



ADVERTISEMENT

qualtrics^{XM}

noisey
MUSIC BY VICE

Drew Banga Wants to Spark the Bay Area's Rap Resurgence

"We need a Jay Z in the Bay's music industry. I'm not trying

This summer, an elongated "DREWW" was ubiquitous on Bay Area radio. Whether it was BOSSLIFE BIG SPENCE'S "10K" or Kamiyah's "Windows," producer Drew Banga uplifted every song he touched with his booming bass, spacious arrangements, and textured, colorful sounds. His beats offer something different for fans of contemporary rap, a market largely dominated by New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. They sound like the Bay, prompting bodies to erupt in erratic movements, the shaking of dreads, and the stomping of feet.

"The Bay sound is every single style of music in one genre," Banga told VICE of the region's distinctive sonic eclecticism, from mobb in the 90s to hyphy in the early 00s. "The best piano solo from your favorite jazz song, the best singing rip from your favorite opera song, and your favorite anything you could think of. All of that combined in one is the Bay's sound."

After graduating from Oakland School for the Arts—a performing arts high school that counts Kehlani and Zendaya as alumni—Banga began his career as a touring bass player for acts IamSu! and 1-O.A.K. But following the overnight success of Kamiyah's "I'm On", which he produced just a year after he started making

beats, he's been dedicating his career to elevating underground artists from his hometown—working directly with local talent as an in-house producer at Text Me Records, serving as a musical director for Los Angeles-based rapper Duckwrth, and managing artists like BOSSLIFE BIG SPENCE.

VICE spoke to Drew Banga about his diverse sound, the lack of infrastructure for Bay Area artists, and his efforts to develop the region into a contender in contemporary rap.

VICE: What would you say is the biggest barrier for Bay Area artists?

Drew Banga: Growing up, I witnessed artists we've grown to love in the Bay Area plateau. They've reached a point of stagnation, and that's based on the lack of structure in the regional music industry. I joined Text Me Records as a full-time producer and musician to learn how to build my own structure to support my friends who felt stuck. Their music was super raw, but no one listened to it. I took it upon myself to figure out a way for people to listen to our music.

You've worked with ALLBLACK, REXXLIFE, and Kamaiyah—all Bay Area artists with the potential to cross over into the mainstream. Yet each artist represents a distinctive element of

the region's sound. How do you uplift their individuality in your production approach?

Based on the artist's vibe, I'll start the song with a sample. Based on the feel, I'll incorporate flavor to be aligned [and make sense] on the sample, before I remove the sample from the track. When I replay the song for the artist, it resembles the sample without [the sample] being there.

Similar to your roster of frequent collaborators, you draw from an eclectic mix of musical inspirations, such as D'Angelo, Eric Benet, and E-40. Is that in part due to your upbringing as a youth in East Oakland?

From funk music to the mobb era, I found a technique to craft controlled chaos. There's multiple factors occurring simultaneously—bass player, drummer, piano player, drummer, horn station—but you have to find value in each respective element, so they can shine at the same time without being overshadowed. It's figuring out a way to incorporate the sweat from the mobb and the musicality of funk at the same time.

As an independent artist, you're responsible for vocal arrangements, securing venues for tours, and in your current position, as a manager for local talent. Where did you see this progression in your profession?

In 2014, I entered the music industry with a serious approach

after I went on my first tour as a bass player for IamSu! and saw my friends managing themselves. I was 23 and wanted to learn how to A&R, manage, and tour, and I found opportunities to develop those skills, such as managing BOSSLIFE BIG SPENCE. It's become second nature to me. If I wasn't producing, I would be touring as a bass player and locked in with an artist. Working with artists, doing rehearsals, and playing bass is what keeps me going.

Over the years, you've gained prominence as one of the best rap producers in the Bay Area. In your early beginnings, you charged a minimal fee as you grew into your confidence, years later, you continue this tradition instead of charging a significant fee, in alignment with mainstream producers?

[When I first started out], being around my friends, I was the only person who took production seriously. Everyone around me was making music, but lacked the access to certain producers. In response, I learned how to make beats and sent it to whoever wanted to use them. My philosophy was, *If it's a hit, let's talk. If it's not, it's music in the air.* Making music has always been a fun experience for me. I'm not mad at giving beats away, because there's people who can't afford to get beats.

You've referenced Pharrell of The Neptunes as an example of

the musical environment you're aiming to create in the Bay's hip-hop scene. How do you view your role in the construction of this community?



Princess Nokia's NYT Interview Is Art, So We Turned It Into a Poem

TAYLOR HOSKING

We need a Jay Z in the Bay's music industry. I'm not trying to rap, but we need a mogul to increase access for our region's artists to have flexibility for projects. I want to be that person for the Bay, so people have the opportunity. I'm centered on building collaborations among artists, yet people only collaborate when the end result is financial gain. It starts with one person making money, followed by another person, and they collaborate to make more money together. When they put their money together, they

make money; it's a unified aspect.

For example, everybody in Atlanta is collaborating with each other. In Chicago, every independent artist has a song with Chance The Rapper, Saba, or Kanye West. They were all tapped in with mainstream artists and pushed themselves to do good. When you apply that to the Bay, how many songs do you think people know that's a hit? Outside of G-Eazy and Kehlani?

Similar to LA, in the Bay, every artist has so much pride, so it creates an every-man-for-themselves mentality. The Bay has to figure out an approach to make things move out here realistic [through people making an effort to work together], and then every market will want to tap in. Our energy is infectious, because we're some real-ass people. In the midst of that realness has to be accountability and transparency. At the end of the day, we have to bring out the real, and people want to see that.

You're one of the few artists who can migrate seamlessly between the Bay's mainstream and underground hip-hop scenes. Do you see yourself as the leader who will connect these two worlds?

I want to integrate mainstream and independent hip-hop in the Bay. I'm trying to figure out what steps and ladders I have to

climb for people to fully respect what's coming out of my mouth. I'm moving into a position where artists are like, "Okay, this is the shit Drew is on. He's not fucking around. He's for real, and we need to fuck with the movement, because he's not playing. He's practicing what he preaches." It's getting people to believe in themselves, so they can fuck with other shit and go somewhere. You don't have to stay stagnant.

TAGGED: [RAP](#), [BAY AREA](#), [HYPHY](#), [MOBB](#), [DREW BANGA](#)

Subscribe to the VICE newsletter.

Watch This Next



Inside My Mind: E40

FROM INSIDE MY MIND

noisey
MUSIC BY VICE

Rappers Like Megan Thee Stallion Are Writing a New Feminist Canon

Their lyrics offer unique perspectives on womanhood in an era where new generations are remaking the rules.

By Taylor Hosking

Aug 20 2019, 12:46pm



ILLUSTRATION BY ANNIE ZHAO

This summer felt dominated both by Megan Thee Stallion's

perfect catchphrase "hot girl summer" as well as the endless quest to both analyze and co-opt it. But Megan is part of a whole wave of women, from Cardi B and Princess Nokia to City Girls, Saweetie, and Rico Nasty, whose lyrics offer new perspectives on what it's like to be a woman in an era where new generations are remaking the rules. They might not be explaining their worldview the way academics do. But, hey, who really remembers what they read in dusty philosophy books anyway? Below, we picked out a few signature songs that carry this movement and analyze them like the feminist texts they are.

Megan Thee Stallion: "Pimpin," *Fever*, 2019



Megan Thee Stallion Fans Tell Us What a Hot Girl Summer Really Is

VICE STAFF

None of Megan's songs boil down her philosophy quite like her lyrics on "Pimpin," from this year's album *Fever*. It captures how Megan created a hypersexual persona that still doesn't cater to men. "Lick, lick, lick, lick, lick / This is not about your dick /

These are simply just instructions on how you should treat my clit," she raps. The song paints a picture of a woman who enjoys sex for her own pleasure and doesn't put the needs of men above her own. As she says, "Damn I want some head but I chose the dough instead / I could never ever let a nigga fuck me out my bread." She's focused on her career and doesn't want audiences to be confused simply because she likes to rap about sex a lot. According to Megan, she's actually the farthest thing from boy-crazy: "Ain't no dick alive that can make me lose my mind / every nigga that done tried still be crying on my line."

BbyMutha: "Rules," *Glow Kit: Blk Girl*, 2016

BbyMutha has been creating a lane for modern moms with albums that weave sexually explicit tracks with touching interludes of her talking to her kids. And she pulls it off seamlessly. On her 2016 hit "Rules," she gives listeners some honest, vaguely motherly life advice about how to keep their sex lives private. On the fun, head-bobbing chorus, she repeats: "You can't give your pussy to a nigga who's not used to getting pussy / 'cause that pussy gon' be everybody's business." She explains in the first verse that she learned this from personal experience, sleeping with a saxophonist who was using her to make another woman jealous. But in classic BbyMutha style, the track isn't petty or conniving. She simply distills the lessons from the

incident with a hilariously reserved cool mom attitude.

Jhené Aiko: "Triggered," 2019

While Jhené Aiko's Big Sean breakup track "Triggered" may not be a conventional rap song, Aiko has given us enough bars in her career that we'll count this one, her most raw depiction of womanhood in years. In her emotional stream of consciousness, Aiko looks for the right way to express how badly Big Sean hurt her while "trying her hardest not to disrespect [him]." She starts to question whether "[she's] overreacting," a few times during the song, which calls him a motherfucker on the chorus. But instead of forcing herself to keep it cordial, she ultimately allows herself to feel angry. When she closes on, "Triggered, when I see your face / Triggered, when I hear your name / Triggered, I am not okay ... you need to stay out of my way," she seems to be validating her own emotions. And her track will likely give other women space to do the same.

Cardi B: "Be Careful," *Invasion of Privacy*, 2018

On "Be Careful," Cardi B explains her perspective on cheating. She's not into retaliating with similar behavior if she finds out a lover's unfaithful because, as she raps, "Karma for you is gon' be

who you end up with." She holds out hope that he'll change on the chorus, warning, "be careful with me." But on the track she's largely accepting that he's responsible for making his own bed and she's prepared to drop him if he doesn't change. "It's gon' hurt me to hate you, but lovin' you's worse," she proclaims. Who knows how this translates to her real-life philosophy, considering she took back Offset back after rumors they split because of his infidelity. But at least in her music, if a lover wrongs Cardi, she has no qualms with kicking him to the curb and flexing in a diamond-studded veil at their conspicuously-timed funeral.

Rico Nasty: "Rage," Nasty, 2018

No one gets the mosh pit going like rockstar rapper Rico Nasty. Her high-energy tracks encourage women to be as reckless as they want to be, and no song captures that like her more rock-influenced song "Rage." As she raps, she "might give a fuck on a rare occasion," because she really, "like bad bitches who be ragin'." Her concerts are essentially parties for women to follow their wildest impulses the way men have been able to in mosh pits for decades. And she gets audiences into the spirit by leading by example, kissing fans and spitting in their mouths on stage. On "Rage" she's really not kidding when she says, "If you talk it then be about it ... Do what you gonna do, you don't gotta explain it."

Princess Nokia: G.O.A.T., 1992 *Deluxe*, 2017

New York staple Princess Nokia insists that all of her nerdy quirks are actually next-level swag. She schools listeners on her game in "G.O.A.T." saying, "It's me who took the weirdo shit / to another level and I'm killin' it." In the first verse, she shouts out the mash-up of cultures that she embraces wholeheartedly. She mentions anime and being a "skater boy" and rocking the Pelle Pelle jackets and saggy jeans of New York's Black and Puerto Rican communities. Even though her peers didn't always understand her growing up, she celebrates that it's all good now. "I got my own movement ... I change rap, forever man ... I been the G.O.A.T. eatin' off the land ... They ain't want me, that's beginning-ish / Now I'm too hot, and they suck my dick." Ten points for the nerd team!

City Girls: "Where the Bag At," PERIOD, 2018

City Girls' "Where the Bag At" is a quintessential sex work anthem. It gets the dancefloor going while bringing listeners into a world where, "if it don't make money, it don't make sense." The City Girls duo, Yung Miami and JT, flip the script on demanding men who want picture-perfect women to be their arm candy or housewives, reminding them they'll have to pay for it. Yung Miami says she'll "put it to the side for a Benz," while JT echoes, "pay a bill just to kiss me." But they're not simply bragging about their worth; they're also giving pretty solid financial advice. According to the lyrics, they already own their own cribs and cars. But they want more cribs and cars just to use for sex with new clients (genius!). In true hustler fashion, City Girls really know how to make their assets work for them.

Saweetie: "ICY GIRL," *High Maintenance*, 2018

In Saweetie's hustler anthem "ICY GIRL," she explains that she's not stacking paper just to look fly. "You tryna get a bag of weed? / I'm tryna get a bag a week," she raps. "Put it in my savings and invest in the right companies." In the track, she weaves classic brags that "her time is very pricey" with real-talk explainers that she's hustling to help her whole team achieve their dreams. A key part of keeping her focus is also steering clear of any drama, as she raps, "You beefing with my enemy does not make you a friend of me / Girls so weird stay clear I'm living drama free."

Saweetie lets listeners in on the un-sexy truth of hustling for an icy life, which is that the hustling itself isn't always glamorous.

Sign up for our newsletter to get the best of VICE delivered to your inbox daily.

Follow Taylor Hosking on Twitter and Instagram.

TAGGED: PRINCESS NOKIA, CARDI B, FEMALE RAPPERS, MEGAN THEE STALLION, HOT GIRL SUMMER

Subscribe to the VICE newsletter.

Watch This Next



Inside My Mind: E40

FROM INSIDE MY MIND