



XV

SQUARE ROOT

WRITTEN BY TONESWEP
IMAGES BY SHANE MCCAULEY

XV IS EASILY ONE THE HOTTEST YOUNG ARTISTS IN HIP HOP. MORE EMCEE THAN RAPPER, MORE BACKPACKER THAN TRAPPER, HE SAT DOWN WITH **DOPE MAG** TO TALK ABOUT HIS JOURNEY FROM COW-TOWN STOMPING GROUND TO THE AWESOME EP... AND WHY THE NERDS ARE NOW RUNNING RAP.

(ToneSweep: TS) XV! Thunder and the Heat my G. Who you with?

(XV: XV) I'm a Midwest dude. All my teams got eliminated, see because I'm a Bulls fan all the way. So being a Bulls fan I already hate the Heat, just being a Bulls fan you have to. I would like to see LeBron get a ring though because he's earned it, and put in the work. But I'm a Midwest man so I'm rocking with the Thunder all day. I have to. Gotta do it.

(TS) Wichita, Kansas is known as a cow town. For NCAA March Madness via college basketball's Jayhawks, and as the World Air Capital. How does one of Hip Hop's hottest young artists emerge from such a place?

(XV) It was 10 years of nothing but grinding, whether it was on the radar or not. I was handing out mixtapes every day. After high school I flew to New York and went to Hot 97 Summer Jam wearing a t-shirt that said "I'm Just a Dude from Kansas". It ain't easy for a dude from Indiana, Oklahoma, Missouri. You have to be able to relate to the universe. There are a lot more people in the world who are from small towns, than there are from big cities; so more people will relate to a small town story if you tell it right, and in an entertaining way.

(TS) Does your native state hurt or help you in being respected as a Hip Hop artist?

(XV) It's a double-edged sword to be honest. I'm from a place that a lot of people don't know about. Kansas is not in movies. Not in entertainment. When I rap I can give people a visual. Something I created. But it hurts me because the rest of the world doesn't know where I'm from. They don't know what to expect. But all in all it's cooler being from a small town, because we already know what Brooklyn, Compton, Atlanta and Miami have to offer. But we don't know the Minneapolis', Wichita's, Oklahoma City's.

(TS) With Wiz, Cudi, Big Sean, J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar, B.O.B, yourself and the backpackers being the hot boys in Hip Hop right now. Is this the revenge of the nerd's man?

(XV) I just think it's the uprising of people being themselves. A lot of what Hip Hop has created became cliché. And it's the same with Rock and Roll. From them you expect cut off shorts, cut up pants, cut up shirts, crazy hair, chains, and skulls. We were raised by the Kanye and Jay-Z style, not so much about the drug music or gang music. More about being a black hippy and being ourselves, and it shows in our music.

(TS) Which legend do you most closely compare to?

(XV) I look at all the artists like that. I see J. Cole in the sense of a Jay-Z, Kendrick Lamar in the sense of a Lupe. For me Kanye and Andre 3000 are who paved the way for me. If it wasn't for those two artists, there wouldn't be a lane for Popular Culture or The kid With The Green Back Pack. I'm not a hood N!99a, so when Biggie and different artists were out. I listened to it. I liked it. But I didn't relate to it.



**"YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO
RELATE TO THE UNIVERSE."**



"THE KID WITH THE GREEN BACKPACK IS MY STORY. IT'S GOING TO BE FOREVER. NO MATTER HOW MANY ALBUMS I MAKE THIS IS THE ONE PEOPLE WILL REFERENCE BACK TO."

(TS) How long have you been thrashing these skateboards?

(XV) I was rollerblading at 10. I actually started skateboarding at 15. 15 was everything for me, just a crazy year for me. I began producing records, making my album artwork, skateboarding. Turning into the person I am today began at 15.

(TS) Basketball has always been closely tied to Hip Hop. Now skateboarding is as well.

(XV) When I was younger, no Blacks were doing it. All my friends were Asians. That's what made me not fit in. I was a skateboarding kid who came from the neighborhood of Cadillac's and corner stores. Even back then BMX was cooler than skateboarding. I like that skateboarding is now very much a part of Hip Hop, because it shouldn't come down to race. It's a fun hobby for kids to get into.

(TS) When I look at most of Hip Hop's music videos today, I see White and Latino video chicks. Where the Sistas at?

(XV) Man, you know that's weird because rappers aren't selecting them for the videos as much, but I feel that the Sistas have also created that margin. As we were talking about earlier, Hip Hop is not seen as a positive thing. If I'm talking to someone and I tell them I rap, they don't know I go to schools and speak to the kids, or that I give to charitable causes, and so on. And also, I think that more groups are accepting Hip Hop. It's not just a Black thing anymore. So you can have Spanish, Portuguese, Asian girls in your videos. We're accepting it because it's new to us. We're embracing the cultures of the people who love Hip Hop music, whatever their race may be.

(TS) What's up with you and these Porn Stars fam?

(XV) Yes, Porn Stars! (laughs). That's my world, G. Crazy. It's beyond the regular porn watching. I don't watch it that much. I collect comic books, porn, Jordan's, and vintage video game consoles. But I will say this - when the world ends and Squarians (his fan base) are running the world. They are going to find the illest collection of porn ever. It's going to be the XV collection (Laughs!).

(TS) This is one of my favorite lines of yours: "Overly optimistic / Maybe a dream chaser / After some things, that I seen / on a screensaver."

(XV) When I was writing that song, I was trying to paint a picture of my personality. I was describing myself. I'm a very optimistic person. At that time, I was working on my album and would always fall asleep in my computer chair. And my screensaver would show Egypt and Japan, places around the world. I'm a boy from Kansas man. So LA and New York are cool, but I always knew my raps would get me to those places around the world.

(TS) How did the Warner Bros. deal come together?

(XV) Awesome was actually the beginning of the whole Warner deal for me. The story behind that song is the explanation of my deal. A Warner A&R was on MySpace and came across me, Awesome, and the Everybody's Nobody mixtape. I was working with Big Sean and Chiddy Bang at the time and they looked at the MySpace message with me. I was like, "ya'll think this is real?" It was.

(TS) From your "The Definition" mixtape series back in '06 to now, with "Popular Culture: The Awesome" EP, your career has been quite a journey. What do you want to happen? What is this EP designed to accomplish for you?

(XV) I'm trying to connect the mainstream audience to my underground audience. I want the Squarians, my underground audience and following, to bridge with my mainstream listeners. This EP is an opportunity to show the world that their voice, and my voice, wants to be heard. That is what music's about. If an Adele sells 10million records it says that talent is speaking.

(TS) The Kid With The Green Backpack sounds like a classic album title, like The Low End Theory or Straight Outta Compton. Like a real thematic title.

(XV) After Popular Culture, this is all I have in the chamber to show the people. My debut album means everything to me now, because I have made so many mixtapes and projects, but this is my best work. The Kid With The Green Backpack is my story. It's going to be forever. No matter how many albums I make this is the one people will reference back to. This is my debut album on Warner Bros Records. Great lyricism. Great production. Great vision. Great story.

(TS) How has fatherhood changed you?

(XV) It changed me drastically. I was just outside skateboarding with my son, and I told him, "Dad has an interview in 30 minutes. You want to skate now? Or you want to wait until later? Because in 30 minutes dad has to speak with DOPE Magazine (laughs!)." I've been through a lot in my teen years. Most of them were spent being a rapper. 15 years of just living, writing raps, performing, grinding. I understand what my voice means to music now. I have a son who listens to everything I say. If I say "that girl's ass is fat", or if I curse, he's going to say the same thing. He's going to curse. It made me start really appreciating not just my lyrics, but the listener of my lyrics.

(TS) Where are you with President Obama? What kind of job has he done the last four years?

(XV) I always try to look at a politician as a regular person living in this world, outside of what he's representing. I feel that we have moved forward and progressed since the Bush administration left office. I feel that we need to continue to be as good, or better, than Obama going forward. I think from gas prices, to war, to the occupy movement, we've progressed. Things aren't good, but things will never be good. That's just a part of living in this world.

**"WE'RE EMBRACING THE
CULTURES OF THE PEOPLE WHO
LOVE HIP HOP MUSIC, WHATEVER
THEIR RACE MAY BE."**