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#Unboxed Vol. 19: Lord Afrixana's Written for Beyoncé, But Now He's Ready to Let His Songwriting Shine Through His Own Artistry

The Massachusetts resident, by way of Ghana, is slated to release his debut major label EP early next month.



Photo: Brooklyn Prewett

Lord Afrixana's writing has largely been to the benefit of some of the biggest names in the music industry – instead of him putting it to use for his own solo projects.

The Ghanaian-born songwriter, producer and Afrobeats artist, who has called Worcester, Massachusetts his home since the age of nine, may have a lot of things going for himself currently. But it's been a very long journey to even officially call America his home.

Afrixana's immediate family immigrated to Liberia when he was just a toddler. But they were later forced to leave the West African nation at the onset of its civil war. Their move from Liberia is how he ended up in Worcester. But like many in his multiethnic community, there were issues with his continental transition that began playing out during his elementary years.

When at school one day, Afrixana saw kids playing soccer in a local government funded league. And when he inquired with his parents about joining in, he wasn't able to due to being unable to produce a social security number. It was then that he realized his immigration status was different.

"I learned very early that there's kind of two worlds that I was straddling," Afrixana told BET during a recent interview. "There would be things like when other kids were getting their driver's licenses, and getting their own apartments and things like that. I had to kind of find other ways to still feel like an adult."

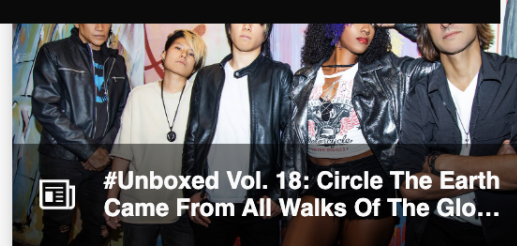
But it was that immigrant experience that actually connected many of the members of Afrixana's Worcester community.

"Western Massachusetts, because it's such a large immigrant population, has not just Ghanians. But we have Armenians, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans. We have people from all over the world," he notes. "So being in this specific city, everybody was so culturally focused that you never really felt like you were missing out on anything. And you never really felt like anything was too much out of your grasp."

Afrixana says he may not have made it in America if it wasn't due to a culture built on comradery and acceptance.

"There's a lot of people I knew growing up who worked under the table. There's a lot of people I knew growing up, who had to live in certain places because they couldn't get their name on a lease. There's very much an underground immigrants society within the United States framework as a whole," he explains. "And it's almost like don't ask, don't tell, thank you. But I also love it. Because it just shows that there's certain places, certain pockets where empathy and humanity still exist."

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As he began getting into his more formative years and adulthood, Afrixana's faced an new concern when President Trump, in 2017, terminated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This decision affected hundreds of thousands of immigrants who moved to the United States unlawfully as children with their parents. That decision would later be overturned by the United States Supreme Court. But it did exemplify the artist and producer's willing nature to, as he describes, "believe in the stairs before I step them."

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"I've just always had an irrational self confidence and an irrational level of faith," he explains. "It's one of those things where I feel whatever you're given, whatever you're supposed to face, you're supposed to face it. So when [DACA's termination] came up, there was already so many people that are undocumented in this country. So I'm like, at least I'm not by myself. I think that was the thing that kind of instilled a little more confidence in me than probably I had."

That confidence plays out in Lord Afrixana's music as well. Recently signing to Warner Records, he released his new single and video "No Dey Tire." In many ways, the track tells his journey up until this point. It's aggressive and in-your-face. It's unapologetically him and flexes an attitude of never looking back.



“I wanted to make sure that both lyrically and sonically it was something that would say something,” Afrixana said. “So that’s why you get very particular lyrics. That’s why you get very particular ideas and sounds and phrasing within that song. Because I wanted to make sure I created a record that both married the American culture — in terms of just like really aggressive trap music. But also married the sonics and the cadences of Afrobeat music. So that was definitely one of the things I wanted to purposefully do.”

The single is off of Lord Afrixana’s upcoming Warner debut EP “Ghana Must Go.” Slated for release on August 4, the project will be a major transition for him. He’ll be put front and center instead of working as a producer or songwriter – roles he previously filled for other artists like **Beyoncé**, **Jidenna**, and **Davido**, among others.

Africana says that being the name on the marquee of his project as a singer, rapper, writer, and producer is both “terrifying” and “incredibly rewarding.”

“Now you're the one being seen and you're the one being watched,” he explained. “When you're the songwriter, you can kind of write, set it and forget it and walk away. You can't do that as an artist. So that's one of the biggest changes for me. Really seeing people embrace the art and what the art really does in real time.”

Lord Africana hopes to one day become the “machine” that he witnessed firsthand in co-writing “Don't Jealous Me” for Beyoncé's “The Gift” — which served as the soundtrack for the 2019 “The Lion King” remake.

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"I remember my girl before going on the trip [featuring a summit of producers and writers for the soundtrack] was like, 'Listen, you better come back with a hit.' I had this beautiful kind of familial encouragement," he says. "I got there and it was beautiful to really see that system, and process and that Beyoncé machine work. Because it gave me so much more respect for that woman."

"Because I really understood that when you're at that helm of a machine, versus just being an artist, there's a big difference. And you could really see all the elements of the project coming together in very different spaces — from the creative, to the design, to the music to the production," LA adds. "It was all these moving parts that I was able to see in real time and really garnish your respect for."

Now, it's Lord Afrixana's time to shine. And being the one man band that he is, the pressure is on.

But it's nothing he hasn't handled before.

It's just the next challenge presenting itself on his path to greatness.