

Underground sensation J-Live comes to WOW Hall

After years of struggling with music labels, J-Live started his own label and released 'All of the Above'

by Carl Sundberg
Pulse Columnist

Making music in America is a tough business. Especially if no one knows who you are. The keys to success are vigilant work, dedication, honesty and raw passion.

J-Live is one example of an artist who embodies all of these qualities.

Hailing from Brooklyn, NY, J-Live emerged onto the hip-hop scene in 1995, bringing his impeccable lyricism and turntablism across the globe with dedication, passion and honesty.

Since then, J-Live has been listed in the "Unsigned Hype" section of "The Source" magazine. His first single, "Braggin' Writes," sold 13,000 copies on vinyl. The follow-up track, "Can I Get It," doubled the sales of his first single.

Following his rapid early success, J-Live was signed to a major label in 1997. Payday Records, a label which signed popular artists including Jay-Z and Mos Def's group Urban Thermo

Dynamics, added J-Live to its roster.

During this time, J-Live recorded his first album, "The Best Part," but it was not released. In 1999, it was re-recorded, but again it was officially unreleased. It quickly became an underground sensation and spread by way of bootleg recordings. Within a year, J-Live's relationship with Payday Records collapsed and he signed a new contract with Universal Records. This contract ended shortly as well.

At this point, J-Live decided he would abandon his search for a new label and started his own, "Triple Threat Productions." In late 2001, after serious trials and tribulations with label shuffling, J-Live finally released "The Best Part."

His second album, "All of the Above," was released in April 2002. He is currently on tour to support the album. He will make his way to Eugene and play WOW Hall tonight, along with special guests People Under the Stairs and Eugene's Strange Folks.

J-Live is a one-man show. He mixes on the turntables and rhymes, sometimes at the same time. J-Live said his shows are full-energy party scenes.

"It's just good hip-hop," he said. "There's a lot of energy, you know, precise lyrics, good deejaying. It's a

good party vibe. I'm trying to put things in the context of a good party."

For every show, J-Live said he sees a larger audience than the last one.

"There's a lot of positive feedback," he said. "Some of the biggest shows recently were in Boulder, San Francisco. (These places) had good turnouts. And people in San Diego, they were so loud. I have to give them props."

J-Live's lyrics are part of what makes him so respected.

"He has a certain way of putting his rhyme patterns together that you hear something new every time you listen to him," KWVA Music Director Aaron Hall said. "By the 10th time you hear one of his songs, you realize, man, there's a totally different subtext going on. It's layered hip-hop, it's not just surface level."

J-Live said he records what he feels compelled to write.

"I do what I feel in my heart," he said. "I have a certain responsibility to uphold."

J-Live holds a degree in English from the State University of New York in Albany, NY. He said this background gave him more of a repertoire and style.

"The more artists you are exposed to, the more you are influenced by



Courtesy

J-Live will perform at WOW Hall tonight with special guests People Under the Stairs and Strange Folks. Doors open at 8 p.m. and the shows starts at 8:30 p.m.

them," he said. "I was really big on Asian philosophy. I really liked 'The Art of War' by Sun Tzu."

KWVA will hold a live interview with J-Live at 8 p.m. tonight before his WOW Hall performance.

"He's a one-man show and he kills it," said Tom O'Toole, who will interview J-Live.

J-Live credits college radio for helping him build his name up.

"There's a lotta politics in gettin' into radio," he said. "You gotta have a lotta resources and tools to do this, and until I get that opportunity, college radio is (there for me)."

Tickets for the WOW Hall show are \$12 in advance, and \$14 at the door. Doors open at 8 p.m. and showtime is 8:30 p.m.

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with "broken politics." A year or so earlier John Wykoff, director of the Oregon Student Association and one of Smith's best friends, had pitched Smith an idea about restarting the Democratic Forum, a conference that had existed in the 1970s to bring together young, up-and-coming leaders.

Smith and Wykoff revived the discussion when he returned to Portland, and Wykoff suggested they add a completely different dimension to the project.

"He suggested ... we actually have

action to advocate for candidates we support," Smith said.

Thus, the Oregon Bus Project was born "after a lot of hard work by a lot of people."

"The inspiration was coming back to Oregon and realizing the politics are broken," Smith said. "What drove me crazy was that the people of my generation weren't doing much about it."

In developing the project's platform, Smith said they looked at the issues they cared about, which happened to be "hauntingly similar" to those of the Progressive campaigns of the early 1900s.

"It's not left, it's not right, but it's forward," Smith said of the project's label as a progressive group.

The project's platform can be summed up in the "six E's: Environment, economy, equal rights, election reform and 'ealth care."

Partially inspired by the Freedom Riders of the Civil Rights Movement, the project purchased a 1978 charter bus and carted around 4,000 volunteers, mostly young people, to support progressive candidates around the state. Experts told them they were crazy, and one even said "volunteerism is dead."

But defying the critics, six of the seven candidates for whom the OBP dedicated their full support were elected.

"It demonstrated ... grassroots campaigning can be very effective," he said. The OBP continues its grassroots

campaign support and is planning to sponsor a "Trick-or-Vote" door-to-door voter registration drive on Halloween. Smith quipped that while many are too old to trick-or-treat, "you're never too old to trick-or-vote."

Another element of the organization is its grassroots media effort to communicate progressive values. The OBP currently puts out a 'zine titled "Zephyr" and also will release a CD later this year featuring music by Oregon musicians and Everclear lead singer Art Alexakis, who is involved with OBP.

Freshman pre-psychology major Heather Brule is the co-chairwoman of the recently started Lane County

chapter of the OPB. She said she was attracted to the project because it promotes values that appeal to everybody.

Co-chairman James Mattiace called the project "a fun and exciting way to get involved with politics." He also stressed the importance of young people getting their voices heard.

"The power structure is not going to pay attention until you pay attention to the power structure," he said.

For more information on the Lane County chapter, e-mail the OBP at lane@busproject.org.

Contact the people/culture/faith reporter at moriahbalngit@dailyemerald.com.

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