

TL Cross: R&B Runner (Interview)



"I began writing songs when I was about 9 and I would perform them in church"

When TL Cross was a youngster he quickly learned how to identify, study and emulate a great muse. Michael Jackson's artistic childhood genius gave Cross an archetype to filter his gospel background and R&B studies into Black pop. The trips taken through varieties of rhythm landed him in the group [Morrison Slick](#). Even though the project was never released the musician received a yearlong mentorship under Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. After leaving Minneapolis he returned to New York City and began working with numerous urban artists. As a solo performer he is preparing his first EP and full-length CD this year both titled *World Soul*. Cross also wants you to know that his father is his hero, he loves jazz and he might record a Jimi Hendrix cover.

Where are you from?

I'm from Queens, New York. I'm a native New Yorker.

When did you start singing?

I started singing at a very young age in church at the age of five. I began singing solos because my father [Eli Wilson Jr.](#) was the minister of music at the church. I was always around music around my dad playing, composing and doing choir rehearsal. When I was around five years old my father wrote a song for me. My dad is my idol. He's a musician, a pianist

and he loves gospel and he's a really good songwriter. When you go to many churches and you pick-up a hymnal his name will be in there for songs he has written that has become staples in a lot of Black churches. He's a lecturer and an author so he has it covered. My father was my piano teacher he taught a lot of the kids. I was one of his students until it got to the point where I didn't want to practice and he kicked me out. I came back to him when I was older around 12 and he started being my piano teacher once again. He kicked me out again because I didn't want to practice. I think when you're young you want to play what is popular so I would spend all my time trying to play by ear what's on the radio than actually trying to focus on my musical notation. So all my life he has been there to guide me through the piano. The guitar I picked-up on my own I was the only person in my household that played the guitar.

When did you know you wanted to be a professional artist?

I began writing songs when I was about 9 and I would perform them in church. I wanna say that I was interested in becoming a professional singer when I was really young and heard Jodeci and Boyz II Men. Because that made me want to be in a group and be like them and have all the screaming fans. I just thought that those guys were cool they inspired me to want to be professional and just get out there.

[youtube]_7DzW5P3Nzo[/youtube]

Would you count Stevie Wonder as an influence on what you do?

Stevie Wonder is definitely one of the artists that has left an infinite impression on me to this day. That came about because my dad has like thousands of records. I grew-up with a lot of records in the basement. I would definitely go through records I don't even know who some of the people were. Stevie Wonder was always spoken about very highly in my household. I just liked the songs I would hear from him on the

radio at the time and I noticed that my dad had a bunch of Stevie Wonder records. He became more of an influence on me once I got to be around 14 or 15. Before that it was all about The Jackson 5. Once my voice changed and I became like a tenor Stevie Wonder was it for me. He reminded me of my dad because he was a songwriter, composer, piano player and a singer. I was already accustomed to seeing that in my father. The way he would compose it was like a fingerprint one of a kind you could tell it was him as soon as you would hear Stevie Wonder.

What do think are the best aspects about live performance?

One thing is the spontaneity of the whole thing. Performing live is when you know that all the work you're putting in behind the scenes is actually materializing into something that people can appreciate. It puts you into a position when it comes to Black music and Black art forms not just musical there's always a sense of spontaneity in it. And if you're not spontaneous most of the time people don't necessarily think you're that good because you have to deal with the moment. You have to deal with the emotion of the moment you have to deal with the feeling in that room, that audience, those particular band members that song. You have to identify with it all at once. It might be one type of crowd the next night it may be a different crowd and it just may call for a different approach to the same thing. The alertness you have to have is a very fun and challenging thing that I look for. And with the live show there's also instant gratification for what you do.

Can you talk about your time with Morrison Slick?

I spent a year under the tutelage of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. We were signed directly to Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis we spent like months in Minneapolis. We would go to the studio everyday writing and producing with them and I learned a lot, that was like going to college. The name of the group was called Morrison Slick. We had two releases Steve Harvey put us

on something it was called *Sign Of Things To Come*. And then there was something overseas that was released called *Look At Me Now* and we did a song with Faith Evans called "Happy Ending." We were signed to Flyte Tyme Records and was signed to Arista at the time with L.A. Reid being at the helm of it. It fell through if I'm not mistaken because L.A. Reid got fired from Arista so once that happened the project became dormant. We decided to create our own label and my partner Beezo suggested that I go solo.

I saw you do a version of "Purple Haze" have you ever thought about doing a proper Jimi Hendrix cover?

I'm a huge Jimi Hendrix fan. I'm in awe of his artistry. I would not touch a Jimi Hendrix joint live unless I was in a tribute because when I see Jimi Hendrix on film and hear his music I expect a certain level of artistry as it pertains to guitar bass music. He was such a virtuoso that as a fan I don't know if I'm interested in hearing Jimi Hendrix without that virtuosity guitar thing going on. I could change it and make it more keyboard heavy but as a fan I don't know how I feel about that either. I'm definitely going to think about that.

[youtube]SC64ILSkruc[/youtube]

Is there anything else in your musical background that informs what you do?

I'm a really big jazz fan I listen to jazz everyday. My favorite jazz artist is Thelonius Monk. I listen to John Coltrane a lot. My favorite jazz singers would be Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn and it just so happens that Ella Fitzgerald lived about five minutes from where I live now. It's a number of people who lived in that area Lena Horne, Count Basie and various people. There were two areas in Queens that had a lot of jazz musicians. One featured Count Basie, Lena Horne and Billie Holiday the other one would feature

Louis Armstrong, Cannonball Adderley, Dizzy Gillespie and people like that. That neighborhood that Louis Armstrong lived in is the same neighborhood where Malcolm X lived when they bombed his house. Those were very prominent Black communities as it pertains to entertainers and public figures, the Jackie Robinsons and Joe Louis.'

I really admired The Jackson 5 because Michael was achieving what the adult singers was doing but he was just a young man that definitely blew me away. Iâ€™m a huge Michael Jackson fan I think heâ€™s an underrated writer, arranger I think his ideas are one of kind nobody ever did that anytime before and after him. But I think that because heâ€™s such a good entertainer people forget how great of a recording artist he was and I think the same thing about Stevie Wonder.

What projects are you currently working on?

Iâ€™m working on the TL Cross project that will be called *World Soul* thereâ€™s going to be an EP called *World Soul* and an album called *World Soul* thatâ€™s going to be longer. I also have my partner Beezo who helps me through the process we have a company together and itâ€™s called DGS Music Group. Another person whoâ€™s involved in my project right now who we have a joint venture with is Needlz. Needlz is the producer of the recent Bruno Mars project that won a Grammy. He and I just did a record together. Iâ€™m also working on some things in collaboration with Needlz' artist his name is Honors English I have a song with him and Lupe is on the same record. Iâ€™m working with DJ Absolut whoâ€™s on HOT 97 and then thereâ€™s Green Lantern Iâ€™m doing hook work for them for rappers. Iâ€™m actually working very closely with Sha Money XL heâ€™s been putting me on a lot of projects that heâ€™s over. A few years ago Beezo and I had a production deal with G-Unit and thatâ€™s how we ended-up working with 50 through that situation. We did two songs for him; one was called 'So Serious' and another oneâ€™s called 'Family Matters' from a commercial mixed tape called *Sabrinaâ€™s Baby Boy*

hosted by Chris Rock.

Are you on Facebook or Twitter?

Yes Iâ€™m on Facebook as [/TLCrossonline](#) and Iâ€™m on Twitter as [/TLCross](#).