

Subway

With Rhymes and Reasons

By David Morrison

It's hard to believe, but hip-hop—or rap music—has been part of the cultural landscape for thirty years now. When the fledgling scene exploded from The Bronx in the late '70s, many critics viewed it as a novelty fad. Few gave it a chance for longevity. But despite a bumpy ride—often of its own making—hip-hop has left those doubters gurgling and become the most globally popular, influential musical genre of them all. Rap and its attendant culture now thrives in every country on this planet that's ever been exposed to it and has, make no bones about it, become a lifestyle choice for millions. Not bad for a passing trend, eh?

Hip-hop is massive. It's everywhere, including right here. With such excellent artists as Toneofvoyce, Fatty Down, Wheat Stalk, Character Traits, Suga-D and more producing top notch “beats and rhymes” in this city, it appears that Nanaimo's own hip-hop community is in rude health. In truth, any one of those I've heard seriously possesses talent enough to break out nationally and beyond, but I'm putting a few bucks on twenty-one year-old Steve McGruther, a.k.a. Subway, to make a considerable impact in the next couple of years.

Before meeting with Subway and his manager/breakdancer B-Boy JuneBug (born John Hubbard), I'd heard just one cut from his forthcoming debut solo album, *Keep On The Right Track*. A head-nodding anthem brimming with positivity, *Things Happen* is truly

Steve McGruther, aka Subway, goes “crate digging” for vinyl in Fascinating Rhythm



Photo: David Morrison



Photo: David Morrison

Subway and B-Boy JuneBug

a killer song. Undeniably commercial with crisp production and brilliant rapping, it deserves to boom from club PA's and radios the world over. Like much of the album, the lyrical content deals with, as Subway puts it, "past struggles with drugs, getting clean and getting on the right track."

Born and raised in Brooks, Alberta, Subway moved to Nanaimo just last July, following time standing up to his addiction in a White Rock recovery house.

It's all started happening for him

since he arrived here. Supported, guided and encouraged by his close friend JuneBug, Subway's life is now certainly moving in the right direction with hip-hop as his inspiration.

"I've listened to hip-hop for thirteen years, but he's got a really captivating voice," says JuneBug of Subway, convinced like many that he'll go far. "I've played him to all my friends who love hip-hop and they agree he's got a fantastic rapper's voice." I also happen to agree. An intense delivery and the timbre of an MC's voice are what have

always attracted me to the hip-hop I appreciate; Subway is right up my alley in both respects.

"I met Steve in Brooks when I was out there working the oilrigs," JuneBug continued. "We met randomly when I was breakdancing in a bar; he came up and talked to me and ever since that day we've been best friends. I got him into all the hip-hop that I listened to."

Subway confirms this. "He's been the biggest influence on me, because I didn't even like hip-hop! I wasn't even listening to it six years ago, but when I saw John

Classic Rock
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Wake Up with Dave & Kim

breakdancing I was so amazed that I had to be part of it, y'know?"

"My dad grew me up on Led Zeppelin and Eric Clapton, and The Grateful Dead is my favourite band. I love them, man! They've got the coolest songs," Subway told me in recollection of his earliest musical influences. "I listened to a lot of rock, but these days I listen to a lot of soul and jazz. I even listen to classical music on the radio, but I came to the conclusion I want to love every kind of music that's being produced!"

I like this kid's sponge-like musical receptiveness a lot.

He's refreshingly wide open in respect of the range of sounds that could

colour his art, so where he goes with it could, it seems, be anywhere. This is one aspect of Subway that makes him such an interesting prospect. Another is that he has every intention of avoiding categorization as exclusively a hip-hop artist, simply by indulging other passions. "I'd like to get a guitar and play jazz or blues and sing, and play once a week at somewhere like Tania's, y'know? I'm not stuck in a box and don't call myself a hip-hop artist. I'm a musician; that's what I do," he told me with genuine conviction.

Subway is certainly set on this, amplifying his intentions by proclaiming: "I'm able to bring something more to the table than being just another dime-a-dozen rapper.

A lot of kids can rap, but they don't construct songs from beginning to end."

The next step in the evolution of this young man's music career will come with the release of *On The Right Track*, provisionally due in late May. While he may be the star of the show, Subway is keen to point out the (typically hip-hop) collaborative nature of the project and credit certain figures involved in its creation. Particular props, he says, must go to MC Cody the Catch and Victoria producer Guy Woods, a pivotal character Subway states has "basically made this album happen."

A couple of Vancouver hip-hop heavyweights have also pitched in, which will do *On The Right Track's* profile no harm at all. "I have two instrumentals produced by Rob the Viking from Swollen Members—he's got Juno's under his belt—and one of those beats features Metty from Sweatshop Union," says Subway with obvious delight at their contributions.

Steve McGruther is intelligent, focused, articulate and warm, but fired by fierce ambition and a steely determination to make a mark, to have a positive impact. He has his sights set on numerous

John Hubbard, aka B-Boy JuneBug, with his protégé Subway.

Photo: David Morrison





Photo: David Morrison

Subway gives it a bit of attitude!



projects, including a record label, and there's a mixtape in the pipeline, recorded in cahoots with female Vancouver Island MC Skulastic.

Beyond his obvious talent and ambition, Subway's strong work ethic and the fact he will not tolerate slackers holding him back will also surely serve him well. "I'm making my own path," he states. "I'm not going to wait for people. I'm not going to carry dead weight with me. If somebody doesn't want to work, I'm not going to be into it, because I wake up every morning and this is what I do, right?"

Incredibly, it has taken thirty years for a hip-hop artist to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, when early pioneer Grandmaster Flash became the first in 2007. I for

one hope many more will follow, as there are plenty deserving of such recognition: Public Enemy, Afrika Bambaataa, The Last Poets and hip-hop's "inventor" DJ Kool Herc, to name but four.

And who knows, one day in the future the name Subway may be spoken of as another worthy candidate. Why not? If he keeps on the right track, anything is possible. ■

On the Internet:
www.myspace.com/subwayscf

Hip hop is supposed to uplift and create to educate people on a larger level and to make a change.

—Doug E. Fresh

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