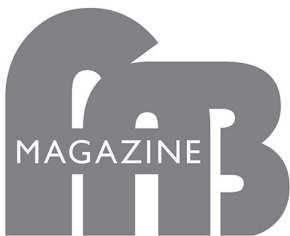


VOL 3 ISSUE 1 2012



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★ **EXCLUSIVE:**

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STARS**

of British Music

TUNISIA

RISING
Back on the
Tourist Trail



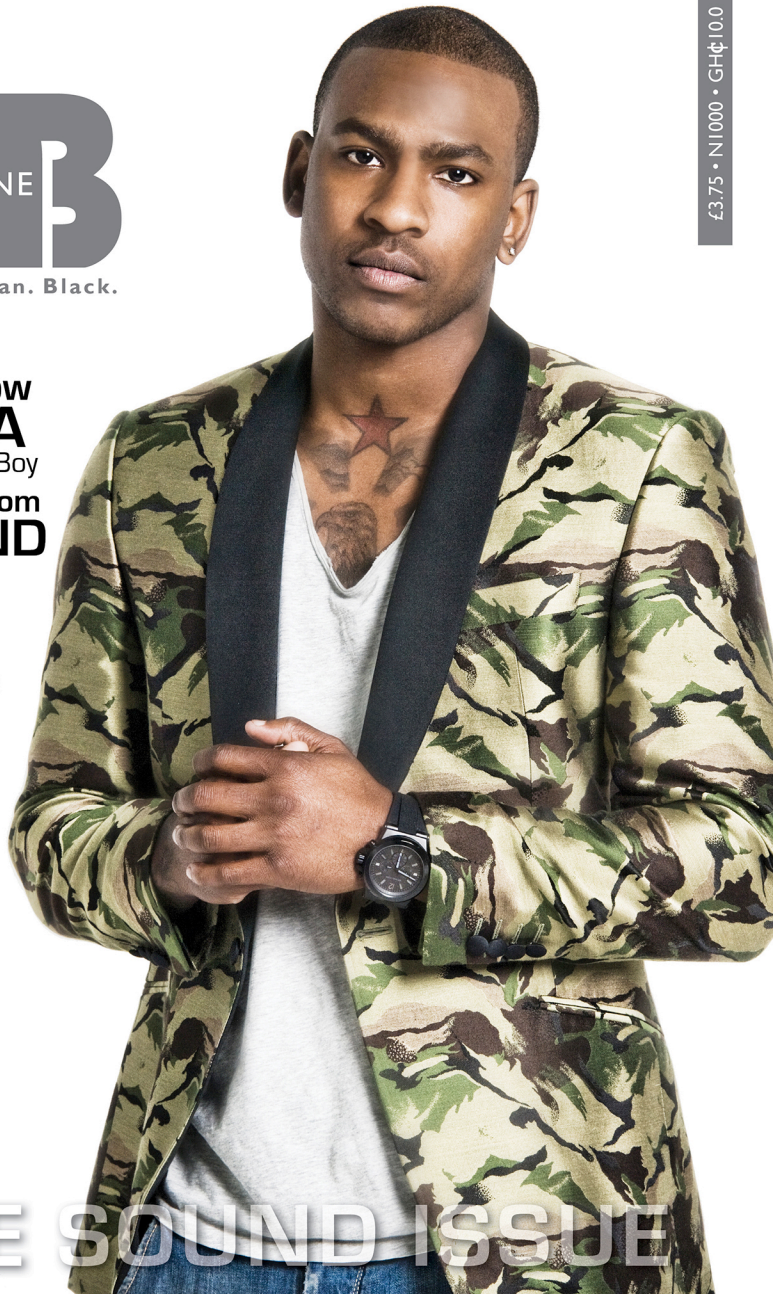
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THE SOUND ISSUE

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Skeptota

Beyond Two Decks and a Mixer

Sinem Bilen-Onabanjo



August 2011 – London was on fire for four days as thousands took to the streets in scenes you'd only see on your TV screen of guerrilla warfare reportage from far-flung corners of the world and the capital suffered widespread rioting, looting and arson. The first spark was ignited following a peaceful protest in Tottenham, following the death of Mark Duggan, a local man from the area, who was shot dead by police on 4 August 2011.

Almost a whole year on, as London, rising like Phoenix from last year's ashes, is getting ready to play host to the world's biggest sporting event around the anniversary of the London riots, I am sitting across another local man from Tottenham, one Joseph Junior Adenuga, better known to fans as Skepta.

"It's tough out there. It's nothing to do with colour; black people, there are white people, they're all in these council estates. It's like they get bunged in there, and ever since you're a child, you get looked upon as if you're something bad," Skepta says, speaking of last year's riots and the challenges the new generation of youngsters growing up on London's notorious council estates face. His passion is tangible as his baritone voice rises ever so slightly to emphasise his point.

"You walk into a shop with £10 to buy something and they look at you like you're going to steal something. All these things knock you down and all these ambitions of becoming a prime minister, a doctor, are rubbed out your head from young. So I really advise parents to give their children that confidence when they come home. If they see that their child wants to do something, encourage them to do it, because there's nobody out there encouraging children. A lot of these kids, you speak to them and they talk like they're going to die tomorrow. I think - not that I sanction, endorse or agree with it - that's why the riots happened," he concludes.

Drawing on his personal experience, he continues, "When I was younger, I really wanted to be a doctor; but it got to the stage where I was like 'No, I can't be a doctor. I'm not

going to get a job over that person, because of the way I am.' You get a stupid attitude against the world, you begin to think that everyone's against you, and you just want the easy way out. Teachers out there, they're not helping. I really wanted to do music at school, but they'd only go on about how hyperactive I was - 'Why do you want to be the class clown? Why do you want to play on the keyboard all the time? But that's what I wanted to do.'"

At home it was more of a balance, in a household of six, four siblings and parents ("Mum and Dad, still together till this day, thank God," Skepta adds cheerily) and with a DJ dad, Joseph Jr. grew up with music. "The parties would start from eight in the evening and end at eight in the morning," he reminisces, "and I've always had that music in my soul. I think it wasn't until my dad bought me my first rap album;

Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* on a cassette tape, I started listening to Snoop, got into Biggie Smalls, Tupac and by the time I got into secondary school, I was just so musically orientated I didn't ever feel that there was anything else that I wanted to do."

Growing up in a musical household didn't offer a one-way ticket to a career in music, as anyone of Skepta's generation growing up in a typically Nigerian household can tell you. "The classic catchphrase 'Get a proper job' rings in my head," Skepta laughs, "That was all that they ever used to say; 'Get a proper job, music is a pastime.' I think it was only when they started to realise that I was making a living off it - when I started to help them out, started to buy cars for my dad, buy cars for my mum, pay their rent, they realised that it was a proper job. The latest solidifying moment was when I took



Photography: SubySireni | Styling: Neesha Sharma | Grooming: Doyin Tejuosho

my mum and dad to Nigeria for my show there in 2011; it made them know that this is a dream that's come true for the whole family."

2011 was not Skepta's first time on home soil, but it was his first time there as a star in his own right. "It was a wicked experience," Skepta says. "Going back there to do my first show was emotional - to know that the music I am making over hear, they love it because one, they like the music and two, the fact that I'm Nigerian. I'm one of the first artists to really stand up and say, 'My name is Joseph Jr. Adenuga.' I've had lyrics like, 'Make Nigerians proud of their facial scars', and when I went there, they were telling me this. I went to Beat FM and I had fans outside, and I was signing autographs, taking pictures. It felt better than doing a show anywhere else in the world."

As well as being one of the first Grime artists to embrace his African roots, Skepta can also be credited as the first man to put Afrobeats on the UK music scene with his 2011 remix of D'banj's "Oliver Twist" which has since then conquered British airwaves in its many forms and reached the UK Urban Top 10 chart.

"People tweet me and say, 'I heard some guy called D'banj on your song man, what's going on there?' and 'How can D'banj do a video to your song and put Kanye West in it?' and I'm thinking, *if only you knew it was his song!*" Skepta says, laughing. With that once again the conversation turns to his Nigeria outing. "When I went out there to do my show, I went to quite a few clubs out there, and whatever club that I went to they would always play the song!" he says, humming the tune. "And I was like, 'You can dance to this in the UK!' So I found an instrumental, and did a cover. Then

I found out that it went on BBC1 playlist, and I was like 'Wow! I do feel that there are a lot of Nigerian -African - people in the UK, and their music doesn't get that proper shine, so obviously, I'm happy that I got to shine that light on it.'

A quick dabble with what has proven to be the hottest Afrobeats tune to come out of Nigeria is just one facet of Skepta's diverse talent as he evolves on his own journey

within the British urban music landscape, from his early days on the Meridian Estate in Tottenham DJing on the pirate Deja Vu 92.3FM ("Those pirate radio days are priceless. Priceless." Skepta offers) to 2009 club anthem "Too Many Men" which garnered over 2.5 million YouTube hits to the more dub step sound of "Rescue Me" and the uplifting anthem "Hold On" and the more commercial 2012 release "Make Peace Not War"

sampling C+C Music Factory's 1990 club hit "Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)"

"I first started off producing beats and rapping, and then I got into grime. The supporters have listened to so many different sides of me that they don't know what I'm going to next!" Skepta offers. "I could make a really Grimey street track, and a really massive dance sounding record or make a dubstep



Photography: SubySinem | Styling: Neasha Sharma

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track or Afrobeats. I like to get on a computer and make something that sounds good. Especially being in a country where it's so multicultural - black people, white people, Asian people, wherever you're from, we all hang around each other - it would be bad to pigeonhole yourself and not experiment with different kinds of records, so try out new things, travel, be bilingual in your music."

What sets Skepta apart from other UK artists of his generation and makes him a crossover success is this ability to see 'the bigger picture.' So it is not surprising to see, as he is changing outfits mid-shoot, a tattoo across his back which reads, "You see two decks and a mixer, but I see the bigger picture" (His equally talented but lesser known brother JME's lyrics, Skepta tells me, adding, "Before I ever went in pirate radio, I was a rapper before, and I always used to see myself being on the stage and selling out tours, so it's one of those things that was an inspiration.")

"The first tattoo I ever got was a Superman sign on my chest. Then I started to get money, but I never really had a pastime. If I wasn't making music, I would chill at my friends' tattoo shops. I got 'good' tattooed on this side, and 'evil' tattooed on this side," he says pointing respectively to his right and his left arm, and continues, "So I started to structure my tattoos. I have Adam and Eve and the apple, and a snake, prison, evil girls, gambling, money, family. The important stuff."

With skin and ink, the interview takes an unexpected turn to Skepta's 2011 release "Hold On" from his upcoming album: "Nearly every line that I've said in that song: somebody has tattooed it somewhere on their skin," Skepta

muses, "I have so many photos on my camera phone - 'Never count the days, I make the days count', 'No point in trying if you ain't trying your best', 'First place never settle for less'; they just tattoo their whole skin. A guy tweeted me that he had a heart operation, and as soon as he came out of the operation, he played the song. It's touching to know that I was writing something that people could actually paint their skin permanently with, or help them through heart operations. It's a serious thing."

Of the second equally positive offering "Make Peace not War" Skepta says, "I was out in the States, and I was like, 'I'm British; how do I fit in here? I want to do me, I don't want to do an American thing.' So I got home and thought of the song "Everybody Dance Now." I never thought I would get clearance for it, but when my manager showed it to the people, they really liked it. And it's going quite well so fingers crossed!" So well that the song, released on 16 May, peaked at number 8 on the official UK R&B charts making the once underground Grime MC a truly household name across the UK.

So what can we expect of the forthcoming *Honeymoon* album if the rumours that it will be more of a return to Skepta's Grime roots are to be believed? "I always like to make different kinds of music, but the core parts of all my albums will always have that Grime sound," responds Skepta, gambling tightlipped on any further details.

As he prepares to add his latest contribution to the British urban music scene, Skepta remains equally positive about his counterparts' contributions: "I feel like everyone just needs to really carry on doing what they love to do, because

when you make honest music it will spread," he offers, "The radio don't have to support and play our music, but we have the internet and twitter; we can really be in touch with our fans. It's all about making the music you love and making another person out there going through the same thing as you say, 'I like what you're saying I feel like I'm with you.'"

Not surprising Skepta who is a much loved and much followed celebrity on social media has so much faith in the power of Twitter: With 300,884 followers (and counting), Skepta is known for tapping into grass roots to support his sales as well as interacting with his followers: "The first thing about being comfortable is that you don't take yourself too seriously," he offers, "A lot of artists out there they feel like it's not 'gangsta'; there's not a textbook on how to be a gangsta. My meaning of a gangsta now, is to see my friend's mum come home with her shopping bags, and help her with them. I'm an old G in the hood. I come around, anybody that needs anything, I will help them."

Once again, remembering his old 'hood, the 'old G' muses, "There were plenty of times I could have gone to jail. I think about it every day. I wake up and walk down the road and someone would be like 'Skepta, man you're my idol, and I'd be like, 'Wow, Me!' I'm here at 2012 with a prosperous career in front of me and doing the job that I love."

As for the teens who feel like they have no other choice, Skepta has one advice: "Stay positive and recognise that this is a talent that you're given; just stay positive and hopefully it goes where you want it to go." The secret, we can't help but muse, is in seeing the 'bigger picture.'

FAB questions

✿ FAB dream collabo? Kanye West.

✿ FAB designer/ high street label? Scotch and Soda.

✿ FAB City to play? Perth, Australia.

✿ FAB way to keep fit? Football on Sundays.

✿ FAB album of all time? Biggie Smalls, *Life After Death*.

✿ FAB movie of all time? *Butterfly Effect*.

✿ FAB thing about being African? Food. My favourite is jollof rice and chicken.

✿ FAB thing about being British? The coolness. We're just the coolest guys in the world!