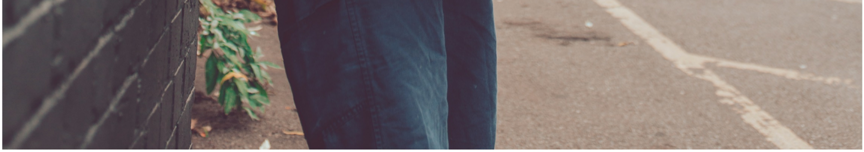
December 10, 2018

IN CONVERSATION WITH: LEYMA



It’s a grey but unseasonably warm day in London when I meet 18 year old Leyma in Hackney. He’s dressed in baggy jeans and an oversized Adidas fleece, yet he somehow looks cooler than anybody I have ever met. He greets me with a nervous smile and a handshake, we take our seats at the cafe and he pushes his 90s style fringe out of his eyes as best he can, a constant movement he makes throughout our hour together. I can tell he’s nervous to do an interview, he later divulged that this was in fact his first in person interview, so I’m shocked he wasn’t more nervous.

For those who don’t know who Leyma is, Leyma is the stage name of Max Hanley, a teen who produces his own music, a mixture of indie and hip hop, in his East London bedroom. He taught himself production for a year before he started studying it at college to really perfect his knowledge of the skill. Hanley never really knew what a producer was, but he always was musically inclined, it wasn’t until he found out that Tame Impala’s Kevin Parker was a producer that he fully understood what it meant to be one. His first instinct was to go the pure indie music route, but an actual drum set was too loud to play in his house, so he bought an electronic drum pad and hans’t looked back since. He briefly speaks about his musical growth, mentioning that when he first started his tunes were very synth heavy and electronic, but now he’s writing so that he can eventually preform his tracks with a live band, rather than just himself being alone on stage.

“I’m inspired by what I see, like what’s around me. When I’m older, I’d like to get into the political side of things, but at the moment I just take inspiration from everyday things that happen” Hanley explains. When an artist is as young as he is, and his core audience are his friends and other people in his age bracket, writing music about day to day life can be really helpful. I try to explain to him that writing about politics now, at this stage of his life could be really beneficial to his peers, but he laughs nervously at this, shaking his head, explaining he doesn’t know enough yet to go that route. Right now his music, such as his most recent single, bumpintheroad, is about the emotions of being a teen. Having feelings that are foreign to him and going through new milestones in life.

When I first heard Max’s music and then saw his Instagram presence, I assumed he would have fans constantly DMing him or tweeting him about his lyrics, or at least about his fashion sense. But he tells me that the only people he ever hears from about his work is his immediate friendship group. “People don’t really reach out,” he explains, “nobody ever comments or tweets me saying ‘ah man I just listened to your song, great stuff.” While he may not hear from his fans much, he does know they’re there, “it’s a bit surreal that I see all these listeners on Spotify, from all over. To me they’re just numbers, and I can’t really get into my head how many people that actually is.” He does get occasional DMs of people saying they like his music, but it doesn’t happen very often. While on the topic of Spotify, we start discussing the fact that his music has been featured on Spotify playlists before. Hanley’s eyes get big and he starts to play with his coffee cup, it’s very easy to tell that he’s very humble about his small successes, and his music in general. “It was so weird,” he starts to explain about finding out he got featured on a huge Spotify playlist, “I woke up and, it was two weeks after I’d released youtreatme, and the song had like 25,000 plays overnight. And at the night, like my most played song had like 10,000 listens. I was just in shock. I went into college and people were like ‘I saw your song on Spotify!’ and I was like ‘I don’t know what’s going on!!’ but it was super cool, but also weird. It’s weird how much a Spotify playlist can give you a boost.”

When this all was happening, he had no management, no PR, it was just him alone in his room, producing and writing his own music. Based on the direction Hanley is going currently, this East London teen is going to be making waves well outside of his college in due time. His plan for the new year is to get a live act sorted, so that he has people to preform with on stage. Most of what he likes about gigs is when the artist interacts with his fellow musicians, so he feels this will suit him, and his music style best. If you haven’t heard of Leyma yet, go check out some of his music videos, which he’s had a hand in coming up with the treatment for. His music is something completely different, but in the best way possible, he is definitely one to watch for 2019 and beyond.

Feature and Photography by Sara Feigin

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