS RAPPING: 1.5

OCCUPATION: Vans store

COLLEGE: Moorpark College (dropped out) ("Fuck this I wanna do music")

BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Michael Jackson; Logic; YBN Cordae

NOTABLE TRACKS: "Clocked In", "Walk a Mile", "Baddie"; Appears On: Pofsky's "Slide", U T M's "GRAVe!"

DREAM FEATURE: Michael Jackson; Roddy Ricch; Kalan.FrFr

DREAM 805 FEATURE: KollegeKado

FAVORITE 805 PERFORMANCE VENUE: Oak&Main (Ventura)

FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Sushi Oaks (Newbury Park)

FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER/ENGINEER: gmbeatz/Steven Callan

NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Pofsky

Q AND A

FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805":

"We're surrounded by all these trees and nature. It's just nice to look at."

2020 MUSIC GOALS: "More solo music. Most of the music I put out is with other people, so I just want to branch off and be my own artist."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: Untitled debut solo album

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "Probably going to Boston [as part of Pofsky's *RHYTHM.I.C.* tour]. Going to the radio shows [and] these crazy-ass studios."

DESCRIBE YOUR OWN MUSIC: "It makes you happy. I talk about shit that's like 'damn, I was fucked up,' but this is how I got through it, or this is how it gets better."

ON HATERS: "I don't [make music] for anyone's recognition. I do it because I actually like to make music."

ON QUITTING: "I've thought about quitting music a few times, especially in the beginning."

NEXT STEP AS AN ARTIST: "The [solo] album that I'm working on, that's gonna be a big step. Promoting it and also marketing myself better... [right now] I won't even talk about [my music] at all sometimes, because I just don't want to bother people with it. But if I want people to listen to it, I kind of have to do that."

ON UNDRGRND: "It's something that we can push all together. It's all of us [local rappers] pushing this one product...it'll put new people on to all the artists."



Pofsky

STATS

LEGAL NAME: Michael Pofsky

RAP NAME: Pofsky

AGE: 22 **HEIGHT:** 5-foot-10-inches

HOMETOWN: Newbury Park, Calif.; Woodland Hills, Calif.

HIGH SCHOOL: El Camino Real; Monarch Boarding School (Montana); Newbury Park ('15)

YEARS RAPPING: 8 ("But I've been making music since I was eight")

OCCUPATION: Bartender, club promoter

BIGGEST MUSIC INFLUENCES: Nas; Atmosphere; Mac Miller

NOTABLE RELEASES: Tracks: "Thug Love"; Projects: *If You Give M.I.C. A Mic* ("from the mixtape days"), *DYNAM.I.C.*, *RHYTHM.I.C.*, *Trap Pofsky*

DREAM FEATURE: Nas

DREAM 805 FEATURE: KollegeKado; Belle; Jordyn Benedict; Whisper Ortiz; Pawni

FAVORITE 805 PERFORMANCE VENUE:

"I don't have a favorite venue, I just like to perform everywhere."

FAVORITE 805 RESTAURANT: Muzen Sushi (Westlake)

FAVORITE 805 PRODUCER: gmbeatz; Charlie Michener

NEXT BREAKOUT 805 MUSICIAN: Myself ("I strongly believe that I have the hardest working team out here")



SLAY

Q AND A



FAVORITE THING ABOUT "THE 805": "You ain't gotta worry about shit out here...and then wherever you need to go you can get there relatively easy...it's a good place to live, for sure."

2020 MUSIC GOALS: "A&R [(artists and repertoire)] Mikey G's album, gmbeatz's [producer] album, and helping with Deo [Cane's] album too...it's gonna be a big team thing...I'm utilizing my resources to put my artists and friends in the best position possible."

FANS CAN SOON EXPECT: Features on other local artists' upcoming albums, and shows and promotion for *Trap Pofsky*

BIGGEST MUSIC MOMENT: "Releasing *RYTHM.I.C.*...everything from dropping the project, doing a release party, to the trip to Boston and New York...four states and ten cities."

ON THE "TRAP POFSKY" CONCEPT: "With Sean [Gomelsky, 24] coming back to the team as the manager, he came to us with the idea of "Trap Pofsky". It is a new style for me...I expect to see big numbers. We're going hard with the marketing for this."

ON BUILDING A FOLLOWING: "Building your fan base is the most difficult part of [being an up-and-coming rapper] among anything else. It takes a tremendous level of next-level energy...it has to be a whole different type of mentality and work ethic...most people you see don't have it."

ON UNDERGRAND: "It's awesome that you have the self-motivation to do it...it's something that we really need in the city...it's dope to do something that's a little bit more old school, and not everybody's doing, which is gonna throw people off in a really good way."

LIFE OF THE PARTY

Less than five miles away from the overcast Oxnard Shores, Devin Smith walks into The Barber Lounge on South C Street in the late morning. He needs a quick touch-up on his fade, just one step in a day full of detail and preparation.

Tonight he'll be hosting a house party in Camarillo. There are over 500 expected partygoers, what would be the largest attended party in his event coordinating career. The 24-year-old from Ventura will spend the rest of the day buying liquor, posting on social media, setting up the house, and checking in with bartenders, musicians, and security officers.

"Nowadays I like my stuff to be real organized," Smith says. "Today is going to be a long day."

Smith, also known as "Smitty", isn't new to this game. He joined the event coordinating business when he was 18, after seeing the potential monetary payout throwing parties could bring.

Since, Smith has organized and hosted over 100 events and launched his own party planning company, Smitty Parties. He also made time to start his clothing line, Positive Vibes, and earn his associate degree in Criminal Justice from Ventura College.

But perhaps the biggest impact he's made in "The 805" is in the hip-hop scene, specifically with the relationships he's built with local rappers who regularly perform at his events.

"There are a lot of dope [artists] out here that just don't get the recognition they deserve," Smith says. "I just want everyone to support each other. If one person makes it, we all make it."

Smith landed a weekly residency in 2017 throwing parties every Thursday night at Oxnard's Casa Lopez Nightclub, where he regularly books local hip-hop talent as part of the night's setlist. Michael Pofsky, 22, known professionally by his last name, is a rapper from Newbury Park who has performed at multiple events hosted by Smith.

"[Smith] is important because he gives up-and-coming artists an opportunity to perform and open up for people and get in front of crowds," Pofsky says. "Some of my biggest shows have been from him."

Smith's involvement with the hip-hop world has led him out of Ventura County's boundaries. He has hosted events in Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Hollywood, and met the likes of Travis Scott, KYLE, Ty Dolla \$ign, and O.T. Genasis in the process.

Through branching out of his home county, Smith has become a liaison between some local rappers and the rest of the Southern Californian music world.

"[Smith] brings people together and that shit is needed for the city," Pofsky says. "He's tapped in with new artists

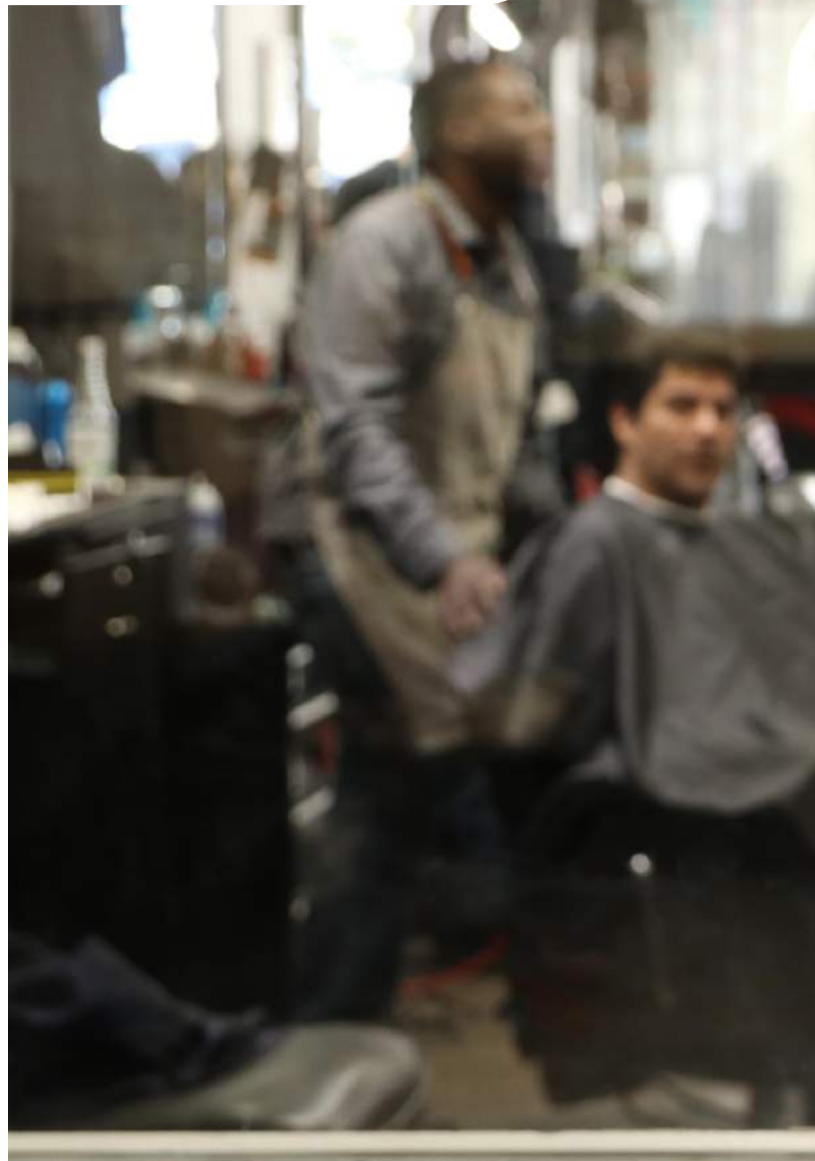


Photo courtesy of Trevor Cobb

like Kalen[.FrFr] and 1takejay and these guys from LA who are making waves. He's bringing [people] from LA out to 'The 805.'"

Smith notes that the position does come with stressful moments, including fights and unruly party attendees, as well as instances of drunk driving and underage drinking. In an effort to prevent these incidents from happening, Smith encourages his partygoers to ride with Uber and Lyft, and implements a wristband system to identify who is 21 and older.

During the week, Smith works for SAGE Services, a



company based in Ventura that assists people with intellectual disabilities. Smith has worked with SAGE for nearly four years as a one-on-one caregiver for mentally challenged adults. The role, he says, teaches him patience, people skills, and how to deal with high-pressure situations.

"With my [caregiving] job, you have to be composed," says Smith, who often meditates, plays basketball, or goes to the beach at night to relax his body and brain. "My stress level is really good."

As for event planning, Smith's future goals will only

help continue to bring Ventura County's musical side to the public spotlight. He hopes to organize a full-scale music festival loaded with local talent, and one day aims to own an upscale nightclub in "The 805."

"I want to make my spot the spot to go to," Smith says. "I'll plan it...[then] sit in the office, feet up, just watching this shit go."

Find Devin Smith on Instagram @devintsmith / @smittyparties / @afterhoursonastreet

Paint, Fire, and Bruises

DAMIEN CRUZ shows his most vulnerable emotions through his masterpieces. His strong connection to his sensitive side is even apparent in his nickname. The 24-year-old creator of hip-hop related artwork in Ventura County is known professionally to his followers as “Bruz.”

“[Bruz] like a bruise, but I spell it like [my last name],” he says. “You’ll see how I feel through my pieces, if you really know me.”

Bruz says he wasn’t seriously involved with art until 2018, when he partook in his first public art show in Echo Park, Calif. Regardless of the late start, he credits his ability to exploit his emotions in his work to his childhood environment, specifically growing up in a household with five sisters.

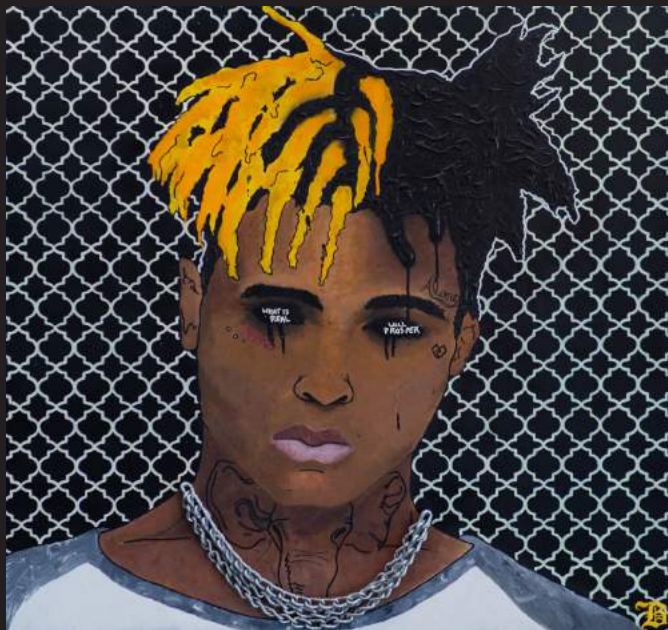
While the Thousand Oaks native relies on a variety of feelings to create his art, sentiment is certainly not one of them. Bruz admits that after finishing many of his pieces, he would burn them, creating a fire spectacle exhibited in many videos on his Instagram page (@damien.bruz).

“Burning them felt good to me,” he says. “Rather than punching a pillow, I needed to do that...there could have been a lot of emotions going on at the moment and I felt like that was the best way to release [them].”

Bruz has suspended burning his pieces, but still doesn’t feel obligated to keep his own work. He has now accepted selling his art to buyers. However, Bruz says he still prefers to give his art away for free, sometimes even leaving his pieces somewhere for the public’s taking.

In Oct. 2018, Bruz left his canvas painting of the now late rapper XXXTentacion, a project that took six months to make, on a chair near the In-N-Out Burger chain in Newbury Park. He has also left pieces throughout Downtown Los Angeles, along beaches, and even on the grounds of the popular Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, Calif.

“When someone finds this, they can give a fuck about anything



“XXX” (2017). 36in. x 36in. “My personal favorite...this was obviously before he passed away, but I was fucking with him heavy.”



“Bad Bunny” (2019). “Rather than just seeing all these female bodies, you should get a little of everything...dicks, pussy, everything...anyone can own it.”

else,” Bruz says of his abandoned work. “They’re going to hang it... maybe it’s in the dumpster, who fucking knows.”

Since he hasn’t relied on selling his artwork to make a living, Bruz also works at a local hospital as an X-Ray assistant and patient transporter. A gig, he says, that helps his artistic process, both financially and mentally. “[The hospital] is very corporate...you’re following someone’s orders,” he says. “I’ll leave the hospital and I still have that mentality [with my art]...I’m inspired and I’m focused.”

Much of Bruz’s art revolves around the theme of hip-hop, a genre that embraces a person’s inner emotions as well as any. In addition to the XXXTentacion project, he has also created art dedicated to artists Trippie Redd, Tekashi 6ix9ine, Cardi B, and Travis Scott. Bruz admits that while he listens to other forms of music, hip-hop remains his favorite.

In 2020, Bruz wants to be involved with the local hip-hop scene in Ventura County, specifically through creating clothes, or “wearable pieces” of art, for artists to boast. He has already started working towards this goal, designing his own clothing for the *Undgrnd* photoshoot and the black, painted-on onesie for featured rapper Mikey Gomez (a.k.a. “Mikey G”).

The onesie, which is showcased on page eight of this magazine, displays the yellow character Lord Quas, the animated alter ego of Oxnard producer Madlib in his side project, Quasimoto.

“[We wanted] to represent ‘The 805’ and to let people know that we definitely know our roots,” Gomez says. “Instead of wearing Gucci or Louis Vuitton or some other designer, I’d rather represent a brand and the name that I actually know.”

In addition to collaborating with more local artists, Bruz hopes to make more money from his art in 2020. He has recently taken less shifts at the hospital and even moved out of his family’s home for the first time, a pair of moves he thinks will allow him to focus on making art his financially stable career.

“It’s a matter of am I consistent enough to attain that goal,” Bruz says. “I’d love for [art] to be a lifestyle...but it’s only a dream.”

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