

Dave East

Necessity is the father of invention. Dave East grew up with hoop dreams but life lead him from the hard top to hip-hop. “I definitely thought I was gonna go to the NBA. I could play ball so in my mind, that was my ticket out of the bullshit that I had been through,” the rapper says. “It didn’t work out.”

Born David Brewster, Jr. in East Harlem, New York City, the 29-year-old excelled at basketball. He played in the Amateur Athletic Union with future stars Ty Lawson, Greivis Vasquez and Kevin Durant and attended the University of Richmond with ambitions of going pro. He majored in Communications Studies but his temperament proved problematic. He was kicked out of the college after a year. “I had a hot temper. I had a bad attitude,” East admits. He transferred to Towson University for a year-and-a-half but plans got derailed after he was incarcerated on a gun charge. “After I got locked up, basketball was over with.”

Six months behind bars in Baltimore was a turning point; East vowed then and there to change the trajectory of his life. “I was like, ‘Once I get up out of here, I never want to be here again.’ That was my whole motivation when I came home—to never go back.” He became introspective and realized that music could fill the void that basketball had left. “I had to figure out what my next move was gonna be. That’s when I really put my mind on what I was gonna do with the music.” Prior to that, rap had been a hobby; something he did with his basketball teammates in the locker room or at the back of the team bus. “I was always rapping. I’ve been writing raps since I was 12. All my homies knew. All my teammates were like, ‘You’re real nice with that.’”

East returned home after his bid, laser focused. He found solace in Islam and converted. He had a story to tell---a story of big dreams, trials and adversity—that he felt would resonate universally. “I knew I had a real story. I knew I would have substance in my music.” Inspired by artists like Notorious B.I.G., Cam’ron, Styles P, Fabolous and Jadakiss as well as Nipsey Huddle, Gucci Mane, Lil Wayne and T.I, he decided upon the stage moniker “Dave East” and released his debut mixtape, *Change of Plans*, in 2010. “It was my first time really, really recording.” It was a grassroots effort on all fronts. He remembers borrowing his friend’s Hermes scarf for the artwork and hosting the mixtape on the burgeoning website Hot New Hip Hop.

The rapper went into grind mode and released a slew of consecutive mixtapes: *Insomnia* (2011), *American Greed* (2011), *Don’t Sleep* (2011), *No Regrets* (2012), *Gemini* (2013) and *Black Rose* (2014). Buzz built with each subsequent release. In 2014, he received the coveted cosign of Nas. East and Nas’ younger brother, Jungle, were friends so the relationship grew organically. That year, East signed to Nas’ Mass Appeal Records. “It’s surreal,” he muses about finding a mentor in the legendary rapper. As to the best advice Nas has imparted on his protégé? “Don’t spread myself too thin and keep family first,” East shares. “Stay grounded and remember where you came from.”

In 2015, East released his mixtape, *Hate Me Now*, and the larger music industry began to take notice. The project was received well by fans and critics alike and featured established names including Pusha T, Nas, Jadakiss and Styles P and production by Don Cannon, Jahlil Beats and Deric “D-Dot” Angelettie. 2016 was a breakout year: East made *XXL*’s annual Freshmen Class in February and he was featured on a BET Hip Hop Awards cypher that summer. By fall, he inked a major label deal with Def Jam Records. He released his mixtape *Kairi Chanel*, named after his then-newborn daughter, which peaked at number 38 on the Billboard 200 chart. It was a full-circle moment. “I literally knew not one person in the industry [when I started]. I didn’t have no ‘in’ to get into rap, to get shows, to get features. I was just hoping to get a deal by the time I turned 30.” By 26, he had accomplished that dream and more.

With a prolific mixtape career and several professional notches to boast, Dave East is looking forward to a big 2017. His major label debut EP, *Paranoia: A True Story*, is slated to be released on August 18, 2017. “I’ve got my music to a point where the world ‘bout to hear it now. I wanted to put out the best project I can put out.” East enlists a slew of high-profile collaborators for *Paranoia* including Chris Brown on the lead single “Perfect” as well as Nas (“The Hated”), French Montana (“Maneuver”), Wiz Khalifa (“Phone Jumpin”) and Jeezy (“Paranoia”). Production credits include Harry Fraud, 808 Mafia, Reazy Renegade, Amadeus and JoJo Beats. Nas helped East shape and finalize the entire project. “He had a lot to do with it. He heard it. As I was recording it, I was sending him records. He was giving me feedback and his input throughout the entire thing.”

East aims to create a cinematic testimony of his real life on *Paranoia*. He hopes the vivid lyrical pictures give fans—both old and new—a glimpse into his truth. “I basically wanted to put a documentary, lyrically. I wanted to bring you up to speed with my life and where it’s at now. I want to make records where you can see what’s happening. I want to make it as vivid as possible.” He promises, “It’s real-life rap.”