

Watch Now: Amherst rapper, evangelist makes career out of love for hip-hop

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Allen Brown poses for a portrait in his producer's recording studio in Madison Heights on April 15. Brown, a 2005 graduate of Amherst County High School, has loved hip-hop since age 12.

Kendall Warner, The News & Advance

In a house on the 100 block of Riverview Road in Madison Heights, Allen W. Brown steps up to the microphone and lets the word go.

"I'm from the 434 but heaven is my home. In God I trust in every song, yeah, I'm going to tell them," Brown passionately raps into the recording equipment, with other lyrics interlaced in the hip-hop track.

Brown moves in rhythm with the music as producing partner and close friend, Quinten Lee, the home's owner who turned a room into a studio, works on engineering the track. On a Friday afternoon, while many are getting off work for the end-of-day commute, the duo is engaged in one of many recording sessions on Brown's upcoming album, the fourth of his career, to be released in June.

"All to the glory of God," Brown said of the music.

An Amherst County native, Brown is a Christian rapper, hip-hop recording artist and evangelist who uses his musical talent to minister his faith. The 2005 graduate of Amherst County High School has been in love with hip-hop since age 12 and looked up to rappers like Lil Wayne and the late Tupac Shakur, a cultural icon whose music still resonates more than 25 years after his death.

"Me and my brothers, we just tried it," Brown, 35, said of getting into the musical genre. "People used to tell me I was pretty good at it. I began to notice that I was pretty good at writing rhymes and writing raps and I excelled in English classes and

writing poetry and things like that. And I really enjoyed and loved just rapping and making music.”

Brown laughs as he recalls freestyle rapping in the hallways of Amherst County schools but admits he never really thought it would be a career venture at the level he is currently at. When he gave his life to Christ at age 20, he said God showed him he could use it to spread the Gospel.

“That’s when I really began to take it seriously and look at it as a ministry tool,” Brown said. “I used karaoke machines, anything I could get my hands on. Slowly but surely, God began to open many doors and send people in my life.”

He said Lee, whom he grew up with and has a bond with like a brother, is a huge part of his musical career.

“I thank God so much for him in a mighty way,” Brown said, adding he sits back in awe of all the things God has done in his life.

Brown remembers hearing his first hip-hop song and the euphoria he felt.

“I just loved it,” he said. “I just loved the beat.”

That love didn’t stop when he gave his life to Christ, he explained. Lecrae, a Christian rapper, singer and songwriter, has been a major inspiration.

“I didn’t even know people did that,” Brown said. “You can really rap for God? Not only was he rapping for God, he was doing it in a cool way.”

Brown also noticed Lecrae was really good, his Christian songs weren’t corny and were every bit as good, and even better, than many others.

“It blew me away,” Brown said of Lecrae’s talent. “It opened my mind to the fact it could be done. I was immediately intrigued and I wanted to do it myself.”

He said his parents told him about Jesus Christ when he was a boy and he remembers saying the prayer to accept Him and truly believed it.

“I believe the seed was planted then,” Brown said.

He went through his teenage years and got away from that faith but gave his life to God when he was 20. He went to church and couldn’t ignore the preacher’s words that were directly for him.

“He was hitting my heart every time,” Brown said. “Eventually I surrendered my life to Christ.”

He began studying the Bible and his heart and mind were changed by the spiritual transformation, he said. Brown also credits his wife, Valita, with being a major positive influence on his life who “slowed me down a lot” and was a big reason why he decided not to leave the Lynchburg area, for which he is thankful.

Brown is nominated for seven awards in the Rhythm of Gospel Music Awards, which will be held in Jacksonville, Florida, for a three-day period in June.

“It just blows me away,” Brown said of the honor. “It’s just the fruit of our hard work and God honoring the hard work we put on the album.”

He said one of his songs, “Help My Belief,” is nominated for three of those awards.

Brown explained recording an album is time-consuming work with recording, mixing, mastering, artwork, promotion and marketing involved in getting it to the masses. He has recorded three previous albums and has a music and clothing ministry, In God I Trust Ministries, which can be reached at ingoditrustforever.com.

“It’s been a dream, especially when I gave my life to Christ,” said Brown. “He gave me a whole vision and a dream of doing it.”

He said he has noticed from online music platforms Spotify and YouTube much of his audience is his age and younger and the duo strives to make songs that are relevant to all who listen. If much of hip-hop centers on drugs, gangs, money and death, it can also be used as an effective way to reach that same audience with the Gospel message, he said.

“I think hip-hop music is a huge tool, a great tool,” said Brown. “You need an alternative and I thank God for it, because in my own personal life...having that alternative was awesome.”

Lee said, like Brown, he’s long had a passion for hip-hop and music in general and they found out it was attainable to pursue it.

“It’s a fantasy but then it switches when you figure out, ‘Hey, I can get the equipment. I can do this myself,’” Lee said. “I can make sound just as good as what you would hear on the radio. Then your whole mentality switches from a just fantasy and playing around to, ‘Maybe we can do this.’ And ‘maybe we can do this’ turns into, ‘We’re going to do this.’”

Lee said the process has been long but worth the work.

“You have to love it because if you don’t, it’s going to get you frustrated,” said Lee of the studio production process. “You’ve got to have some type of skill, some type of gift, and just like with anything — athletes — you have to practice. And if you don’t, it’s going to tell on you. You see sports stars, it’s tells on them when they’re doing what they’re not supposed to. It’s no different inside of here.”

In addition to studio recording, Brown often performs in front of live audiences locally and along the East Coast.

“Everywhere I go, I encourage everyone to put their faith and trust in Jesus,” he said.

He said there are many Christian artists in hip-hop he would recommend people listen to. For anyone with reservations about the genre, he said there are positive aspects to it and much talent and work involved behind the scenes.

“Give it a chance,” Brown said. “You might just like it.”

More Information

For more information on Brown’s In God I Trust Ministries, visit ingoditrustforever.com or email ministryoverbusiness@gmail.com.