

Adventurous and Experimental, Nino De Brown makes free spirited music

Despite the consistent upward trajectory and dominance of Afrobeats in today's music scene, creative Nigerians continue to experiment with different sounds and genres across the continent; diving into a brilliant exploration of African sounds and pushing the boundaries of our sounds by creating several interpolations of music that highlights the diversity and distinctness of the Afrobeats genre. The emergence of these new sounds and sub terrains have not only solidly held their fort in the landscape, they have also effectively crowned Afrobeats effort in exporting the culture and sound to the world.

Artist Nino De Brown is no stranger to such experimentation; his sound categorized as an audacious afro fusion of Street hop, Afrobeat, and an element of Ghanaian dancehall is a resounding affirmation of the diversity of our cross cultural artistry.

Can you share a brief history of your exposure to music at a young age and how it has influenced you and the growth of your sound?

From the history of Nigeria and its people, dancing is a definite part of our culture, Nigerians love to dance and party so growing up as a kid my childhood was fun. We used to dance, sing, and clap in the evenings when the moon was out. I think that's like the origin of music in my life. As a young boy, I never thought of singing as a career, I never thought of it as something to focus on like saying "I want to be a

musician” but when I got admission into college, I began to experiment with different creative activities because I had friends who were comedians. At first, I tried being a DJ, I was like okay! I wanna be a DJ so I started practicing. Some people still know me as being a DJ from those times but I quickly realized that it wasn’t my calling and then I went into comedy. I started doing stand-up comedy and I did it for a little while but it wasn’t still me, even though I am kind of funny, people still think I am a comedian today but it is just life. That’s when I got into music, I did it a little bit in school then I stopped. I stopped music when I relocated to Ghana in 2012. While in Ghana, I started anchoring MC for a couple of shows; friends would need an MC for a birthday and I’ll just pull as a supportive friend to help anchor the show.

Then in 2015, I moved to a new apartment and I met this dude who does dance ups and he was like, “Nino, let’s go to the studio, I know you do music so let’s go and record”. I hit the studio that day. I did a song and I did ‘*carry my cross*’ which is the first song I did in Ghana - ‘*Carry my cross*’! My best friend was like this song is dope, everyone said the same thing too and since then it’s been almost 10 years of doing music officially. I have done all kinds of genres since that time. I have done dance hall, I have done hip hop, etc. I keep doing it because I am still experimenting and finding my voice and myself. I’ve been experimenting with Afro-fusion even before it became a thing, I’ve always seen myself as an Afro-fusion artiste and I think I found my voice and I am ready for my fans; those who have been there and believed in me since day 1. I think I’m ready for them now.

Can you mention artists whom you’ve felt a connection with; artists whose sounds would always make you feel special at whatever point in life you listen to them?

One thing about me, I love music in all its entirety. As long as it's a good song, good artists, and good music, I don't have any special song I dance to or listen to that makes me feel special. I know a lot of songs that I can sing word for word but I won't pick any as a favorite. I love every song and they've all had a great influence on me.

So you mentioned that you officially started making music when you got to Ghana and moved into a new apartment but you were living in Nigeria before then, presently, which country are you in? Canada? USA?

No, I am in the US.

You've lived in 3 different countries and must have experienced cultural diversities and shocks. How have these influenced you and shaped your art, creativity and your general view of life?

The experiences have been thrilling! It's been a lot of "wow!" moments. I've gained more knowledge over time because moving from place to place opens you up to new worlds and experiences. Like I said when I was talking earlier, I have tried a lot of music genres and I finally think I found my voice - that's an influence of my cross-cultural experiences; I've learned to be experimental.

You officially started making music in Ghana and now in the US. What are the similarities or differences between the Ghanaian and the US?

In Ghana, the fan base focuses only on the genres they listen to; they don't want to try new genres or be diverse with their sounds. Dance hall is their favorite genre and it's more competitive; everybody wants you to do either dancehall or high life. The fans prefer to only listen to their faves and that has affected the Ghanaian music industry, every artist deserves support even when they are making a different sound. The American scene is more experimental with sound; they want you to find yourself and just do you. That's the difference for me.

What you are saying is that in the Ghanaian industry, their audience seems to separate artists based on genres but in the US, everyone is open to experimenting.

Yes, we see that in Nigeria too. Wizkid fans will still listen to Olamide, Olamide fans will still listen to Burna Boy, and Burna Boy's fans still listen to Fireboy and other artists. That's what makes the industry unique. Everything is flowing. Music is flowing.

African music has hit an impressive mark in recent times. What do you think has contributed to the growth of Afrobeats and how are you positioning yourself as an African music artiste in the US striving for global success?

African music has always been global, you know? but we didn't have as much recognition then because of the lack of internet. A lot of great African artists have traveled around the world, playing shows. It's recognized now because there is a means to prove that the music is going, the streams are counting, people are listening to it, and you can see it on your cell phone. You walk around; you can see what's

going on in Germany. It has been a big thing and me being an African artist or being a Nigerian producing afro-fusion sound; producing my original Nigerian sound and infusing it with genres from other places to make it a global enjoyment for people from all over the world is great. It's a great feeling.

Let's talk about your latest release, 'Eko'. You are in the US but you made a sound to reference Lagos state. What significance does the city hold for you and your music? What inspired the song 'EKO'?

I made Eko when I just got back from Lagos, I went to Nigeria and I was in Lagos for like a week; it brings back a lot of memories not only in Lagos but even back to every state. As a Nigerian when you leave Nigeria for too long and you come back, the nostalgia hits you; the life, the rush, the hustle, and even the ridiculous stories, For example, the story of that snake that swallowed money. Big story! Those are the kind of funny things that go on in Lagos and so I decided to put all of those anecdotes into a song, lyrics like, "*You no cum, I no cum how come belly cum?*". Initially, 'Eko' wasn't a part of my upcoming album. I didn't want to drop a song because I had a lot of things happening to me; I lost my wife which made me push my album to next summer. I just wanted a break but I also kept feeling the need to drop something. I wasn't even sure what I wanted to drop till the last minute when I was driving and playing my songs from my pen drive (which contains more than 200 songs of mine) plugged into the car, it got to 'Eko' and it sounded interesting, the song kept playing in my head; I put it on repeat twice and then sent it to my producer and we decided to put it on the album to spice it up. The album is where the real flavor is because you will hear new experimental sounds away from Afro-fusion.

The song was recently released. How have you been feeling about it? How have people been reacting to it? How has the feedback been since you dropped ‘Eko’?

It's been good. The numbers have been amazing too though not the target but you got to give thanks. The most important is that it was released. I didn't leave it on my PC or my phone or pen drive.

You mentioned having to push your album to summer because of some personal reasons. Does it have a title yet and is there a specific date attached to the project's release?

It does have a title which I can't reveal now. My team and I are working towards a release for next summer though. We plan to drop another track from the album soon so fans shouldn't worry too much. Most likely in February, we'll release a fresh new single; an original from the album but let's hold on to 'Eko' for now and keep feeling it. The album is going to be worth the wait and I'm so excited for it; it has all the feels in it. The title of the album, release date, and a pre-save link will also be announced in February when we drop the song.

What matters most to you in life and why?

What matters most to me is my voice. Not even my life, because I know it's going to be gone. My voice is priceless; everything can be gone but I don't want my voice to be gone so my voice matters to me most in my life.