



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Mic Crenshaw (left) and his longtime producer Prince Strickland have been recording numerous collaborative pieces of music this summer at Portland Underground Recording Studio in southwest Portland, including an album with fellow rapper and Max train stabbing survivor Micah Fletcher under the moniker Last of a Dying Breed.

Mentoring on Rap

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Benson High School, called Alliance, and teaching at Caldera arts camp. He uses his music to fight racial and economic injustice and empower young people to thrive in their creative fields.

"I'm in numerous relationships with young people who are intent on developing their careers as artists. And so some of the kids that I work with at Alliance, we actually bring them here to record in the studio. And we've recorded about six or seven songs with them here," he said, adding that he's also brought kids to another studio in northwest Portland, called Bodecker, to record songs.

"I don't see that work stopping any time soon."

Crenshaw's recent collaboration with Fletcher, who knew Crenshaw for years before he survived a brutal stabbing on the Max train two years ago, had them doing a hip-project. The pair is known together as Last of a Dying Breed and their debut album, called Brink of Distinction, came out on June 15.

"I was honored that he asked because I actually have a lot of respect for Micah, as an artist as well as just a human being. He's a bright person," Crenshaw said.

Fletcher told the Portland Observer that he was one of the youth who had been mentored by Crenshaw, when he was just 13 or 14, having worked with Crenshaw on a sexually transmitted disease

awareness campaign-centered album commissioned by the State of Oregon.

Fletcher then tied for first place in a hip-hop competition Crenshaw hosted years later at KBOO called Chapel of Skills and the two have been friends ever since.

Fletcher, now 23, said he drifted apart from hip hop after graduating high school, but told the Portland Observer that changed after the trauma he endured.

"After the stabbing that I went through on the 26th of May in 2017, I just ended up, as a way of trying to deal with this, to write more and more. And eventually that led into me having full songs," Fletcher said.

The duo has already dropped two music videos on Youtube—for the songs "Sunlight" and "Heavy Bag"—and has performed in shows in Portland and around the nation, most recently in Minneapolis, Minn.

Reflecting back on the stabbing, when he was attacked while defending two teenage girls from racist taunts, Fletcher said he doesn't think of it any differently than he did back then, an act of senseless violence.

"It was an unfortunate event. It as something that I changed the way I looked at the world for basically the rest of my life it seems," he said. "We're so busy living our own little bubble that we forget to check on the person standing next to us.

Looking back on his career, Crenshaw had reflections of his own.

When he was younger, Crenshaw said, being on MTV or on the cover of XXL magazine defined success.

"I wanted to be respected by people the world over for my lyrical skills—that was the dream."

Now, he said, receiving the support from Oregon Humanities and the other groups is like being validated for his years of work.

Remarkably, Crenshaw had another recent eye-opening level of public support from a former student—a woman over 70—who wanted to learn how to rap and talk about social issues.

The student was a wealthy white woman who believed in reparations, he said. After she heard about a struggle Crenshaw was having with a racist neighbor who had been threatening his family with violence, she gave him \$210,000 to buy a new house.

"I feel for the first time, in a very deep way, the value that other people place in my work and I'm just really grateful," Crenshaw said of the experience.

Last of a Dying Breed's debut album, Brink of Distinction, is available now on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music and other digital music services. You can catch the Last of the Dying Breed duo on Thursday June 20 at the Bit House Saloon for a 7 p.m. show with fellow Portland rappers Swiggle Mandela and Mic Capes.

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