

Music & Nightlife

GETTING TO KNOW

ILoveMakonnen

The LA singer schools *Jonathan Cook* about Azealia Banks-gate

THIS WEEKEND, Born & Bred festival hits Haggerston Park for two days of bass, beats and bars. Following Azealia Banks's removal from the line-up after her racist and homophobic Twitter rants, UK pioneers are now the order of the day, with one honourable exception: Makonnen Sheran, alias ILoveMakonnen.

Best known for 'Tuesday,' his collaboration with Drake ('Got the club goin' up on a Tuesday'), the 26-year-old singer from LA – who once attended the Beauty College of America – stands apart from the ultra-macho, thugged out posturing usually associated with hip hop. We spoke to him ahead of the festival about the power of positivity.

What are you expecting from Born & Bred? Do you feel any pressure as the only non-UK artist on the bill?

'I'm expecting a lot of positive energy out there. I'm going to show up and shell out. There's no pressure. I'm a person of the world; I'm not just an American. It will be humbling and an honour to come over and experience England, and to play at the festival as the only US act.'

Are you plugged into the UK scene?

'I know a few things, a few people. Stormzy, Skepta, Novelist – they're making some noise in America. Section Boyz are doing things. But I'm always willing to learn more. There's gonna be a lot of great talent together, so I'm excited to check it out.'

Before being dropped from the line-up, Azealia Banks was pretty vocal in her disdain for UK rappers. What's your take on British rap?

'I feel like British rappers always bring something fresh. Hip hop is kind of ignorant but when British guys rap, it's often intelligent stuff. That scares a lot of Americans off. Americans like a lot of dumb shit. And the British guys are bringing something that's more of a science, more educational, but with that

raw, gangster stuff behind it. It's like: wow, you're really backing up what you're speaking. You're not a flexer, you're not saying you've got a hundred women, chains, gold. You guys are real.'

Was the festival right to drop Banks?

'I think it was a good move. They want to make this a place where all people can come out and have a great time. I know Azealia Banks has gay friends – I wouldn't say she was a racist or a homophobe – but this is a job and we're supposed to be an example for everyone. She's out of the festival, that's good. Let's move on and be positive rather than spending time bashing her.'

But you've spoken out before against homophobia in hip hop...

'We all need to stop judging and bashing each other, saying this is or isn't right. You have gay fans. You have transgender fans. Hip hop is an expression: it's a worldwide thing. If we're going to move forward and keep the future of hip hop positive, we need to accept everyone who enjoys it. We can't be negative. It's an ignorant conversation.'

Have you been to London before?

'Only for a few days. I want to see monuments that have been there for hundreds of years. Everything that's been there before the iPhone!'

What's next for you after the festival?

'Keep touring, chilling out, dropping music. I got the world in the club on a Tuesday; now I want to see what they want to do next!' ■

→ Born & Bred Festival is in Haggerston Park on Sat Jun 4 and Sun Jun 5.



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DIYAN HUI/THE