

EDDIE KAINE'S ROOTS RUN DEEP WITHIN BROOKLYN'S CONCRETE

by Jesse Berendsen, 25 October 2021

Eddie Kaine has worked day and night to leave his mark on the underground hip hop scene of New York for the past years. He managed to do exactly so with a handful of albums, the mastering of multiple flows and styles and even physical releases through the Dutch labels ashame Records and De Rap Winkel Records. His latest masterpiece 'A Tree Grows In Brooklyn' just came out in collaboration with the mysterious producer Big Ghost LTD and within 35 minutes the physical copies of the album sold out worldwide. Time for a heart to heart with the rapper who's known for his signature: "It's Kaine!".

Eddie Kaine was born and raised in the concrete jungle of Brooklyn. To be more specific: in the rural suburbs of Bed-Stuy. "I look back at growing up in Brooklyn as bittersweet. I've had good times, but also times that were just extremely crazy and dangerous. Brooklyn babies need to grow up fast. I was in the public school system in a rural and crowded area. So as a kid I got in touch with people that were further in life, causing me to see and experience things from a young age that have gotten me into some shit. Later, when I met people from outside of Brooklyn, I found out that I was already doing things that I wasn't supposed to be doing at that age. But don't get me wrong, I don't want people to think that New York is a terrible place. It's actually an amazing and beautiful city, with a lot of love to give and that truly never sleeps. It's just certain areas that are extremely gritty and gutter."

"It's not the right time yet for me to leave New York. My roots still run deep through the concrete here."

Even though Kaine also knows what it's like to experience the bad side of Brooklyn, he never left. "I've planted a lot of seeds in Brooklyn that I can't just leave, you know? My family is still here and I have a lot of friends that rely on me. I've done a lot in this city and I'm still tied up in a lot of situations that I can't just leave behind." However, the rapper does dream about leaving his roots from time to time. "When I'm ready, I would love to do so. I've been thinking about leaving for a couple of years now, because there's so much more I still need to see. I was born and raised here and I don't leave the city that often. It's just not the right time yet for me to leave New York. My roots still run deep through the concrete here."

A big part of the roots that keep Kaine tied down in Brooklyn clearly lie with his friends and family, who have been highly influential in his choice to pursue hip hop. “In a certain way I think hip hop might have chosen me. I grew up in a household where my mother would play a lot of blues, jazz and gospel records. She even sang in a gospel choir. On the other hand my older brother used to play a lot of hip hop and my sister mostly listened to R&B. You can hear those influences in my music, since I often harmonize on my tracks. As a kid I started out singing and I wanted to pursue a career as a singer. All the people I hung out with were already rapping at that time. So by constantly hanging around a bunch of rappers, rap also naturally spilled on me. I’ve been writing rhymes my entire life. I mean, I still sing at home at times, but hip hop became my calling. I’ve tried so many things in life, from skateboarding to basketball and singing to drawing, but hip hop just kept coming back. I couldn’t shake it.”

“I was always a little jealous of Bow Wow and Lil Romeo, who’ve been putting out music from a young age. I wanted to be the 13-year-old who also made it with rap.”

The first time Kaine laid down a verse for somebody other than his friends or family was at nine years old. “My older brother used to play basketball and I went with him to one of his games. Funny enough producer Deric D-Dot Angelettie, who was connected to Bad Boy Records and Diddy’s crew, was also at the game. My brother did revise my rhymes, but I spit that verse for D-Dot. From that moment on this shit became more serious. I was always a little jealous of people like Bow Wow and Lil Romeo, who’ve been making music from a young age. I wanted to be the 13-year-old who also made it with rap.”

From hood dream to harsh reality

However, Kaine’s encounter with D-Dot was not what really kept him in hip hop. He tried a bunch of things in life and making it with basketball was one of his hood dreams. The tragic passing of his high school basketball coach became the deciding factor for Kaine to translate the things he experienced to music. “It were the failed basketball dreams that made me realize that I had nothing else to fall back on. I was doing fucking terrible in school. I didn’t even show up for my entire junior year. So when I went back to school around my senior year, I was talking to my coach. He was going to get me a safety transfer to play ball at a better school. My coach unfortunately had his own legal issues that became too much for him to handle. While I was in the middle of the process of my transfer, he took his own life. After that I was fed up with basketball. I never quit making music, but I wanted to have a safety net in other trades. I could have gone back to school or picked up something else, but I’ve always had a talent for writing and rapping. What happened to my coach turned out to be the deciding moment for me to go for it. I just thought: ‘Fuck it, you have a talent. Let’s see where this will take me.’”

“When I call my mother she picks up with 'Wassup Kaine?’”

Eddie Kaine inherited his stage name from the hood. Both his father and older brothers had already built up respect and a name in the streets. So as a kid, Kaine also got respect from the guys hanging in the streets. “My real name is Eddie. Older guys on the block always used to shout “Ayo Eddie Kaine!” when they saw me passing by. It was a few years later when I found out they actually meant ‘Eddie King Jr.’ from that movie ‘The 5 Heartbeats’, but many people mistook King for Kaine. Eventually the name stuck, even with my mother. When I call her she picks up with ‘Wassup Kaine?’”.

“I went to the most dangerous spots with the flyest shit. Mainly so people knew I wasn’t afraid to take certain risks.”

The respect that he got from his hood also gave him a certain sense of confidence. “If you want to make it in a city where everybody is a rapper, you need to take certain risks. In Brooklyn you have these open-mic showcases in all these different locations. Some of those were just really fucking dangerous to go to, but I couldn’t care less. I’ve always been a flashy dude and I went to the most dangerous spots with the flyest shit and jewelry on. Mainly so I could make a name for myself in a scene where the most important thing was that people knew I wasn’t afraid to take certain risks.”

Eddie Kaine, student of the game

Meanwhile, in the span of two years, he released no less than five albums. In the period before that he released at least eight different mixtapes. Eddie Kaine worked hard on making a name for himself and is known for his razor-sharp flow on boombap beats. But Kaine is also home in trap and other branches of rap. “I’m a student of the game. So even if not everybody heard it, I’ve mastered every possible flow. The funny thing is that if you go back to my first tapes on DatPiff.com, you’ll notice that I’ve always been making boombap. I was making trap in a certain period of time because I felt like that fit with New York. I see it as a good test to show my versatility. Besides that, I want to try to bridge the gap in hip hop. I still harmonize on certain tracks and people often say I’m playing with fire, since the underground boombap-crowd just doesn’t do that shit. But I think it’s important to show that hip hop is universal. I’m not saying you should bring out Young Dolph at boombap shows, but hip hop is a culture and a form of art. It’s important that we learn to accept each other’s art.”

“Working with Big Ghost LTD is like being a kid and going to an amusement park.”

A Tree Grows In Brooklyn

It was his versatility and insane work ethic that put Kaine on Big Ghost LTD’s radar. On a daily basis the mysterious producer is being stalked by various rappers who want to work with him, but that’s not how he works. Big Ghost LTD chooses you, not the other way around. And that is exactly how Eddie Kaine’s latest album ‘A Tree Grows In Brooklyn’ was born. “Big Ghost knows what he does and above anything else, he knows

what he wants. It wasn't the first time we worked together, because our collaboration started with the possecut 'Demigods' on UFO Fev's album 'The Ghost Of Albizu'. Fev and I are homies and Ghost hit me up for a verse on the project. What a lot of people don't know, or maybe that's something special between me and Ghost, is that on my album I was able to handpick who I wanted on my tracks. So when it was time for my possecut, Fev was the first person I reached out to. Shout out to him, because without my contribution on his tape I never would've had my own album with Ghost."

"I need to live and experience first before I can create something."

And so a sapling sprouted in Brooklyn. "The entire process of making this tape took a year. I'm somebody who needs to live and experience first before I can create something. Besides that, it also takes about a year before a tree properly shoots down it's roots. So, I lived for an entire year and that's what I wrote about. I don't care what other rappers do, but everything that I cover in my music is real and is something I actually lived through. The reality is that we recorded the entire album in only one studiosession. Of course I wrote everything down beforehand, recited my bars and checked the beats. But we taped everything in one go. Working with Big Ghost LTD is like going to an amusement park as a kid. The process was just that much fucking fun and I'm gonna miss having contact on a daily basis. He didn't know how hands-on I am with my material, so we spoke every day during this project to the point where we also became tight on a personal level. I won't think twice about taking on another project with Ghost. If he ever needs me for anything, I got him."

In the eyes of your scribe, 'A Tree Grows In Brooklyn' is a serious album of the year contender. The tape is raw, full of soulful and classic hip hop samples and is an exact mirror of the harsh reality Kaine lived through for a year. The collaboration with Big Ghost LTD paves the way for the next big steps in Eddie Kaine's career, but his previous projects have also borne their fruit. Kaine revealed in our interview that there's a big chance he might release another project before the end of the year and he recently featured on a new Wavy Da Gawd single with Rome Streetz and Spoda. Despite a whole bunch of upcoming projects, for now you should check out his latest and all-round solid project with which he planted his roots deep within the harsh, concrete underground of New York.

(Spotify link to album)