

Believe it or not, Bandmanrill only recently began, in earnest, to dance. “I’m late to the party,” admits the 20-year-old rapper, who despite his short time in the spotlight has revolutionized hip-hop by rhyming dexterously over the club music from his native New Jersey. Yet even if he doesn’t sport the years of experience some of his friends and collaborators can claim, dance is something of a birthright to those who grew up immersed in the scene. “Nobody in Jersey could say they never danced before,” the radically charming MC says with a smirk. “Everybody danced. No matter how many people you say you shot, you danced before.”

That universality is evidenced by the way Bandman was able to almost immediately connect with a huge audience before being backed by any label. He uploaded his breakthrough hit, “Heartbroken,” in the spring of 2021 with little in the way of a release strategy. It couldn’t have mattered less. “I lost a game of 2K, and it already had like 250,000 views,” he recalls. The Jersey native was discovered by hometown entrepreneurs from his beloved Newark, NJ by Dawan “DB” Brown and Saad Amin who also furnish frequent collaborator Mcvertt under their combined label imprints 100% Pure and 1865 Black Flag Entertainment. The tandem forged a partnership with the legendary record executive “Steve-O” Carless and his Defiant Records imprint, Bandman is poised to break his disruptive style even wider.

In the two years since “Heartbroken”—which introduced Bandman to a national audience and cemented a relationship with Mcvertt, his go-to producer—the artist has become something of a phenomenon. Bandman not only anchors skittering, freewheeling club records with his authoritative growl but traces the connection between that music and drill, which was itself born from Chicago’s dance music culture. Even at his most guttural, Bandman’s verses are filled with finesse. His debut album, November 2022’s *Club Godfather*, showcased this versatility, proving that being nimble and forceful is not a contradiction—it’s simply the mark of an expert MC.

Bandman was raised in Newark, where his DJ father had converted his basement into something just short of a nightclub. Club music coursed through that basement until the early hours of the morning—and also at cookouts, where middle-aged men danced to it in linen suits, and at high school house parties, where club was a prerequisite. “If you ain’t playing club music at your parties, people not going,” he says of the attitude he, his friends, and Newark at large shared when he was coming up. “That’s still how it is.”

Ironically, the initial foray into making such a social, party-oriented genre of music came during total isolation. During the early stages of Covid-19 lockdown, Bandman found himself quarantined with a studio setup. He got to work perfecting the formula that would eventually make him—patiently at first, though once “Heartbroken” hit, his process took on the same runaway-train momentum as his irresistibly careening songs. “I’ve been getting better at rapping naturally, day by day,” he says of that ongoing growth. “I’m getting more organized. I’m maturing.”

As he turns his attention to the future, it’s difficult to imagine a version of rap in the 2020s without Bandman close to its center. There’s a whole host of releases on the way and ecstatic collaborations with both groundbreaking artists in his club orbit and bonafide superstars. Despite that crowded slate, the house party veteran and club destroyer is remembering to stop and enjoy the ride. “I’m just making music that I’m feeling and everybody else is feeling,” he says. “That shit don’t even feel tiring. The studio feel like a party sometimes. I don’t get tired of this shit. I get paid to say words—I could never ask for a better life than this.”