

Alan Oldham Reintroduces JOHNNY GAMBIT For A New Generation (Interview)



Credit: Jen Jeffery

Alan Oldham is what society now calls a multi-hyphenate, but in times past, the term was Renaissance man.

For the past three decades plus, he has been an innovative purveyor of electronic music and a comic book writer and artist extraordinaire. Oldham started his trek as an eclectic art fan during the '80s in his Detroit hometown. He combined his love of the German Expressionist movement in film, the clean lines of Art Deco-inspired objects and more to start writing the narrative and visuals for his characters. The first major result was his trench coat-laden hero JOHNNY GAMBIT. Oldham hit paydirt and was signed to Hot Comics out of Chicago in 1986. The company folded soon after and the

character would have two more issues published in 1987-88 by Detroit's Eclectic Press.

Oldham did not have any time to think about the next move for JOHNNY GAMBIT because he was busy creating the cover art for the first Detroit Techno releases from childhood friends like Derrick May and Juan Atkins. These same friends also supplied him with music for his influential Fast Forward radio show being broadcast on WDET. This writer remembers listening to Oldham play Detroit Techno, house music and industrial in the early morning hours as listeners would call in and get an education on the new sounds that have laid the foundation for today's myriad of electronic artists. He also worked as a DJ for Mike Banks' sci-fi and funk-dipped techno crew Underground Resistance. As the '90s moved on Oldham started making his own music and founded the Generator and Pure Sonik labels.

Today, Oldham is just as excited about creating as he was years ago. A current resident of Berlin, he still travels the world as a DJ and has had art exhibitions in several countries. He is having a rebirth of sorts with JOHNNY GAMBIT and a Kickstarter relaunch. The new graphic novel is bringing GAMBIT back with a remastered 2 CD set. I spoke with Oldham last month shortly after his set at the Charivari Music Festival in Detroit. We talked about GAMBIT, the early days of Detroit Techno, and what it is about the city that drove him to greatness among his many other career-defining moments.

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back and tell you good job. If anything, they will shit on you. So, it motivates you to push forward, to push internationally and outside of the city."

How did you decide to bring Johnny Gambit back now?

I'd been working on the book for almost 15 years now. I started it in 2007 and it's been kind of in the back of my mind to bring back JOHNNY. We did a run in the '80s and I didn't get a chance to finish the original story because my publisher(s) went out of business and then time went by so I thought I'd just reboot it completely.

What was your original inspiration for the character?

Well, that's a really good question. JOHNNY GAMBIT is basically the kitchen sink character for everything I liked at the time; Japanese animation, Japanese Manga, "Miami Vice," "Love & Rockets," the movie "Metropolis" by Fritz Lang, Art Deco design, prototype cars that were never made, and there was a comic back in the '80s called "Mister X" that was a huge influence.

I saw where Marvel later came out with the character in "Uncanny X-Men" #266.

There was a girl, well, woman now, that I met at the old Chicago Con back in '86, and we became friends. Turns out she worked for Marvel so we stayed in touch. It turned out I was going to New York for my first visit back in '87 and she invited me up to visit Marvel. That was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me 'cause you got to see the real Mighty Marvel bullpen with your own two eyes. So I got to NYC, went

up there and I had a bunch of my old JOHNNY GAMBIT number ones with me and she introduced me to a few of the editors like Archie Goodwin and Carl Potts, and I was just leaving my comic as a calling card.

Fast forward to 1990, I'm at Todd Johnson's old comic shop in Ferndale, and I notice a character named Gambit with the hair to one side and a trench coat. But they gave him powers and they changed it enough so where you can't sue them. You know how it is, they take the idea and add just enough to it so they can say hey, we came up with this on our own. But the resemblance was uncanny, no pun intended. So yeah, there's nothing you can really do about it. At this point, it's just an interesting story.



So as far as the reboot is concerned on the musical side what can you tell me about the new double album? How is it different from the original release?

It really isn't, except it's going to be remastered. It's the same tracks as before. We never really did any real CD pressing on the original tracks, so it's going to be remastered and repackaged and the plant that I'm using is in the US. So it's going to be a little expensive 'cause we make it in America and we ship it back to Germany. But it's the same tracks by my friends FBK, Nino Sebelic, Blak Tony from Aux 88, Phrek, Altroy, Sprawl, and Krenzlin from Germany. I also did a solo soundtrack which will be included.

You created the visual art for many of the first techno labels in Detroit, how did the music influence your cover art? How were you able to visualize what the art should look like for this sound that was new then?

When I did the stuff for Djax-Up-Beats, I was encouraged to do what was in my head. Saskia Slegers, who was the label owner,

would take the art and match it to the music, so she said draw whatever. The very first stuff I did for Derrick May, I just went by vibe and the track titles and things of that nature when he asked me to come in and do "Nude Photo." It just seemed kind of obvious what I drew. I don't know. Sometimes I got to hear the music first, but a lot of times it's just do what you want and the label will match it to the music.

What is it about Detroit that has shaped your artistry?

You know, I have absolutely no idea other than there are so many talented people in Detroit. I didn't really appreciate it until I left. So many talented Black people. One of the things Detroit did for me I will say, is it's a constant fight to be recognized and you're constantly motivated to push forward because a lot of people—especially in the early days—a lot of people like to shit on you and they try to shit on your work. It just motivates you to push further, so that's one thing about Detroit. It's not an easy place, no one's going to pat you on the back and tell you good job. If anything they will shit on you. So, it motivates you to push forward to push internationally and outside of the city.

How did you start DJing for UR?

It was 1990 and I was working at a record label called Full Effect. And Full Effect Records at that time fancied themselves the Detroit version of Chicago's Wax Trax Records. They did industrial style music. I had a real job and quit it to work at the office at Full Effect. What it turned out to be was just to sit there all day answering the phone and telling everybody that the owner, Tony Srock, wasn't there. Because he was busy scamming people, ripping people off, and running up lines of credit, so people would call the office looking for him. The one perk was I got to make free long-distance calls all day. Full Effect only put out two releases before the house of cards crashed down.

Anyway, Jeff Mills came around to the office one day because him and Srock were friends and did Final Cut together. And Jeff said, "Hey man, come work for UR, we need somebody to do press releases and stuff and you can write, you can communicate." I was also doing my radio show, "Fast Forward."

So I ended up quitting Full Effect and I went to work with Underground Resistance doing press releases and promo stuff. And then a year later, Jeff quit UR to go solo and Mike Banks needed a DJ because they were getting ready to go on tour and he asked me if I wanted to DJ for UR, which of course, I said yes. And once we got on the plane he was like, What's your code name, because everybody in UR has a code name." I had just seen the movie "Terminator 2" and the T-1000 is the liquid metal cyborg terminator in the movie, so I took that name and it stuck, and that's how I got involved. I was with Mike a year and half for the live shows, then he quit the road to focus on Submerge. After that I was on my own, and I've been doing it ever since.

I became aware of you because of your radio show Fast Forward. How did that start?

I was a student at Wayne State, and my major was Radio TV Film. The plan at that time was to be a commercial radio jock. I had done a radio show on WAYN which at that time was the low-powered AM radio station on campus only. Only available in Student Center and the campus apartments nearby, but it afforded me the opportunity to do air checks. Air checks are when you record your show and your on-air persona and you can use those demo tapes to get jobs.

A buddy of mine named Todd Boyd who is now a film professor at USC, was telling me WDET had an internship open and I should go down there and look into it. At that time you needed an internship to graduate and I didn't have a car like a lot of my peers, so I couldn't go out to the 'burbs to the big advertising agencies or the real radio stations like WXYZ, but

WDET was located right on campus. I marched my Black face in there and right away I met Judy Adams, and I guess she liked me because she put me on that day, then she introduced me to Ann Delisi, who was the program director at that time. Judy was Ann's boss, and Ann was my boss.

My first job was to alphabetize the record library. I spent the whole summer doing that and learned a lot about music, especially jazz, because you're listening to music while you're alphabetizing. Then finally it got to be fall and the internship was over. The overnight guy had gotten fired and Judy asked me if I could take over the overnight slot which was 3-6 AM on Fridays. Then she asked me if I had an air check, which I did. I let her hear it, and she hired me to be on WDET and that's how that started. She came up with the name "Fast Forward." The night of my first broadcast I went by Derrick May's place on the east side and he gave me a whole stack of white labels, and was like "Hey man, you can play these," and all this stuff turned out to be some of the very first Detroit Techno records.

I got a lot of that stuff early and started playing it on my show, and people liked it from the very beginning. At the time, the show was a mixture of Detroit Techno, Chicago House, I was still into jazz fusion at the time, it was quite a mix. This was 1987.

Then 1988 was the Summer of Love in England, Acid house came in, and then you had industrial which I was getting into, and slowly the jazz fusion part was phased out and the industrial Wax Trax kind of music was coming in. I was playing a mix of everything electronic. Cabaret Voltaire, Rhythm Is Rhythm, Inner City, Kenny Larkin, Depeche Mode, Ministry, just a mix of everything.

I had fans from the beginning. Back in those days people would call into the radio station and the phones would light up and I'd be talking to people, and it was always the weirdo night

owl insomniacs, you know a lot of artists and bohemians. Old hippies, painters, those kinds of folks. Real old-school Cass Corridor (not Midtown), Woodbridge-type people.

What was cool about it to me was a lot of Detroit people would call in, a lot of hood dudes who'd never heard Clan of Xymox before, never heard Skinny Puppy or Severed Heads before, and the brothers would call in and be like "Mannn what kind of music is that?" One time, I played a Kenny Larkin track, and I announced that Kenny Larkin was from Southfield, Michigan, and this guy called in, he was shocked because they think anything electronic is from Europe. It turned out I was educating people that a lot of this stuff was from Detroit, their own hometown.

What made you want to start making your own music and start your own labels?

I must say I was doing Fast Forward and I was also doing my comics and I'm still in my last days at Wayne State (later graduated). But it seemed like the art was really, really thankless. I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere, even though I did publish. I had an actual comic book company pick me up (and I actually got paid). But what really snapped me out of it was there was a photo that I saw in the paper—you can tell how long ago it was, because it was a newspaper (laughs). There was a photo of Derrick May and he was chilling in his loft with my man from Depeche Mode, the lead singer?

Dave Gahan.

So yeah, Dave Gahan and Martin Gore were in town and came up to Derrick's loft. The big thing with me and Detroit Techno was that these were guys that I knew, some were guys that I grew up with. They were my own age and they were making records. Not just Derrick, but all of those guys. Kevin (Saunderson), Blake (Baxter), Juan...Juan was like slightly older than us, like one or two years older, but these guys

were actually making records. People didn't make records, corporations made records.

But what really got me was Derrick hanging out with Dave Gahan and Martin Gore. That's when I was like I've got to learn how to DJ and make my own music. My little studio is in my grandmother's basement it's all cold and I had a little space heater down there, and I'm like OK that's miserable (laughs). I'm doing this and a guy I actually know is hanging out with these people and then you're reading in Melody Maker how he played The Hacienda in Manchester, and he's playing alongside Bernard Sumner from New Order, so I'm one degree away from fucking Joy Division.

When I was in college, I used to dream about going to England and somebody I knew who was my own age was hanging out there, and actually knew these people. That's what inspired me to make my own music and learn how to mix.

It's been 20 years since the Metro Times cover with you, Kelli Hand, Mike Huckaby and Juan Atkins. Kelli and Mike have since passed. What are your thoughts on their contributions?

Invaluable. Both of them. As far as Huck, he was a great teacher. He got a lot of people into this stuff, into production and making their own music and the freedom of it. I think his most famous student was [Kyle Hall](#), who just played [Charivari](#) this past weekend. When I was moving over to Native Instruments' Traktor and Maschine, I would hit up Mike whenever I had a question. I would PM him on Facebook and no matter where he was in the world, he would always take the time out to answer my dumb questions. His tastemaker days at Record Time. His Sun-Ra Reel to Reel Sessions. His productions. His mentoring. Everything that man did really came from a good place.

With Kelli, she was The First Lady Of Detroit Techno. The good news is before she passed away, she got a citation from the

city that she was bonafide and that's it. She too is just irreplaceable. Her place in the hierarchy as the first woman to do it in Detroit.

I give Kelli props because no man helped her. See that, to me, is the key with Kelli.

Guys kind of hung around and helped her hook up her gear sometimes early on. Mike and Jeff and Sean Deason would just kind of go around to her place to help her set up. But once this lady was set up, once she knew what she was doing, no man helped her after that. Which is a stark comparison to today with a lot of these young women getting in and getting famous off of Instagram, it's their boyfriends making their music, teaching them how to DJ and all that.

The hypocrisy is what I don't like. You know, you do these big feminist "down with the patriarchy" interviews, but you know that's your boyfriend in the background that made that music. These women are model-looking and they just get up there and get some dude to help them. And then of course, when they get a level of fame they dump the guy.

I wish I knew who you were talking about.

All I'll say is there's a couple of ladies who fit that description. Kelli will always have my respect as someone who did it on her own. There is no question as to who made a K-Hand track.

You guys went back to high school, right?

Absolutely. We were at Henry Ford together. I graduated in '81. I think she graduated in '83. I used to think she graduated in '82 but we were there at the same time. We used to hang out even back then, like even before music.

I remember her from The Scene. Was she always so unique and a maverick?

Totally was. She used to get her parents' car and we'd go up to Birmingham and buy New Wave clothes. She was always her own woman.

What made you move to Berlin? I saw on your Twitter timeline one day where you said you walked into a room realized everyone hated you and decided to move.

It was a retweet of like "that feeling when you walk into a room and half the people hate you," I vaguely remember that Tweet from my friend Andi (laughs). At the time I was gearing up to leave I wasn't really well-liked in the city. You go to places and show your face and you'd feel vibes, it was really a tough time. This was 2000, 2001. I'm feeling weird vibes locally yet I was famous everywhere else but Detroit. I literally would go play a gig in Toledo, Ohio and get more props just 45 minutes outside of Detroit.

So finally in 2004 when my lease was up, that's when I left. I went to Chicago originally because my ex-fiancée is from there. I thought that would be a new start but it turned out to be a big miscalculation on my part.

Then finally in 2014, that's when I went to Berlin to stay, so that was eight years ago now. A friend of mine had gotten an artist visa. I thought it would be harder, but my friend inspired me to get one. So when I was over there on my visit I made an appointment, got my paperwork together, got a visa and ended up staying.

Can you compare here and there a little bit? Do you still feel unappreciated in Detroit?

Actually, I don't. I'm feeling the love now, but this is almost 20 years ago. A whole new generation has taken over and it's a new city now. And I'm not the dude from Meyers and 7 Mile anymore. I'm the cool guy from Berlin (laughs). I mean, it's all the same for me, but the perception changes. You get that validation from the Europeans, the big stamp of approval

from the Germans, now you're the shit (laughs). I'm known as Ellen Allien's friend now. It's bizarre but cool, I guess.

It's what I call doing the Jimi Hendrix.

Pretty much, you're absolutely correct. Yeah, the Jimi Hendrix, the Willi Smith. Remember Willi Smith? The fashion designer?

Yup, Willi Wear.

You know he went to Paris and he became huge, it's the same thing.

How do you like living in Berlin?

I love it. It's quite a freer atmosphere. I have health insurance there. I have the national pension. You can just do whatever you want. It's becoming gentrified now, but you can still do whatever you want. You can have a guerilla art exhibit if you want to. You just ask around and see if you can find a space to do it. You can DJ all the time if you want. The clubs themselves are the culture and industry, there so there are many opportunities living in Berlin, and it's just really super cool. What's also really cool is going to different countries in Europe is like going to different states here. I just went to the French Riviera last month for vacay, it was a 90-minute plane ride.

So it's not like a plutocracy or full of nepotism?

Not at all. The thing about Berlin in my view is that it meets your efforts, the city will reward your efforts. If you try to do something the city will reward it. The people and the audience will reward it. You don't feel like you're throwing things against the wall to see what sticks. If you have an idea you can do it. There's a big movie studio right outside Berlin where they make big movies. "The Matrix," "John Wick," "Atomic Blonde," the "Bourne" movies. These guys work there;

cinematographers, set designers, writers, video guys outside of music. Berlin is a place of opportunity in all arts and music types, in my opinion.

How do you feel about Beyoncé bringing house music back to the mainstream?

I don't have much of an opinion. Us older people remember when house music was mainstream before, like '90, '91. Cece Peniston, Crystal Waters, C&C Music Factory, Black Box, etc. It had to happen for this generation. The only problem is the younger people who follow Beyoncé may think that she invented this stuff, and there was not an underground before. That's always kind of the problem.

It is. And to her credit, I think she publicized Robin S. because I think she sampled her and she sent her some flowers. I think the younger people may know who Robin S is.

Yeah, I think Green Velvet worked on this record, from what I understand. It was a few cool people who worked on this record. Green Velvet, Robin S., and Honey Dijon. That's what I heard, I could be wrong.

My attitude is long as the originals are recognized I'm good. Anything that brings more coin to the original Black artists is good with me. Beyonce and her producers are recognizing (and paying) the originals, I'm cool with that.

Check out Alan Oldham's [Kickstarter](#) campaign and follow him on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

The Dreams Of Peace Film Festival Founder Talks 2022 Competition

The Dreams Of Peace Film Festival is the brainchild of founder Khaliph Young. The competition invited creators from the African diaspora to share stories about their identity with one-minute mobile phone films. The call went out in 2020 after the world saw the George Floyd death at the hands of the police which was captured on a mobile device. Young's reaction to Floyd and the kind of race-splitting dialogue coming from then-president Trump inspired him to use the festival as a way to create a vision of harmony. The filmmakers presented their views of Black life with the moxie and brilliance of new auteurs determined to be heard in a world mired in white supremacy. In the following interview Young explains the origins of the festival and how the films will stream on the Volume channel via the Vskit and Ayoba mobile apps.

What can you tell me about your company ZenZenMobile?

We are a digital entertainment company creating lifestyle content on different platforms like mobile apps, Smart TVs and things of that nature.

Is the Dreams Of Peace Film Festival all about making people familiar with the Volume TV channel and the Vskit app?

No it's really just all about bridging the continents acting as a bridge between African-Americans and Africans by creating films during a time when it's a lot of racial injustice going

on in America everything with the Trump administration, the killings and just the George Floyd thing so a lot of those struggles are different in Africa. We're all African throughout the whole diaspora so even though they're there and we're here they're still Black, we're still Black so there's a common ground. We just wanted to create an outlet for filmmakers to be able to share their stories with the stories abroad.

You said in your press release that independent storytelling is a pivotal tool in developing critical dialogues. Are there any films in the festival that are an example of that?

Yeah, I would think the film by Tony Strickland the smart social awareness art film. I think that kind of says it all and then there's the film about S.U.N. the recording artist S.U.N. who we shine all the time it shows a lot of Black pride, Black connectivity, crossing the bridge, where we originated from and that sort of thing. So I think those two films kind of show that.

<http://www.kickmag.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SMART-Social-Art.mp4>

I see the competition requires content that deals with Black identity and it's a competition, what is the prize?

The films were selected by our panel and then the film that has the most views on the different platforms will be selected as the winner. That filmmaker will receive an Adobe Creative Suite. That will be their prize.

I saw where the Vskit app has over 15 million users in Africa?

Vskit is like Africa's TikTok type of app. They feature a lot

of comedy but because we have a verified media channel our lifestyle content gets a lot of views. The Ayoba app has about 10.5 million users and our channel ranked 11th on that platform out of a hundred something other channels and we've had over a million and a half views we have about 200,000 active users for our channel. So that platform is like Africa's Whatsapp. It's a Whatsapp communication platform then it has entertainment. feature a lot of

I saw the films will start to stream on March 12th how long after before the winner is picked?

We thought we'd leave them up there for a week and then select the winners at that point.

Where will the films post?

They will post in the Vskit app and they will post on the Ayoba app. The apps have to be downloaded you register then search for Volume TV.

How can people keep up with you?

They can go to zenzenmobile.com everything we are doing is there.

Is there anything you want to mention?

Just that we're excited to do our first mobile film festival. It's been done but this is our first one and we've done film festivals on a variety of different platforms. First internet film festival in '99, then we went on to PBS, onto films on Palm Pilots and pocket PCs then on to Roku. So now back to mobile since mobile is really driving everything.

You said you've been doing this since '99 do you think there is a common theme connecting these mediums over this past 20 plus years?

I think the common theme is that there is such a demand for

content. That demand is just continuing to increase and it's created a whole creator economy. Social media and all these platforms but going back through screen sizes is the demand for content and everybody loves lifestyle content. And now accessing that content on your mobile phone just propelled it even further because now right in your pocket you got music, You got video, you got stories you got everything.

For more information about the festival go to www.zenzenmobile.com.



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.”

Â

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 GinniÂ 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 knowÂ like looked after. There’s no strangers.Â 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 Â was Larry Ginni Crescent?Â

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.

Â 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 sh 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 sound this is from your dad's land. This 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 of 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 UKÂ 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?Â 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.

Follow S.O. on his [official website](#) [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

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JAI^{RU}S Talks About His New Single Groove & How He Got Here

Los Angeles by way of Maryland native JAI^{RU}S is proudly representing for the funk with his newly released single "Groove." The classically trained singer's DC roots more than prepared him for the next stage of his creativity. As a student at the legendary Duke Ellington School of the Arts he started learning from the masters. The learning included all the sounds the city is known for including the warm conga funk of Go-go. Jazz guru Patrice Rushen started mentoring JAI^{RU}S in DC and would continue during his time in college. Those sessions were extremely important to his emergence as an artist.

JAI^{RU}S pulled the elements of "Groove" together and started planning for his EP after it seemed like we were heading for a post pandemic world with the reopening of businesses. His pure vocals within the scheme of rhythm from a blaxploitation soundtrack produced by Cole Mitchell comes

across as a renewed flavor from a different time. He shared with me how he got this far on his journey and the source of his inspiration.

How did “Groove” come together?

“Groove” took about a year total to make. I was working with a producer and at the time we were just trying to write something new. I had the drum groove which is inspired by the sounds of my hometown Go-go music. We got as far as adding drums and guitar, but I ended up setting the song aside with the pandemic and my last year of college it wasn’t quite time. So months later, now working with a new producer I hit up my good friend Cole Mitchell and showed him my idea and we went to work! Reached out to my friends Eliza Petrosyan and Rani Adi to add guitar and bass and we’ve been grooving ever since!

How long have you been singing and how to decide to sing professionally?

I’ve been singing since I was a little kid. I grew up in church and sang on the youth choir which wasn’t enough so as a pre-teen and teenager I was singing on the adult choir. I did community theatre because I love musicals and was in choir at school. It wasn’t until my sophomore year of high school I decided to do it professionally. I transferred to the local performing arts school Duke Ellington School of the Arts where they classically trained my voice, my artistry, and musicianship. I fell in love with creating and the stories they could tell and the affect they can have on people and that’s when I knew I just had to do this.

Who or what are your muses?

My biggest muses are God, universe, nature, and my family, friends: community. They inspire me, ground me, and motivate me to be my best self! I always feel most connected with myself when these things are in my presence or on my mind.

Good music also is a muse of mine. I listen to a ton of music from jazz to pop to rock to hip hop and more but a good song can transport me to the unknown and really just inspire me to the fullest.

Were you mentored by Ledisi, Patrice Rushen and Bobby McFerrin and what did you take away from being around them?

So in high school I was blessed enough to experience master classes from great artist like Ledisi (a few) so I was able to hear directly from her about the voice and music and her approach to artistry. As for Bobby McFerrin I was given the opportunity to perform in, what we call a Legends concert, with my choir and to hear what he does with music and what he had to say was incredible something Iâ€™ll never forget. My biggest takeaway from him is improvisation. Heâ€™s a master at it and the sounds heâ€™s able to create are breathtaking which inspired my improv journey. Now Patrice Rushen is a direct mentor of mine. I first met her at a show in highschool the jazz choir I was in opened for her and Ledisi at the Kennedy Center. What I didnt know is I'd meet her again at USC and sheâ€™d change my life forever. To be able to have multiple classes with her as my professor and getting direct feedback on my music changed everything for me. She gave me so many different things to think about and ways to go about creating and executing my ideas! She also was teaching me piano and arranging which is her expertise, so to learn that on a one on one kind of setting is honestly once in a lifetime kind of thing. I could go on and on about the things she taught me but that be too long for this but she really took my foundation my seed and watered it and I can say now Iâ€™m beginning to bloom!

What can you tell me about your forthcoming EP?

Iâ€™ll say get ready! When I do things I give it my all and then some. So this being my first collection of songs I wanted to release something timeless, almost nostalgic, and different

but fresh! Some real deal music. And thatâ€™s all I’ll say.

Will you be doing all the writing and producing?

I do all the writing myself and my friend Cole Mitchell does the producing! I am a believer the more creatives on the project the better itâ€™ll be. So though I do all the writing I’m open to co-writes and collaborating but thereâ€™s no way in hell I could do any of this by myself it really takes a village.

Whatâ€™s next?

Iâ€™ve got a lot in store for the near future! Without giving too much away Iâ€™ll be back in August with a song thatâ€™s so special to me and one Iâ€™m really excited to share with the world.

Follow JAiRUS on [Instagram](#)



Credit: Caleb Griffin and Domia Edwards