

Northwest Exposure

RAPPER BROOKFIELD DUECE FOLLOWED HIS COUSIN, DAMIAN LILLARD, FROM OAKLAND TO PORTLAND. HE'S MADE THE HIP-HOP SCENE HIS SECOND HOME.

BY MATTHEW SINGER msinger@week.com

Brookfield Duece is well aware that Portland doesn't always take kindly to outsiders, especially those from California. But the Oakland rapper is a special case. After all, without him, Damian Lillard may never have settled in here.

"I actually moved his stuff there," says Duece, the beloved Blazers point guard's oldest cousin. "I loaded his and his mom's stuff in a U-Haul truck and drove it there. So I was actually in Portland before they made it to Portland. But I hadn't been to Portland for any other reason than Dame."

Duece has been back a lot since, and not just because he gets primo seats at Moda Center. Seeing a wide-open hip-hop scene not yet defined by any particular style, he saw an opportunity to establish himself outside the Bay Area's crowded hyphy scene. He jumped on bills at Holocene and Kelly's Olympian, collaborated with a pre-fame Aminé and coaxed Dame D.O.L.L.A. onstage for the first time. Earlier this year, he released an EP on Lillard's Front Page Music label, showcasing a soulful, introspective style.

Now, Duece has been invited to play the third annual Portland Hip-Hop Day. It's a moment of validation for an artist who's put in a genuine effort to win over the city and not just rest on his familial connections. *Willamette Week* spoke to Duece about being accepted as one Rip City own, what Portland doesn't understand about itself and competing with his cousin—both on the mic and on the court.

Willamette Week: Did you have any perceptions of Portland prior to Damian getting drafted here?

Brookfield Duece: I came in with a definite clean slate. Before I even made my way up there, I got on the internet and Googled "Top 10 rappers in Portland." I just started connecting with people, and whenever I could do a show, I'd drive up or fly up and give away

Adidas or Adidas passes—whatever I could do to give back. I didn't want to come into the city and not give back and have people looking at me like I came to take from them.

Were you surprised to find there was such a strong hip-hop scene here?

I was surprised by the talent level. Based on me watching the conversations on Facebook and stuff, there are a lot of people arguing about how Portland doesn't support each other, and how in other areas like LA and the Bay, it's different. I look at that situation and laugh. It isn't true. That's the surprising part to me—that Portland doesn't see how good Portland is.

How did you start rapping?

I had no dad around, my mom was always working, and I had no real way to express my feelings. I had questions, and I would write the questions down in poem form. As I got older, telling your homies you do poetry was kind of boosie. At the time I was writing poems, I was in high school, and [Tupac] just died. I perceived him as a poet, and I heard him doing those poems over music. It took me six or seven years to actually get the courage to spend some money to do it for real. I recorded my own song, called "I'm a Gangsta," which is hella funny, because I don't perceive myself to be that at all. The insecurities you have as a youth with doing poetry, and you don't want to tell nobody, then you turn it into rap and the first song you give them is "I'm a Gangsta." You can tell there's some acting involved.

Dame told a story to *Slam* that you'd pick him up from school and play your own music in the car.

I was the oldest, so I was the first one with a license. I was like the taxi in the family. So I'd pick him up and play my music, and

he'd be like, "Man, put Tupac on" or "put Ludacris on." I'd be like, "But listen to this," and he'd be like, "I don't wanna hear that mess!" He got to watch my process not knowing he got to watch my process.

So would you say you mentored Dame as a rapper?

I wouldn't say that. Our family was really competitive. It was, like, 10 kids in one house. You had to speak up and be heard and do what you gotta do to put your foot on the ground, because we're all alphas. Like, I haven't played basketball since high school. But if me and Damian were on the court, I'd give him 20 points. I truly believe that. The same rules apply for music. It's like, "I rap," and he's like, "So what? I rap, too. Listen to these bars!" I don't think I mentored him, but I think of all the cousins in our family, he was one of the more attentive ones. I think he paid a lot of attention to things you didn't think he was paying attention to. Whatever he took for me, I wouldn't know unless he told me.

Do you still feel like you're competing with him on some level?

I mean, I'm happy for him. You can't tell him every day, because then it sounds like

you're fake. I pick and choose my spots. Like last year, he was struggling right before the All-Star break. I texted him and I was like, "You're not doing the same things you used to do." Instead of telling him, "I'm proud of you being in the NBA," I'm like, "You're messing up right now." And he'll do the same for me. So I don't think we're in competition. Now it's to the point where Dame's in the NBA, he's got his money, he's got his influence—let's get the next family member in, let's get them to the next level.

What does it mean for you, being a non-native Portlander, to be invited to something like Hip-Hop Day?

I appreciate being accepted in a city I'm not from. Me being invited to Hip-Hop Day is solely attributed to the hard work I've done in Portland, with Portland artists, and Portland recognizes that. They said, "We can accept you as a Portland transplant." I know that's a big thing in Portland where Portland doesn't like all the people who are invading the city. I don't think that applies to me anymore. **WJW**

SEE IT: Brookfield Duece plays Portland Hip-Hop Day at City Hall, 1221 SW 4th Ave. #340, with Rasheed Jamal, Fountaine and Wynne, on Sunday, Oct. 15. 3 pm. Free. All ages.



COURTESY OF BROOKFIELD DUECE

SEVEN CRUCIAL MOMENTS IN PORTLAND HIP-HOP HISTORY

• **1981:** Electro-funk band Shock releases "Let's Get Crackin'," Portland's first rap song—at least according to frontman Malcolm Noble.



• **June 23, 1990:** U-Krew appears on Soul Train. Host Don Cornelius asks, "What's

it like trying to get funky and soulful in Portland, Oregon?"

• **June 14-15, 1995:** The first annual Portland Oregon Hip-Hop Festival, co-curated by Cool Nutz, is held at La Luna.

• **June 12, 2003:** Lifesavas release

Spirit in Stone, the first Portland rap album to receive significant national attention—even Rolling Stone took notice.

• **March 1, 2014:** Cops crash a local rap concert at the Blue Monk on Southeast Belmont,



leading to an internal review of the Portland Police Bureau's treatment of hip-hop shows.

• **Oct. 15, 2015:** Then-Mayor Charlie Hales inaugurates the first-ever "Portland Hip-Hop Day." Mic Capes, Vinnie Dewayne and others perform on the steps of Portland City Hall.

• **Nov. 15, 2016:** Benson High alum Aminé performs his viral hit "Caroline" on the Tonight Show, adding a verse opposing newly elected President Trump just days after the election.

