



IF YOU HAVE EVER SEEN "GRAFFITI ROCK", MICHAEL Holman's classic hip hop TV show you will recognize the beat. On the footage, Jam Master Jay is spinning it over while Run DMC are sparring with Kool Moe Dee and Special K of the Treacherous 3. Almost 20 years later and that same break, Billy Squire's 'Big Beat' gets a new breath.

"I'm old school like happy shopper / I fight old school, bring your bat and your chopper"

Dizzee Rascal: Fix Up, Look Sharp

Shrugging his shoulders, the 19-year-old brings minimal teenage front to the interview—this same teenager, Dizzee Rascal, was endorsed by a BBC poll as the No.1 hope for British music. Of the Big Beat-sampling single "Fix Up" he said simply, "heard the beat, loved it and spazzed." Simple.

Attending Langdon Park high school in East London, Dizzee was the standard failed education story, like he said, he was "a bit of a rascal." Except, for the faith showed in him by his music teacher ('Mr Smith' on the sleeve notes), who saw the potential and let the young Dylan Mills loose on what equipment made up the school music studio.

Reaching 16, he released "I Luv U"—the underground hit that had kids, clubbers, DJs and record label people all turning up the radio dial—and the first installment of his debut set, "Boy in Da Corner". The infectious, self-produced track took just 20 minutes to make claimed Dizzee. "It's all a continuation from school, just using computers, databases and straight to learning cubase; it's just the more you do anything the better you become. I learnt to make beats quick, do it, get it out the way—other people spending three days on one tune, wasting their time!"

And the tune did well, "just got the dubs and took them round to the DJs. We did 500 white labels first, and it sold all together on the underground about 6,000." Released again this year on XL, "I Luv U" made the UK Top 40, not bad for a teenage MC and his made-in-20-minutes beat. Even the industry people knew it...

"I can't remember half their names—all I know is that I ate a lot of Nandos [grilled chicken peri-peri style] through it! Def Jam was the biggest contender." A UK act and Russell Simmons' people come knocking. At that age you have to put the ink down, be the next note out the money-printing machine. Course you do?

Instead, he took the commendably mature step of signing for the UK-based XL Recordings, a more diverse label with acts ranging from The Streets to Basement Jaxx: "XL knew what they wanted with us because they have all them diverse kinds of music. [With Def Jam] I was gonna be hip hop, and that weren't really the move, and they wouldn't give me the same as

Ja Rule, so what's the point?" said Dizzee.

So, hip hop wasn't 'the move', which for someone so young is refreshing, an unwillingness to file himself under someone else's cliché. 'Euro Terror Techno' claimed New York's *The Village Voice*, and even within the UK, the sounds of Dizzee and Roll Deep Crew, of which he's a member, have left some UK Garage and hip hop peoples confused.

Confused, since the boy could light a fire under their expectations for what should or should not be defined by musical type, be it Garage, hip hop or whatever. Simply speaking, it sounds like nothing that can be reduced to page. "Boy in Da Corner" is different; shocks of sound, sharp riddims and a lyrical experience that talks directly to kids his own age. But he can still engage older ears with his storytelling and humor, whether or not we have a clue what he is talking about.

"Just in general, I'm that you!' that was sent in the corner a lot, or on the street corner, rebellious. I watch all around, I watch all the detail. Sometimes you just sit here, just looking around. Anytime you're on the corner, anytime you can see kids hanging out and wonder why—it's for them kids, you gotta get out of this," said Dizzee.

The humor is there throughout the album. The atmosphere can be dark, very dark at times, but he's adept at spinning two sides of the same story, especially for someone so young. For instance, on "I Luv U", he complains: "Some whore / Bangin' at your door / What for? / 15? / She's underage / That's raw." The girl replies deadpan, without a blink in the video: "That boy's some prick, ya know / All up in my hair / Thinks that I care."

Inevitably, with all coverage of UK Garage and of course, hip hop—comes the mention of violence. Recently, Dizzee was stabbed in the chest and back while performing in Ayia Napa, Cyprus—the Hamptons of UK Garage. On a tune punctuated with gun-talk and noises, "Hold Ya Mouf", Dizzee lets it be known: "I'm a problem for Anthony Blair". In a society where the Prime Minister believes the whole population is middle-class, this is a different reality—one where the class system is still in place. A stark musical contrast to the media/political sound bite culture stretching from MTV Base to BBC News.

"Contrast, that's the mad thing, like yesterday at the '2Fast 2Furious' premiere. Going there, and every star in my face, however they are, like the Jay-Z thing (who he supported at Wembley Arena), jus' coming back home to the Playstation—everything's normal. Contrast. I don't give a fuck about all the glitz and glamour," he gestured around him. "I told them—I don't care'. I'm just a person, I'm just staying here." ■

Diz zee.

Heights.

*Divine Styler:
East-End kid, Mad good.
Dizzee Rascal turns
heads as this year's
Mercury Prize Winner.*

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