

“I got a question/What’s a rapper look like?/Is he tan? Is he black, white?/Is he blacked out, high on the crack pipe?/Or more the cats that’ll ride on the half pipe?/Don’t wanna act like I know about the rap type/’Cause matter of fact, I can’t grasp who rap likes.”

Putting aside the intricate cadence for a moment, 22-year old emcee Asher Roth succinctly sums up his *raison d’être* with the above lines. While so many rappers are delivering tired rhymes to back up their fake back stories, Asher Roth has quickly emerged as the future: a hip-hop anomaly grounded enough to take pride in his suburban roots but confident and talented enough to have already earned the respect of rap royalty such as 50 Cent, Ludacris, Akon, and Andre 3000.

There will be those who will see the gifted emcee and immediately think, “Great. Another industry gimmick.” These are people that have obviously never heard the kid spit. Roth won’t tell you about life on the streets (you’ve heard that a million times anyway), but he will give astute and singular observations on everything from politics to partying to his unique position in the game. With Roth, one hears a genuine student of hip-hop; an artist deftly able to weave complex rhymes and patterns that urge repeated listens.

We know your first question: how exactly does a college Elementary Education major at West Chester University become a future hip-hop heavyweight? Growing up in Morrisville, PA, Roth’s family was more likely to bump classic rock, 70s soul and 80s pop over rap. “When it came to hip-hop, I was always on the outside looking in,” says Roth. “I remember hearing Jay-Z’s “Hard Knock Life” on my friend’s radio and the way they flipped an Annie sample into a hip-hop anthem. I was like, ‘This is for everybody.’ I couldn’t rap about the drugs that I had or the guns that I sold, but I *could* rap about how much fun I was having hanging out with my friends. That’s the stuff that felt right to me.”

As a teenager, the budding emcee would make tapes in his friend’s basement (“On a \$10 mic,” he says, laughing), eventually selling an album to hundreds of students in his tiny high school in a few days. As high school turned into college, Roth’s love of the genre only increased. When the rapper posted a few freestyle tracks on Myspace, it was admittedly just for fun. But on a whim, Roth’s friend sent a Friend Request to former So So Def marketing director Scooter Braun, who was so impressed by the young emcee that he flew him down to his Atlanta residence and quickly signed him as the first artist on Braun’s new record label. Fast forward a few and Roth and Braun, after an intense label bidding war, signed to a joint venture with Steve Rifkind’s SRC label in late 2007. “I started that Myspace page just for the f**k of it,” Roth recently told one magazine. “I never intended to get a deal. It was just for fun.”

Since then, 2008 has proven to be a watershed year for Asher Roth, who released his first mixtape, the DJ Drama and Don Cannon co-signed *The Greenhouse Effect* (the first Gangsta Grillz tape to feature a white emcee) and performed at a series of sold-out shows ranging from intimate sets to raucous, showstopping performances. Forget skin color.

Forget the suburbs. It's the quality of Roth's live shows that *really* separates him from his peers. Whether it's taking on and selling out a packed-to-the-gills SOB in New York or rhyming to 9,000 students at the University of Colorado and breaking a university attendance record, Roth is injecting what's been missing in hip-hop for a long time: fun. "My vision is to put on the dopest live show possible," says Roth. "Let's make it like Woodstock. Let's have people doing hard drugs rolling around in the mud." To this end, Roth employs a full band to accurately convey and expand on his ever-growing catalog. This combination of excitement, intensity and talent has already led the emcee to be featured in *Yellow Rat Bastard*, *URB*, *Vibe*, *The Source*, *Allhiphop.com* and numerous other outlets, including the cover of *XXL*'s 2008 December issue. (only other white MC to achieve this was Eminem)

With his debut album slated for release in the spring of 2009, Roth blows away any false cries of gimmickry or novelty. With Roth, hip-hop has an emcee that balances the fun and simple with the serious and complex. An emcee who freestyles better than most emcees' writtens. And most of all, an emcee with the knowledge and excitement to connect to *any* hip-hop lover. The "Roth Boys" in the building tonight.