



Introducing FNX: New Artist Honors Hip-Hop Culture While Breaking Down Stereotypes

FNX is a rapper and hip hop artist of unique style and origin. At the core of his music is a story of perseverance and positivity; overcoming life obstacles amidst a journey of self-discovery. He was born Kenneth Shuler of Norwalk, Ct--long before would he would turn to music as an outlet for his teen anger and depression. Faced with childhood homelessness, surviving abusive experiences in a shelter with his young mother, the young teen found solace and self-awareness in rhyme. Yet with so much of rap culture based on boasting and bravado, there aren't many other rappers of such humble beginnings that could boast of a Bachelor Business Degree from the Southern Connecticut State University and a Master's Degree of Science in Organizational Leadership from Southern New Hampshire University. FNX is an artist unlike many of his peers.

Distinguishing himself early as a rapper of technical skill and lyrical intelligence under the adopted stage name Symon Feenixx, his early work "Young Black Males" garnered the attention of industry veterans. That early persona, adopted from the 1993 film Demolition Man, was reminiscent of rappers Ghostface Killah and Method Man, whose own names were inspired by comic book and movie characters. "I took on the name [alias Simon Phoenix from the movie Demolition Man] because Phoenix was a villain who was ruthless and vulgar – which was my approach when I first got heavily into writing my own music," said Shuler. Finding the persona limiting however, the maturing artist thus found the need for a new name to define his growing artistry. With this came "FNX," pronounced "Phoenix," which he identifies as a sharp turning point in his life and career.

Yet even with a more focused handle on his music, the artist found himself facing unexpected challenges. When asked to write a song to promote a friend's health club, which he happily agreed to do, he became very aware of how reliant he was on using curse words in his rhymes, including the obvious use of the "N Word" so often used in hip hop culture. Rising to this challenge, however, he completed the song "Pushing Heavyweight," which FNX fans can expect to hear on his first full album in Fall 2016.

Now embracing his ability to rap authentically in a style free of profanity, shedding another stereotype of hip hop culture in the process, FNX hope this will allow his music to positively impact on listeners of all ages. This change in style will heard in his new song "Rubber Bands," that will be the first single released worldwide by FNX on May 30, 2016, in association with Factory Underground Records.

Yet even as his own personal phoenix rises from the ashes of his poverty stricken beginnings, FNX has his eyes set firmly on goals that go far beyond hip hop music. An advocate for the George Washington Carver Foundation of Norwalk, which he credits with keeping him off the streets and pushing him to graduate from high school with honors, FNX isn't waiting for musical success to give back to the community. "For me the music is a vehicle-- it's the message that is important to get out there," he says. That message, one hip hop fans may also find surprising, as yet another stereotype of the culture is discarded, is financial literacy.

"There is so much flaunting of money in hip hop imagery," he say. "Making paper, acquiring wealth and showing it off. This what we are teaching our kids in the so-called underserved, inner city communities. Who is teaching them how to take care of their money, how to stay out of debt, how to stay clear of crime, and not go to jail? Questions like these have helped fuel an educational course in financial literacy FNX started teaching in 2015, which he hopes to expand at the Carver Center to include working with children and families in the community.

In many ways, working with the Carver Center, one of the largest providers of after school programs in Norwalk--serving up to one thousand children daily--is FNX coming full circle in his life. "Working with these kids is important for me because I am one of them. It's a chance for me to show them what music and education can do. I want them to say, "If FNX did it, I can do it too."

