

S.O. Discusses Heritage & Inspiration For Larry Ginni Crescent Album

S.O. took advantage of the pandemic like most artists and used the time to get closer to his muse. In this instance that well of inspiration came from his young daughter who he wanted to make sure would be aware of her cultural roots as a child with parents from Ghana and Nigeria but now living in Texas after spending time in the UK. S.O.'s previous *Augustine's Legacy* from 2019 was harder and more stateside in its sound which contrasts the genial and worldly approach to the just released *Larry Ginni Crescent* album. The choice to delve into Afrobeats was a practical one because of the genre's mismatch of Black pop from around the globe. S.O. wanted to connect all of his family experiences in song as a musical playbook for his daughter's heritage. The album is like a sonic equivalent of honey and iron with its ambrosial melodies and words of gratitude and determination. In the following interview the rapper explains the how he planned the new music and the importance of knowing one's history.Â

“The first thing somebody thinks about Africa, one of the first things is the child who’s hungry with the fly in their eyewhere I could take you to Lagos and this looks just like New York.”

So I see that Larry Ginni Crescent is the name of the street you lived on during your childhood in Lagos, Nigeria. What are some of the things that you remember most about that time?

That's a very good question. Things that I remember is just the community aspect of it. So you know Larry Ginni when we got there we were like one of the few houses that were there. So as families started moving in and everybody kind of knew one another it's kind of picturesque.

If you think about the movie when they go to a neighbor and hey can I borrow some milk? And I brought some sugar or hey, I'm going out of town for a little bit can you make sure that the house has been you know like looked after. There's no strangers. I think that like a community aspect was like one of the main things.

I remember one time my neighbor's dog gave birth in our house and so we had the puppies at our house. I have fun memories. Dad, my mom, my sisters, you know, like all of this stuff you can think of, like growing up in Nigeria in Lagos in the early '90s at that time that's the stuff that I was experiencing.

Who was Larry Ginni Crescent?

I have no idea who he is. My assumption is that Larry Ginni is the first person to build a house in that area. I actually don't know. I'm going to ask my mom who is this guy? Crescent is the road that my house was on.

So the main thing that I'm hearing is the sense of community. How does this music reflect that feeling ?

I think that the music the intention of it is to get those who are in the diaspora. So like someone like me who was born in Nigeria raised in Nigeria and then moved to London and is now living in Texas like I'm part of the diaspora. So always, always having a sense of wanting to go back home wanting to connect to where I'm from you know what shaped me.

A lot of my friends are Nigerian. A lot of them are Ghanaian and so we know what village we're from we know our village name so on and so forth but there's also like on the other end for my African-American brothers and sisters who like you know since being in America.

As I was creating the music I was thinking how can I create songs? Sonically, maybe not topic-wise, but sonically that will at least encourage some of my brothers and sisters in the states to be like hey man let me go find out more about this Afrobeats sound or more about this language that you'll speak.

What is Yoruba? but what's Larry Ginni Crescent? Where is that? Can we go there? Like, you know what I mean? Like stuff like that. And so there was still that sense of community but it's more on a global scale trying to make people hearken back to where they're from so that they can appreciate it more because I was around when being African wasn't cool. I still remember that or the teacher will pronounce your name incorrectly and the kids would be laughing.

Why was it so important for you to get back to your African roots? And also, why did you make the choice to use the Afrobeats sound this time? listened to Augustine's Legacy and it's very different.

It's multi-layered man so I think another thing that happened is I had a child and I said I never want her to not know where she's from. So what can I do to ensure she stays grounded and rooted in where she's from and the culture that raised her mom, raised her dad and will ultimately raise her as well. I had a kid and saw that I can't speak Yoruba all that well I need to go learn it so that I can teach my daughter or you know we, we do great with the food, the culture, the dress, all that stuff. But that language you know what I'm saying, the language is necessary, you know? And so like one of the ways I've tried to do that is like if I'm singing it on certain songs she can sing along with me. She can understand hey this

soundÂ this is from your dad's land. ThisÂ picture that you see on the front cover of Larry Ginni Crescent this is your dad's and your sister and your auntie in their house in Lagos like we can I can literally take you to this place.

Like my, most of my friends are either immigrants or first generation so there's still that connection. People go home every year every other year twice a year. There's still that sense ofÂ hey we know where we're from how can we continue to pass this on to the next generation so that it doesn't get lost as they remain in the Western world?

Was your daughter born in Texas?

Yeah. She was born in America. She was born in Texas.

How long were you in the UK before you moved to the United States?

I just moved to America five years ago. As I started to do music a lot of my audience I start to realize was stateside and so between like 2011 and 2015 I was coming to America like every year, twice a year, so on and so forth. One day I was coming back into the states and you knowÂ if you have a bridge four hours across what you're allowed to come into the US on a visa waiver so you don't need a visa. I was perfectly legally coming in but then they detained me. They detained me and said hey don't come back until you have a proper work visa. And so when I acquired that work visa then and I just moved cause I know this is a place where the music is being consumed majority wise. And so this is a place that I need to kind of be to build and continue doing what I'm doing.



When did coming from Africa over here become cool, but first of all, what is the difference in how you were received over in the UK versus in the US?

I think because the majority Africans in the UK can trace exactly where they're from my one family member or two at the most that's different, right? Because the language is still being spoken to you. The cultural intricacies are still being that the food, the dress on us, like it's even down to the musicians right now in the UK. Most of the Black musicians are either African or Jamaican and they know exactly where they're from. They're speaking the language and the music they're intertwining it with the sound. So it's like in the UK to be African at least in this new era isn't anything to shy away from.

Me and my mum had the conversation all the time. I'm like yo like you know why did you move me and my sisters from Nigeria to the UK. Like, why didn't we just stay there? Why didn't we just remain as a family there and then come here and then go there. The reality of it is like there was this idea that the west America, UK and Europe was better both economically, financially, educational wise. And to a certain extent that is true. There is a level of truth in that but imagine what would have happened if we just remained where we were at and

developed our countries.

So going back to the original question, it's like yeah. Knowing where you're from having that sense of connection with where you're from is a lot little easier to be connected in the UK as opposed to being in the US where, you know, like for the majority of the black experience the connection has been lost, right? But what I've tried to do since being here it's like how can I extend like some of my experience or my knowledge to people? One of the things I think is the easiest way to get people engaged is food.

What is the dish that always gets them?

Jollof Rice because they used to that I feel if you've eaten like Mexican food, they're distant cousins is enough for that. Um, but then if you want to like go deep, deep, like pounded jam and spinach stew you could see like, sometimes we'll make some of that for people but yeah like food and music.

Are there other ways for African-Americans to connect to Africa?

It's difficult to acquire from someone sometimes. They didn't grow up in. So probably if I go to my African American family, like, Hey man, you should really go back and give back to where you come from. Like, bro, I don't come from that. And I can't fault them for that because they don't like, you know what I'm saying? Like, I can't be like, Hey man, you should really go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's everywhere. Just get on a plane. Let's just go to Ghana, Nigeria, like yo, because of everything they've seen on TV, because even though *Black Panther* is there, you still have the years of false information about the continent. That the content undeveloped the people live in bushes there you fight lions.

I can't fault someone because of how media has portrayed Africa. Media has done a terrible job overall.

In more recent years they've been doing better, but overall they've done a terrible job at conveying Africa. The first thing somebody thinks about Africa one of the first things is the child who's hungry with the fly in their eye where I could take you to Lagos and this looks just like New York.

We already have shared experiences. We just call them different things. I'm going to the cookout in South Africa. That's a brie that's the same thing. Like, yo, I'm going to this it's the same. We have the same experiences. We just call them different things. And so he would go there and realize Hey, these people aren't as different from me as I thought they would be it becomes a lot easier to be connected.

Did you see the parallel with rap music?

Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that the rap music and Afrobeat. Like think there's music coming from struggle. Like music, like hip hop was just what, 40 something years old. I think it just turned 40 something. Yeah. 48 years. Music birthed from struggle to speak against what is going on that's what is being created that is what's being made. If we look at what Fela Kuti was doing with Afrobeat he wasn't just making you know songs about girls. And he was specifically speaking against the political powers that be and so like things like that. There was so much connectivity like so much parallel that you know if we just kind of like stop pitting one another against each other like oh, you're this, you're that? And I've been guilty of doing that too. We can learn from one another.Â

So were you saying earlier that now in 2021, it's easier to be African in America? Now what's going on that, like, when did you see it?

Wakanda Forever.

***Black Panther*. Did it?**

Yeah. *Black Panther*. Â That was the straw that broke the camel's back in a good way. That was the one that made people go, yo. Okay, cool. What's this mean even though it's fiction. Even though it's not real people still felt like a level of connection. From that to the year of return in Ghana that was like a big thing. If you remember like in that Black Panther era people were wearing the dashikis to the suits to the movies.

And then I would also say like the influx of Afrobeats, um, like, especially in this go around, you've had like a first go around, but because of how the internet is now, it's a lot easier. Um, so easy to be like, Hey man, I want to listen to a Burna Boy song or who is Burna Boy. And how streaming has kind of helped level the playing field.

Artists can collaborate with other artists. I just saw Wizkid has a song with Justin Bieber. Justin Bieber is the biggest artist in the world. Afrobeats has also helped them play the part in that. And I'll say the internet has definitely made the world smaller so people can go and find out about other cultures without having to go and visit there.

What's the most personal song for you on this new project?

My most personal song I think is "Good to Me" Â is probably the most personal song. Â This album is dedicated to my grandmother who passed away last year due to COVID. So like kind of looking at stuff like that seeing what's happening in the world you can easily lose faith. You could easily lose faith and be like, God, are you real? God, are you there? You know, so on and so forth. But once you kind of look at things from a different perspective, you start to realize even though my grandmother passed away.Â She was sick and my granddad passed like maybe two or three weeks after that. But they had been married for over 60 years. Great.Â They've had a wonderful life. Things of that nature where you could you could look at the negative but always having to look at the

positive and say heyÂ God you are good to me regardless of what's going on around the world. Â Because what would have been worse really is for her to pass away and then for him to still be alive now because he had dementia his health was depleting and so it was actually better for him to go than to remain on earth.

I look at things like that and I'm like good to me. That's my favorite song on the album. It just kind of like hones in that message in like just looking at my life and just thinking about where I came from and where I'm at now. Like there's no way I canâ€™t say that God hasnâ€™t been good to me.

I really liked â€œProsper.â€

â€œProsperâ€ is one of those songs where I probably be performing that for a long time., I think maybe like a week after I heard about my grandmother, I wasn't able to like, create anything, you know, like I just was like, man, what is going on in life? Like what is in the next verse just, you know, just kind of stuck with me. Like no weapon formed against you will prosper and thought this sounds like an anthem for people going through COVID going through, you know, life in general, like things that, that you don't even know will hit you. Like, Hey man, we could be singing this and this could be our jam together. Like as well as with dancing, like pray, no weapon formed against you will prosper.

We've been down so long. That was time to prosper. You know what I mean? Like, and, you know, as I was writing that, it just came to me. So yeah, that's it, that's the chorus right there.

You know, a great survival anthem.

You know, there you go.Â

Is Â that actually your wife and the video for â€œKinda Love?â€

That is her. She is no video vixen but she's beautiful. You know usually she's really like heavy hands on with like some of the design and things like that. So I had to get her involved. *Love & Basketball* references as well. You've got the basketball scene. If you see the *Love & Basketball* DVD cover they put the basketball up and they're both kissing. We recreated that scene. So we wanted to like show like iconic Black love.Â

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It just really feels like great music for the summer. Do you feel you conveyed what you were trying to do by bringing the Afrobeat sound and having more of a sense of the diaspora. Do you feel like the music really expressed that?

Yeah, absolutely. Man. I think that the other I think it expresses, I think that the response has been that too. Yeah, I think that anything with melody always work, you know because it crosses generations. We went over to Maryland and I was playing, playing some of the songs like one of my aunts she was like I really like this. And I play one of the songs for one of my cousins who's like in his twenties and he's like yo, I'm really digging this. So generation to generation singing and melody always works always hits and you know no one can be like Hey what are you saying? because cause if the melody's catchy enough they're going to remember it.

I think people are going to be playing this project be it if you're of the diaspora, even if you're not from the diaspora, like you're going to just enjoy good music with universal themes about love, faith, prospering and surviving.

And so, you know, I've got to ask you about your producers.

TBabz is a young producer from Nigeria. I think he produced three of the songs. Um, obviously he's produced Travis Greene

and Daâ€™™ Truth but you know, I think with this project I was working with like one of my main producers name is GP heâ€™™s Grammy nominated.

He’s produced the majority of my stuff from 2011. But with this one I was looking for like younger guys that can you know feel in tune with the sound that’s going on in Nigeria and around the continent. That can pull me in and like school me on some stuff and help me like I think about the last song â€œWonder.â€œ

And that’s very ami pianoesque and I’ve never made like ami piano before but TBabz was like yo check this song out watch how they’re doing it. Like send me the vocals. I’ll chop up your stuff. He was really instrumental and stuff like that. He’s like super, super talented man.

I’m super excited for his future. Steve Rod who made your favorite song â€œProsperâ€œ again I heard that song I was like yo, I need this beat. Like I need it donâ€™™t sell it. I just thought dope. Don’t do anything. Just send it to me right now. I’m going to see GP that’s my friend brother for life.

He produced three of the songs as well. It was just good to have that. Having the project mixed by one of the members from Team Salute who produced like probably one of the biggest Afrobeat songs, Adrugbar. He was super critical, super pivotal in helping me, um, Like singing and the melodies and even like how I would do certain things like, Hey man, that’s too wordy.

And you know, like I’m never the guy to be like, nice one to do it myself. I don’t want, I don’t want to create, I think it’s just always good to create a community, even if it’s a small community that you’re able to like share stuff with share ideas and be like, yo, what you think? How can it be improved?

Â Are there any plans for any more visuals?

Yes. We have a visual for "Want You" that's dropping September 10th. I'm toying with either shooting a video for "Prosper" of "Corner (O Ti De)" but for sure September 10th for the "Want You" video. We have a few remixes we're dropping to continue the momentum.

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