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# Abdu Ali on new 'Already' EP and the importance of Baltimore Club



<http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/music/midnight-sun-blog/bal-abdu-ali-interview-already-baltimore-club-story.html>

In 2014, the beauty of Baltimore Club music – the city’s beloved, high-beats-per-minute breakbeat dance music – is how it has splintered in unpredictable ways.

92Q’s DJ AngelBaby is incorporating Jersey and Philly Club producers in her “Get Pumped” mix series. Rising star Matic808 uses popular mainstream rap songs by Kanye West and Drake as jumping off points to create something fascinating and undoubtedly Baltimore Club. Mighty Mark and Tt the Artist seem determined to breakthrough, while legends like Rod Lee and Blaqstarr continue to bring the kinetic sound well beyond city limits. And this is all barely scratching the surface.

Two of the genre’s most exciting artists are currently Abdu Ali and Adam Schwarz. Baltimore-native Ali moved to Brooklyn, N.Y., in late July but still closely identifies with the city and its dance music. KAHOLON, his semi-regular party series at The Crown in Station North, is a positive force that unites likeminded-but-musically-different artists. In August, Schwarz showed the power of the genre with his Ferguson-inspired protest song, “Hands Up Don’t Shoot.” Baltimore Club matters greatly to both artists.

“It’s cool to put out an EP that’s based around a sound that really made a huge impact on us both,” Ali said. “It’s really a part of who we are.”

To show their love of Baltimore Club, Ali and Schwarz released a collaborative EP on Tuesday called "Already." (Listen to the EP, which contains explicit language, here.) They recorded it over the summer, before Ali, who described the record as "mad uninhibited and unconscious," moved. I spoke to Ali — who was in town for tonight's kick-off show of the Motivational Tour with Schwarz and Kilbourne (a New Jersey DJ Ali called "talented") at The Crown — about the EP, working with a musical hero and more.

It's my first strictly Baltimore Club project, and out of anybody I would want to be on this [it] would be Blaqstarr because he's a legend.

— Abdu Ali

You recently moved to Brooklyn. Was it a career move?

I guess I felt like I needed to be in Brooklyn to further myself musically, but no, I think it was more a personal goal to be personally changed. I think I just wanted to get away and grow, and let the environment really provoke growth, instead of like, "Oh, I'm going here to be a music star." I don't think that's the case. I don't think I need to go to another city to be poppin' or anything like that.

Is the change of location having the effect you hoped?

Yes, it definitely helped me change my perspective on life and things and music. For one, it made me realize how special Baltimore is to me. I feel like you don't realize what you have until it's gone. I know that's a cliché but it is kind of real. It made me realize that Baltimore is a really nice space for artists, and you can do a lot here and still be in the East Coast and still be between all these great cities.

Schwarz releases Ferguson-inspired 'Hands Up Don't Shoot' Baltimore Club track

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Now there are cons; I'm not going to lie. I was telling people that there are less cons living in Baltimore but the cons are [heavier] than New York. New York cons are kind of superficial on the surface. Because it's so comfortable, a lot of people become complacent [in Baltimore] because you can get stuck in this gray tornado, and not even realize that you're in it. The most important thing that I got from moving to Brooklyn was that it made me realize that where you're living doesn't really affect how you come up. It's more so the mindset.

Let's talk about the EP, which is excellent. Many Baltimoreans know how you mean "Already," but for those who don't, can you fill them in on what the title means to you?

"Already" is a validation of something that exists and will continue to exist forever. I feel like when people say, "Already," they're saying it after somebody says, like, "Thank you for helping me out" and they say, "Already." It's like saying, "Of course. I got you, and I will always have you forever." It's just a validation of loyalty, love, respect and trust between two individuals.

Is this tour with Schwarz your biggest yet?

This is the longest. I went on tour before and it was 14 shows. This one is like [22]. We cover a little bit more ground in a way. We're going up a little bit more north, like to Boston. I've never really been to Boston.

Why call it the Motivational Tour?

Because that's what it's all about. Keeping it going, being inspired. I feel like, me personally, I'm really hungry for this music. It's all about the motivation, more so than anything else because I feel like, without that, you really can't get anywhere without the motivation.

Do you have a favorite track on "Already"? Mine's "I, Exist."

Yeah, I think that's my favorite. "Flat Out" is cool, too. "Flat Out," sonically, is really good. It will probably go the [expletive] off in the club. That's the one that provokes my body the most, but what provokes my spirit the most is "I, Exist." That really came from my heart.

How'd you choose the DJs for the remixes?

Well, I curated the whole thing. I wanted somebody who was fresh, like DJ Dizzy. Then Kilbourne, that was automatic. We have her on the mixtape because she's touring with us. Then I was like, "I gotta get Blaqstarr." It's my first strictly Baltimore Club project, and out of anybody I would want to be on this [it] would be Blaqstarr because he's a legend. Coming up as a kid, I looked up to him. He kind of changed my whole world on what Baltimore Club can sound like and be more than just a club, dance music party genre. He made it this bigger thing. ... He's kind of the afro-futurist of Baltimore Club music. I had to get him on it because he's just one of my musical heroes. Thankfully, he said yes. He was down from the jump. He's real cool. A sweet guy.

What's up with DJ Dizzy?

He's a new Baltimore Club DJ. He's only like 18. That was really important for me – to have somebody young or just coming up be on there, too. I think that's important. At the same time, you need to acknowledge, pay dues and respect to legends like Blaqstarr, Scottie [B], Rod Lee, Technics and all of those people. At the same time, we need to give platforms to uplift the younger kids, too. I think that's been lacking for a long time in our music scene in general.

You vented on Twitter the other day about a recent NPR segment on Baltimore music. It seemed like pent-up frustration boiling over. What upsets you about how the scene is covered?

I feel like it's always a misinterpretation. I feel like they always get the wrong people. Usually, no shade, it's a person who has no idea or who has no physical hand in the music scene in

general. And the coolest [music] that comes out of Baltimore is the Club, is the rap, is the R&B or the electronic music. A lot of times, that gets misinterpreted or not fully covered in the proper way, or it just doesn't get acknowledged at all. I feel like that happens a thousand times over and over again. A lot of it is due to the fact that Baltimore is so raw and underground that it's hard to find people to really tell you what's up. That's the beauty of it – that it's so raw and underground – but sometimes, out of that, it can be a little disconnected.

You've released a few projects now, but in your mind, have you released your debut album yet?

Nuh-uh. I think that's next. I want to make my [expletive] "Off the Wall" kind of record. That's what I'm working on right now. I'm in the mental stage. I'm trying to piece everything in my mind. ... I want to do my thing with Baltimore Club music and rap and punk and noise, and try to progress the sound, and keep it as futuristic as possible. Even with [Already], it's Baltimore Club but it's like another department. Even from the beats to the way the vocals are, it's still Abdu Ali. It's still trippy and weird. Just keep it pushing. I want to come out in the middle of next year with just an awesome album. Like the album.

INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED AND CONDENSED