

MAY 25, 2014

ON THE VERGE NICO & VINZ
SPOTLIGHT ON BREAKTHROUGH ARTISTS

'Am I Wrong' feels so right for this duo

Martín Caballero

Special for USA TODAY

MAKING NOISE: If you're curious who the guys are behind summer smash *Am I Wrong*, you're not alone: The Nico & Vinz single, already triple-platinum in their home country of Norway, ranks fifth in Shazam's Sounds of Summer predictions. *Wrong* has been making all the right moves, climbing to No. 18 on USA TODAY's top 40 airplay chart, while the video, shot in Botswana, has scored 13 million YouTube views.

REMEMBER THE NAME: Nico Sereba and Vincent Dery have been recording and performing together, initially as Envy, since 2009, winning the Emergenza Festival competition for new artists in 2011. Unlike most Norwegian contemporaries, they began rapping in English. "We listened to rap from America, so that's what we learned from," Nico says. "We've always dreamed of making it (outside Norway), so it was a natural artistic decision."

SEARCHING FOR SELF: Nico & Vinz had to tackle their own struggles with identity growing up in Oslo; Vinz's parents hail from Ghana, while Nico's father is from Ivory Coast and his mother from Norway. "A lot of children of immigrants go through that: 'Where am I from? How do I behave?'" Vinz says. "I battled with that a lot until I was 20, 21. Then I realized that everything that I am is exactly who I'm supposed to be."

MIXING IT UP: After signing with Warner Bros., they reintroduced themselves as Nico & Vinz and toned down their raps in favor of singing. "If we really want to reach the rest of the world, we



STIAN ANDERSEN

need to figure out who we are," Vinz says. "The music has an African influence, a Scandinavian pop melody and an urban touch."

POSITIVE POWER: With its empowering lyrics, *Am I Wrong* gives listeners a taste of Nico & Vinz's ambitious plans for album *Black Star Elephant*, due later this year. "If you can feel happy within yourself, you'll be able to change the people around you, and through that, you can change the world," Nico says.

DREAM DUET? Kanye West. "I love the way he thinks," Nico says. "It would be a cool thing to mix up our style with his and see what comes out of it."

Nico Sereba, left, and Vincent Dery have worked together since 2009.