

Like all the most exciting new talents, 21-year-old Toronto-born JAHKOY seemed to appear from nowhere. Shared speculatively on his Soundcloud last June, the shimmering funk of debut single *Still In Love* – the first song he recorded after he moved to LA alone aged 20 – now sits at over one million plays on all platforms. Same with the skipping electro-throb of follow-up *Hold Your Hand*, the string of those songs presenting a new artist in absolute control of his craft while already looking to manipulate it into new and exciting shapes. Both songs have received plays and shout outs on *Beats 1*, most notably from Zane Lowe, Drake and JAHKOY's childhood hero, Pharrell. In fact, it's telling that from a young age JAHKOY was drawn to a constant shape-shifter and experimentalist like Pharrell. "I loved the fact he was in his own lane," he explains. "There was stuff that was going on but he was creating new stuff. He didn't fit in and he stepped over the boundaries of music and made what he has today." A brief pause. "It's something I want to do with my music."

Before he could pinpoint his own musical inspirations, there was a childhood household bustling with early influences, mainly covering 90s R&B and hip-hop. "A lot of New Edition, Total, Notorious BIG, Lil Kim," he says with a smile. While school didn't offer him a musical education as such, there were mandatory violin lessons to train his ear. "Because it's the only instrument I know how to play I feel like it's pretty easy," he shrugs. By the age of 11 music had started to go from something he listened to to something he created, and buoyed by the expanding Toronto music scene he started (secretly) writing early lyrics in the form of poetry. Steadily these turned into raps, which in turn became his debut releases under the name Raheem. "At the time I was doing music everyone was rapping," he says. "It started becoming more of a common thing and then it was too common. I put out three projects before changing my name." While proud of the critically acclaimed mix-tapes, he's also aware that they were a stepping stone: "That was more my learning process to get to where I am now."

JAHKOY, the artist, was inspired by a perfect storm of circumstances, mainly built around UK dance duo Disclosure and, well, good old-fashioned love. "Disclosure came to Toronto in 2014 and I had just dropped a project as Raheem that same day," he explains. "I went to the Disclosure show, but I was going to see Vic Mensa, who opened for them. So he killed it and then the headliners came on and they completely ripped it. I had no idea what kind of music they made or anything but their name. I was blown away by it. More because it was instrumental so I figured it would be dope if somebody sang or rapped over those kind of beats. So I started doing just that and then it turned into singing." His passion for singing was also bolstered by falling in love, the title of his forthcoming debut album, *Temptations*, inspired by his first date.

In amongst the musical re-awakenings and the young love, JAHKOY also knew he needed to leave Canada to make his dreams a reality. "I left Toronto for Atlanta," he says. "I just needed to get out of Canada. So I spent some time there, but eventually felt like there wasn't what I needed in Atlanta. I needed to explore what was out there and so I went to LA and I grinded it out." In fact, he didn't tell anyone he was going to LA, just packed up his stuff and left.. While a move to LA sounds glitzy on paper, in reality it was a leap into the unknown. "When I got to LA there was just one person I knew. I'd met him online. He was actually a fan of my early music, so I knew he was really down to support the movement," he explains. "So I was staying on his couch for a while and getting a chance to meet people. The internet is a big world and there were some people who I knew were in LA that I hadn't met before, but I was willing to because I was there."

So I linked up with a few people and I worked in a few studios and it went from there.” It was during those early sessions that he created Still In Love, a song that re-shaped his journey. Steadily his name started to reach other producers, most notably the likes of No ID, Pop & Oak, James Fauntleroy and DJ Dahi, with a deal eventually signed with Def Jam.

Often the inspirations behind JAHKOY's songs are used purely as the foundation to careen off into glorious new areas. So Hold Your Hand was inspired by The Beatles' I Want To Hold Your Hand, this sense of carefree early love morphing into a day-glow mix of filtered guitars, shuffling beats and JAHKOY's airy delivery.

Asked where he'd like to be in five years' time, JAHKOY says it's something he's been thinking about a lot recently. Rather than emulate a specific career, he's focused on making his music meaningful to as many people as possible. Once again, there's this sense of following your own path and doing what you need to do in the best way you can, regardless of what else is happening around you. “I want to be influential to the music world,” he states, and you believe him. “That's really it. I want to be able to bring that light to music.