



{UK}

{44}

text\_cameron blue photography\_krew

# ONLY THE GOOD TIMES

Two stepping comes easy for UK sensation *Est'elle*, whose life has always been grounded in music from the heart.



## AFFIRMATIVE INACTION

### The rise of gun crime

text\_dyson bezel

And let's not forget videogames: anyone who received "Grand Theft Auto – Vice City" for Christmas knows that you can beat the crap out of anyone and spray the public with bullets. Surely, just a test simulator for the soon to be graduating bad boy.

So is the cause of gun crime social deprivation of the inner city youth?

This is hardly a sustainable argument. "Social deprivation" is children in developing countries having to pick up their meal from a heap of rubbish, not when you can't afford the latest pair of Air Max or Versace. In a country where education is free until university, there is no excuse for second or third generation immigrants to claim alienation or deprivation.

So what about prevention?

The metropolitan police have been effectively hamstringing with the urban communities hoisted by their own petard. Public outcry at the shocking manner in which they dealt with the Stephen Lawrence murder, and it's witch-hunting for institutional racism, has resulted in an impotent police force that is unable to search for suspects and which appears to harass people of certain cultural groups, fearing claims of racism -- a sort of "affirmative inaction."

If the guns can be found and kept off the streets, shouldn't all reasonable measures be adopted rather than merely observing quotas? At least in the UK we have some semblance of gun control, unlike the US where the right to bear arms is embedded in the constitution and fiercely supported by the sort of people who might vote President Bush in for another term.

However, in this moral panic and public concern, particularly those that live in urban centers (although not exclusively—for example, Dunblane, where 16 children were massacred), very convincing replicas, some firing ball bearings at high velocity, are openly on sale to the public. If one of these was pointed at your face, what would you do, given that you are not actually the star in a bling bling hip hop video?

There are guns on the streets and people willing to use them. This potentially creates an upward spiral resulting in exponential growth as each person arms to defend themselves against someone who may or may not have a gun. Whatever it's cause, it clearly needs tackling across the whole of society, from the media promoting unobtainable lifestyles that are practically commercials for car manufacturers and faux-luxury goods to the parents of the children that grow up and carry guns. ■

a career out of her music came when she was 18 and working in a SoHo design company where her boss encouraged her to go for it. "It's been hard," she said. "For a couple of years I was flat broke, working to support myself and focus on my music."

This hard work, including collaborations with Blak Twang, Skitz, 57th Dynasty, Social Misfits and 3SL, is paying off finally. The Skitz track blew up underground before appearing on his "Countryman" album and subsequent video. Her ubiquitous appearance at open mic sessions at such venues as Subterania, where she dispensed her unique flow of sharp freestyle, led to the track "Trnka" with Blak Twang, which entered the UK Top 40, and the tracks "Ghetto Gold" and "Break Free" with 57th Dynasty. The heavy rotation videos for these tracks gave Est'elle street recognition. "A really strange feeling, being recognized but me not knowing them," she confides.

The success of these tracks led to a collaboration with the boy band 3SL for the track "Touch Me Tease Me", which brought it's inevitable charges of "selling out" from the myopic parts of the UK urban music community. But let's face it, it's not exactly uncommon for hip hop artists to work in the commercial mainstream. Redman and Christina Aguilera, anyone? And as Est'elle points out, "They played me the track and it sounded good. I met them and they were real. They weren't trying to come off as some bad boys."

Looking at the future, it seems like 2003 could be Est'elle's year: she has a number of recording deals under consideration, projects in the US, the creation of her own production company, and plans for a label. Est'elle lists her goals with a smile, "Ten years as a recording artist, a few Grammys, and then setting up my own corporation that can employ people and support artists."

Let's hope she does. ■

**Born of a Senegalese mother and a father** from Grenada, 23-year-old Est'elle grew up in West London, in a large family of eight brothers and sisters, plus an extended family of cousins. "I had a good childhood," laughs Est'elle. "It was funny... if we ever got invited anywhere people had to go out and shop for us," recalling a visual of what it takes to entertain such a large family. From childhood she was singing in the Pentecostal Church. She jokes, "My family was so large we were half the church!"

Est'elle grew up with her mother and a stepfather, whom she initially disliked, but says, "You grow up and you realize that you can't let what happened in the past rule your future and he has been there when other fathers weren't. People around me are like 'rah my childhood was hard man,' but you can't dwell on the bad times or it just makes you depressed, which is why I wrote 'Excuse Me'."

Est'elle describes herself artistically as both a

rapper and a singer, a concept she explains has been difficult for some, who believe these talents are mutually exclusive, to grasp. "Music has always been there in my life," she says. She goes on to say that she was brought up on a mix of Bob Marley (who died the year she was born), Dennis Brown, Lionel Richie, Aretha Franklin and jazz. By the time she was in school, it was "Teddy Riley, Salt 'N' Pepa and all that."

As a teenager, Est'elle's musical influences were a mixture of British music TV shows, such as the obligatory "Top of The Pops" and "The Chart Show". Apart from that, Est'elle was a bit of a bookworm. "When I wasn't watching music programs I was reading." It is a habit that has become useful for passing the time spent in planes, the result of interest in one of the hottest new artists emerging from the UK urban scene.

Est'elle tells me that her decision to make

