

Michael Christmas

I Ain't No Joke

Words **Tara C. Mahadevan**
Photography **Soraya Zaman**



“I never wanna be the best rapper alive, I never wanna be the guy with the most bars. I wanna be the guy who everybody came out to see and had an unforgettably fun night” Michael Christmas tells me sat on a park bench in Cambridge, Massachusetts. An image of him perched on the bench with the sides of his afro sticking out from his cap pops into my head. His statement is surprising - doesn’t every rapper want to be the GOAT?

Born Michael Lindsey, he reincarnated as Michael Christmas about four years ago, when he was 16. At that point, he had been writing bars since seventh grade and decided to take rap seriously. But as he was creating Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook accounts, he realized he didn’t have a rap name. Indeed, there was a time he went by the name Young Dirty Bastard - an ode to his beloved ODB - until he found out a YDB already existed. He sat around for 10 minutes, trying to think of a name equal parts cool and funny, until Michael Christmas popped into his head, with Bob Hanukkah as a close second.

Though Christmas has wanted to be a rapper since seventh grade, he stumbled onto the idea through an afterschool program, which taught him how to make beats and how to rap. He didn’t even want to write raps in the first place, he just wanted to produce. One day, however, the program told him he would have to write a rap or he would get the boot. He made a basic Soulja Boy-esque beat and wrote a song to it. “It was basically me saying I’m flyer than the next nigga. Literally as soon as I recorded it, it was the most fun I’d ever had, like listening back to it and hearing my voice on the track was so fire and I just wanted to do that. So I stopped making beats that day and started writing raps every day. I became like the rapper in my school.” After that, all the moves Christmas made to become a rapper were purposeful. In seventh grade, he told himself that he was going to be a rapper for the rest of his life. He dropped out of school, began recording in basements and at his uncle’s house, and released music when he could. He just wanted to make music and to make people smile. He paved his own way to a rap career, even though no one knew he rapped for a few years.

“I look at it as a blessing because if I was really cool in Boston, like if everybody knew who I was, then all of my wack music would have been spread everywhere,” he considers. “I would have just accepted my wack music and kept making it.”

Christmas grew up in one of Boston’s rougher neighbourhoods, Roxbury, but says his parents were pretty protective of him when he was younger. “[My parents] love the shit out of me. That’s probably why I’m so sheltered and the reason I am the way I am. We just try to make fun of everything.” He started professionally rapping last year, when he wrote the standout track 'Daily,' which he wrote after he got out of a sad rut. “I started just rapping about really, really real life. Like 'Daily,' I still think it’s the greatest song of all time because I don’t think anybody’s ever kept it so real.” He can pinpoint when everything changed: when he premiered the video for 'Daily,' which was produced and shot by his friend Goodwin.

But to many, the realness that Christmas subscribes to has been taken as ‘regular guy rap,’ a branding that has often been attached to Christmas since he dropped his debut project *Is This Art?* in February 2014. While Christmas has no issue with being the regular guy rapper, he would never call himself that. “It’s kind of something that was just sprung on me. It was never my idea to be branded as the regular guy rapper. But then I like it in the sense that it makes me feel related to the regular guy. I don’t believe most rappers, I don’t believe in anything they’re saying. I believe in the things I’m saying because the people who are doing the same shit everyday relate to me, and they tell me they relate to me.

So as far as being the regular guy rapper, I’ll never call myself that but I respect people’s opinion to call me that - I see where it comes from and I enjoy it, I enjoy being the most relatable dude in the room.” Though his routine has changed a little bit now - he’s really concentrating on his career, cramming in more studio time, and has even moved to Los Angeles - 'Daily' was what he did everyday, a step-by-step instruction of how he lived his daily life. Christmas’ preference over being called the joke rapper, regular guy rapper, or relatable rapper, is to be the rapper



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who pushes younger kids to find their own viewpoint. “What I want in the end of everything is some kid in high school who’s going through all the same things I was going through in high school, to hear my music and start rapping and sound just like me. And then over time, stop sounding like me and start sounding like himself, and take all the same steps,” he explains. “I look at it like a circle of life. The same way a kid grows up to just be like his dad, rappers grow up to be just like their favorite rappers but in their own way.”

Right now, Christmas sees his career in a transitional period; he’s trying to gain more exposure and establish his character to a bigger crowd. And while his career goals are currently numerous, above all, he still strives to perfect his viewpoint and to hone in on his sound; and although he’s in-progress, he believes what he’s doing strays from the norm.

“I think what I’m doing is something new. At least what I’m trying to do. I was young and I started rapping, I wanted to be just like all of my favorite rappers. Like I did everything I could to sound like them. But what I realised is, you can’t have people try to be like you’re if you tryna be like someone else,” he says.

“So, I think where I fit in is doing my own thing, doing what I’m doing. Not being a joke rapper, but not being the hard street rapper that everybody expects either. I think I’m coming from a place that’s really different. You make your own positivity and you make your own life happen.” Something else that sets Christmas apart from the rest is that he doesn’t necessarily idolize other rappers. While he was heavily influenced by Redman and ODB as a kid, he’s now more inspired by his favorite people: Dave Chappelle, Louie CK, his dad and “Other members of my family who are really good at talking shit. A lot of my family used to rap,” Christmas says.

Though Christmas doesn’t like the label joke rapper, he walks a pretty thin line between stand-up comedy and hip-hop. During his shows,

he likes to crack jokes between songs to ensure that his audience has fun, borrowing his stage presence from some of his favorite comedians. It might not seem apparent at first, but Christmas’ humor is his art and part of the concept behind *Is This Art?* Even the story behind the name - as all of Christmas’ stories are - is quite amusing.

“I remember I was sitting in bed, watching MTV Jams and I don’t remember what video it was but it was really over the top. It was like overwhelmingly over the top, and it had a lot of weird messages and I didn’t get it. I really, truly didn’t get it. And I usually get shit like that. So I was like watching it, I said to myself, ‘Is this art?’ Like, is this art or is this a flashy-ass music video for no reason? Because at the time, early 2013, I thought that’s what hip-hop was: everybody just trying to do the utmost.

So I remember I said it to myself and I started calling my friends and I was like “Yo, I think I want to call the tape, *Is This Art?*” As I got deeper into it and started making more of the music, I started asking myself like, is this art? Is what I’m doing art? Or is this just bullshit? Am I just making music for everybody to enjoy? And at first it was, but then I started to think, this is art. Because now I’m starting to get deeper into the art form of making music. I’m starting to find a love for it and expressing myself through it.”

Part of finding and sharpening a sound is opening up artistically, which is what Christmas has realised. Since having found a venue to express himself, it seems like he views the world on new terms. He’s begun to see the art in everything, from movie dialogue to Allen Iverson crossovers. Although his aim is to make fun music that sells a tour, he doesn’t intend to lose the message behind his music; from the looks of it, it seems that his message is only getting stronger. At the end of the song ‘Michael Cera,’ off *Is This Art?*, appears the audio of his dad asking, “So why do you wanna rap?” At first, Christmas admitted that he didn’t know the answer to that question. Sounds like he does now.