



Top: Billionaire Boys Club

J Hus: A True Londoner

Words: Novar FLIP

British street music has gone from strength to strength in recent years. Artists like Giggs and Skepta have broken barriers and survived against intense adversity to reach mainstream success. Now a new wave of artists have picked up the momentum and joined their predecessors at the top of the charts. This year J Hus has stepped into the fold achieving a top 10-album and a Mercury Prize nomination. “The music’s banging, like we’ve finally found ourselves,” says Hus. “It’s just stepped up a level and obviously they’re hearing us right now, we’re what’s popping”. Is the current reign here to stay? “Yeah, 100 per cent, we’re taking over man, we’re taking over!”

We may have never seen a rapper like J Hus before. Not many rappers have been accepted to the mainstream with elements of street life in their content, but Hus’s style and identity add layers of originality to that dynamic. The way he bounces between styles and even accents with such charisma is one of the most refreshing experiences to behold. His East London residence, his Gambian heritage, and all of the influences prevalent in the city are present. From cockney linguistics, to the impact of Jamaican culture, it can all be heard in the vocal performances of J Hus. “With the album I tried to represent the UK as much as possible, but the UK that I know,” Hus says. I felt like it was the UK and London that I’ve always know as well. It is a special thing to see this dynamic identity presented on a record so unequivocally. London is a melting pot of cultures that can be beautifully visible in the personality of individuals. For this reason, J Hus is a true Londoner.

I watched as Hus went through his first few looks with the photographer. One look posing in a t-shirt with the words ‘anti-social human being’ across the front. I watched as he stares meaningfully into the camera lens, taking his job for the day very seriously. He seems shy at times, yet generally confident and relaxed as he poses. He talks to the photographer about 50 Cent being his biggest influence. One look saw him in a t-shirt with ‘You Pussio’ written on it, he liked this one. Another look saw him in a classic 80’s Hip-Hop get up, LL Cool J-esque Kangol hat on, while Dead Prez, ‘It’s Bigger Than Hip-Hop’ played in the background. J Hus is essentially a rapper, but his music transcends hip-hop as well. His album ‘Common Sense’ displays a variety of sounds from rap, afrobeat, R&B and even garage. I had also heard new terms such as afro-trap and afro-swing being used to describe the sound he has become associated with. Even more interestingly, I had seen him referred to as a grime artist. Does J Hus consider his music to belong to a specific genre? “Nah, I can be anything and everything. My sound is everything you’ve heard, but nothing you’ve heard at the same time.”

There is often confusion surrounding how to label artists from this world of ‘urban’ narration. Why was J Hus being referred to as a grime artist? “I don’t do

grime!” he emphasised. “[But] they don’t know what to call it, it’s just like this thing, it just come out of nowhere,” he went on to say. “You know how like Stormzy come with grime, so it’s like Stormzy represents all of us to the mainstream. So they think we’re all doing grime. Like, we kind of look like him and whatever. It’s like to them grime is UK street culture, that’s how they see it. But obviously, it’s not really that, it’s deeper than that.” On the point of afro-trap and similar terms Hus dismissively stated, “Nah, I don’t know what that is.” With his original point of not being tied to a genre, and the variety of sounds on his album, it would seem that J Hus is not intent on being labelled any time soon.

J Hus has kept his day ones with him on his journey into commercial success. Long-time collaborator JAE5 produced the majority of his ‘Common Sense’ album. “He’s the one I started off with from the beginning,” he says. He also has a management team comprised of his personal friends. “You need to have people that you trust around you. We didn’t know the business, but as long as they’re willing to learn, as long as they got their head straight, it’s calm.” Recent chart topper Stormzy has a similar set up and has advocated for artists to hire the people close to them in positions of management. His team released his ‘Gang Signs & Prayer’ album completely independently reach number 1 on the album chart. It made me wonder why Hus had decided to sign with a major label at all. “You know what it is, the deal was correct, the deal was right, the people are all right, the people I was going in to business with. They stuck with me, they helped me get this far, they let me have total control of what I was doing. As everyone knows I was in a bad position not too long ago, and they stuck with me, even though they could of just left man.” I couldn’t argue with the results that have already developed, as his album encapsulates everything you could want from a J Hus album and more. The independent success of Stormzy is to be revered, but in the current climate of UK street music dominating popular culture, it serves a purpose that both lanes are being achieved.

The recent success of UK rappers has not been without obstacles. Many artists have had their shows and tours cancelled due to interference by the police. In May 2017, Hus himself had no London date on his UK tour. “I don’t know [why]”, he says, with a big smile on his face to exhibit that it doesn’t matter anymore. “We’re doing London in November, that’s all that matters.” The current accomplishments of UK rap seem to of established progress in this area and given Hus something to celebrate. “[I] can’t wait. The tickets got sold out in the first eight hours. So yeah man, it’s gonna be crazy”. This lead us to a discussion of content. Does his music carry a social message? “Certain tunes, I got a tune there called ‘Spirit’. I think that’s a good message. I wrote that trying to give out a good message.” On the other side of the

debate, it is often suggested that rap music can promote violence? “Does rock music promote violence? When they’re smashing up their guitars on stage?” Hus asks. “I just think people rap their lives. You can’t judge no one for what they’re rapping about if they’re rapping about their lives and you ain’t experienced it.” Moving on to the subject of whether artists are responsible for their content? “This one’s a deep one you know, because you know what it is, you’re tryna express yourself and everyone out there is listening... Yeah... Yeah, they are responsible for the messages in their music because they’re saying it,” says Hus. “[But] am I responsible for what they take from it? Nah, not from what they take from it!” On the issue of knife crime and violence among young Londoners Hus expressed, “We have to get to the reason. We have to know, why is everyone so angry? I don’t know, that’s a deep question. I don’t have the answers.”

We reach our final shot of the day, the ‘smoking shot’. J Hus sits at a table. Tobacco, Rizlas, a grinder and a Capri-Sun in front of him. J Hus begins to roll up very seriously and thoughtfully. Watching his technique, the photographer asks: “You make it Holland, what do you call it in England?” With concentration and a smile on his face, Hus replies; “Backstrap.” Hus got right in the zone, striking poses with enthusiasm and blowing smoke in the air. “Jheez, best photoshoot ever!” he exclaims with the widest grin possible. “This is the life.” Watching Hus for the day I had noticed how his real-life persona could switch from completely serious to all smiles in an instant. This contrast is also reflected in his music. With all of the harsh realities present, there are still many moments of amusement interweaved. “You gotta have fun, you gotta enjoy it. You see with me, you see when I make music, I make the song from an experience. That experience could of been a funny experience, so that’s where the tune comes from... With ‘Friendly’ my friend was on the phone to a girl, and I was like, ‘Show me the girl, let me see what she looks like’, and he was like, ‘Nah nah nah’, and out the blue I was just like, ‘You don’t want me to get friendly with her’, and then everyone started bussin’ up, and then I was like, ‘You know what, I’m gonna put that in a tune’.”

With his current success and a newly empowered scene of UK rappers the future is looking positive. “Everyone can do it, we can all do it. The way the scene is moving, it’s not like only one man is shining. We’ve all got mad potential and we can all do so much. I think a whole scene together can move and become bigger”. Personally, J Hus is still building. “For now I’m still focusing on conquering the UK... [I] still got a long way to go”. When does that mean we will see another album? “A year or two,” Hus says with a smile.

‘Common Sense’ is out now via Black Butter Records.

Hat: KANGOL
Tracksuit: 3 PARADIS
T-shirt: 3 PARADIS
Trainers: ASICS
Watch: HUBLLOT

“With the album I tried to represent the UK
as much as possible, but the UK that I know.”





Hat: ROCAWEAR
Tracksuit: ROCAWEAR
Watch: HUBLOT



Hat: STARTER / Jacket: ALPHA INDUSTRIES / T-shirt: CLARA MARTIN / Bottoms: CLARA MARTIN

“Jheez, best photoshoot ever!”



Tracksuit: LUKE
T-shirt: CHUNK
Trainers: NIKE CORTEZ
Bag: MONEY SWAG BAG



Hat: KANGOL
T-shirt: CLARA MARTIN