

By: Tirusha Dave



The energy and atmosphere of Orlando is of its own identity, and the nightlife is certainly one of the best in Florida. When it comes to Hip-Hop music, Orlando is an undeniable melting pot. Taking the stairs to the second level in one of Orlando's hottest clubs, a familiar tune starts to ease through my ears and a familiar voice starts to take control of the microphone. I turn and see Orlando-based recording artist, Ajaxxx, gearing up for his performance.

After an exhilarating show, I sat down with Ajaxxx and learned one thing - in today's hip-hop scene, one does not often come across an artist who is trying to express a positive message through his lyrics, who is an innovator and represents his community - and that's just scratching the surface. Ajaxxx has showcased his versatility while rapping over Bollywood-style tracks and party tracks to inspirational songs and even old-school break beats. He is young, vibrant and ready to take the music scene by storm! Having 'abused' the microphone since the age of 13, Ajaxxx has developed into one of the best MCs in today's South Asian scene.

Balancing a full-time job and a music career, Ajaxxx's schedule is extremely busy; that, however, doesn't stop him from writing songs. As Ajaxxx leaned back into his chair, wearing his green Enyce jacket and matching hat, staring at his iPod, I thought, "does he think about anything aside from music?" Without a doubt, his songwriting style is very unique, and as he well knows, it cultivates many occasions for 'magic' in his studio.

Ajaxxx - Well, with anything I do, not just music, I try to be super creative and as innovative as possible. I like to try different things and experiment, rather than doing what the next guy does. I think that in order to be truly successful with music, you have to be a leader and surprise

the winning songs in the **Rap Against Violence** contest sponsored by local radio station 102 Jamz, Brighthouse Networks, and the Florida State Attorney's Office. I was saddened by the tragedies we kept witnessing and wrote a song to raise awareness and encourage people to step up and speak out against crime.

CM - For those who aren't familiar with your music, you've released two CDs, "It's About Time" and "Something to Prove: The Promo." Give us some insight on the two releases and how you've seen yourself grow as an artist between releases?

Ajaxxx - "It's About Time" was the first mixed CD I did. Everyone kept asking me if I had a CD out on campus, so I thought it was time to give something to the people. It was an eclectic mix with a lot of different styles and sounds, also featuring various local artists. The promotional CD you mentioned was my second release, but was more of a compilation CD until my next official mixed tape comes out. It included a lot of the music I've been releasing in the UK, some songs I've contributed to mix show DJs, and then some song favorites from the first CD.

CM - Besides personal projects, you are also being featured on other artists' projects and mixed tapes. Tell us where else we can hear you!

Ajaxxx - There is a lot, but here goes nothing - outside of my own CDs, I've been featured on several mix CDs for Xplicit Desi Vibes, a national DJ crew. I have also been on mix CDs from DJ Ohm and DJ Navi, two Desi DJs from the east coast. I'm on several different CDs here in Orlando, and then I'm also on UK producer June25th's mix CDs too. I'm sure I'm leaving out a lot, but as you can see I'm in a lot of places!

CM - You are from Orlando and you are an Indian-rapper - these are the two basic facts that people know about you. What truly makes 'Ajaxxx' the artist that he is inside? How did 'Ajaxxx' become your stage name?

Ajaxxx - What's up Tirusha? Well, I was originally going by different aliases when I first started off, but eventually decided I wanted a "name" to represent me versus a title. "Ajax" was a name given to me while I was growing up, so I thought I could use that and just add the triple x at the end to give it an edge. And with that, Ajaxxx was born.

TD - What is it about you that makes you stand apart from the other South Asian rappers today?

people. Not too many other rappers, in my opinion, are trying to set standards and break boundaries like that. I feel that's where I'm different.

CM - What is it about your songs that create the emotional depths they have and leave your listeners thinking? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe the best example would be your song, "Walk With You" which you won a contest for, right? Tell us about the contest too.

Ajaxxx - I've had songs that have inspired me throughout my lifetime, so I try to create that feeling for others by drawing on personal experiences and meaningful stories. "Walk With You" was a song I wrote about the recent school shootings we've been seeing on the news, which was one of

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Ajaxxx - Fresh From Orlando

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CM - The south Asian scene has always been thriving for the media's attention. Directors, producers, actors and models have all made their way mainstream, but sadly, it seems that musically, the doors to south Asian rappers and singers are always closed. Why do you think that is?

Ajaxxx - I don't think that the doors are closed, I just think that we're still on the rise and progressing. The directors or actors you mentioned didn't get to where they're at overnight, it took a lot of hard work. I'm starting to see a lot of south Asian rappers doing big things, ranging from mainstream collaborations, big-name magazine features, and even music videos. If we can keep building the momentum and not sacrifice our artistic integrity, then I think it's only a matter of time.

CM - Where do you see the music scene to be in 2008? Who are some of the outstanding artists and producers right now? What do you feel needs to be done in order for this scene to survive?

Ajaxxx - 2008 looks to be very promising. I know an artist from New York, Nivla, who recently had his video featured on the Doritos's Super Bowl commercial. Another artist named Kidd Skilly recently did a song with R&B singer Akon. These are just some examples, but it shows that we as a collective are pushing forward and breaking down walls. As long as everyone is working towards gaining more exposure and putting out good music, the scene will not only survive – it will prosper.

CM - Where do you see yourself musically in 2008?

Ajaxxx - (Laughing) Where do I begin? Well, I have four mix CDs I'm intending on putting out this year, one of which will be entirely Indian-themed. I'm going to continue to collaborate with UK based artists and producers, as the UK *desi* music scene is very strong right now. I'm working with some South Asian R&B singers and I'm also starting to dip my hand in production. I have plans of doing a tour too, with dates here in Orlando and then several dates out of the state too. My motto is, success isn't going to come to you - you have to go out and get it!

CM - Since we're on the topic of you, let's get inside Ajaxxx's head for a bit! As a male-artist in the scene, the larger percentage of your fans, are of course, the ladies! I'm not going to beat around the bush and neither should you! Is there a lucky-lady in your life? And I don't want one of those 'let's try to get away with it' answers like "of course ... my mom!"

Ajaxxx - Ummm ... let's just say I'm "accepting applications." (Laughing)

CM - Tell us a little bit about your family background. How supportive were your parents when you told them that you wanted to be a rapper? How did they handle the idea of you wanting to



build your own studio?

Ajaxxx - To be honest with you, my parents have been nothing but supportive. They have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and their support has been extremely helpful, if not inspirational. I won't lie though, when I told them about the idea of building my own studio, I think they might have thought I was a little crazy but when the smoke cleared they were very proud of me.

CM - Most of the other artists out there are either Gujarati or Punjabi – but you're neither! Tell us a little bit about your cultural background as well.

Ajaxxx - Well, for those who may not know, I'm *Sindhi*. *Sindhis* are not so different from other types of Indians – we're very family-oriented and traditional. Just like any other Indian, we love our customs, our music, and especially our food! To me, we are all very similar.

CM - What was your childhood like? Did you confront a lot of the typical South Asian stereotypes while growing up?

Ajaxxx - I might have gotten a joke here or there, but nothing cruel or malicious. The people I surrounded myself with were very down-to-earth and friendly, similar to me. I think it's important to

keep people like that around you. High school had a majority of Hispanic students, so I have a lot of friends who are Dominican, Puerto Rican, etc. Anybody from Florida knows what I'm talking about! I have a variety of different friends from many different cultures.

CM - What about your life as a rapper? Did you receive a lot of heat from the public when you were on stage trying to battle a non-Indian rapper? How did the public react to you when you entered the scene?

Ajaxxx - The thing about hip-hop (which I love), nowadays is that people don't really care what you are or where you're from. Instead, they want to know whether or not you have skills. I think that at first I might have thrown some people off – I mean, an Indian rapper, c'mon, right? But I've placed an emphasis on showcasing my talents first and proving to everyone I can hang with the best of them. I have never strayed from that idea either, and it's gotten me where I am today.

CM - Do you think the public's perspective on a south Asian rapper will ever change? Do you think there will ever be a time when we'll hear a south Asian artist on mainstream radio? You obviously broke that barrier in Orlando as "Walk with You" streamed the airways of 102 Jamz, but what about on a national level?

Ajaxxx - Absolutely! Like I said before, a lot of south Asian artists are making waves, so as long as we can continue to do this, it won't be long before you see one of us on MTV or hear us on mainstream radio.

CM - Ajaxxx, being that you're from Orlando, how important is it for you to reach out to your community? Are a major chunk of your performances Orlando-based?

Ajaxxx - I think it's of the utmost important to reach out to your community. Believe me, nobody is going to give you the support that your hometown can give you. Think about sports – there's a reason it's called home-court advantage. As far as performances go, the majority up to this point have been Orlando-based but I have done several performances outside of the city too. I hope to continue to expand with 2008.

CM - Ajaxxx, it's been a pleasure spending time with you and seeing how involved you are in the community! It's always great to see talented people from our community making moves and spreading a message at the same time. Any final words for the readers of City Masala magazine and your fans?

Ajaxxx - Yes! Thanks to CityMasala for allowing me this opportunity, and to all the readers and to all my fans for their constant support. If you're interested in learning more about me or hearing some of the music I talked about, please log onto www.ajaxxx.com or www.myspace.com/ajaxxx.

