

On turning your everyday life into art



Rapper and comedian YOUNGMAN discusses composing a good line, the value of collaboration, and what is truly means to be successful.

October 21, 2022 -

As told to Paul Barman, 1753 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Comedy](#), [Process](#), [Collaboration](#), [Inspiration](#), [Money](#).

You're known as a busy family man. Does being an active uncle make comedy easier or does comedy make being an active uncle easier?

I have to say responsibility cuts two ways. The added experience gives depth to your material but the time-suck can make for a lot of frustration. I noticed a lot of my friends say, "I could never be a parent, but I'd be the best uncle." Mothertrucker, if you don't have parent-level commitment, you're a wack uncle!

Are the audience norms for stand-up and hip-hop cross-pollinating? Do you still expect laughs during album rhymes? If the crowd is familiar with a record I suspect the payoffs become quite different.

I think of that in terms of tempo. How closely do I really expect the contemporary ear to listen to fast rap in today's context of supercharged distractions? Do I expect more from another person's ear than I expect from my own? The answer is yes!

There should be a study of people who stuck with underground hiphop and its correlation with staving off Alzheimers and dementia. Books are written like, "You need to read, do a puzzle." If you put iodine in a rhyme and traced its path around the brain, you would display a pretty gorgeous maze.

Sometimes the feeling just bursts out and I can improve on it by fiddling with it by saying it slower somewhere else. And sometimes the beat demands what the beat demands.

As for jokes, things have changed a lot both for me and for the world. For me, jokes are second nature. But rhymes are first nature. The intrinsic humor of wordplay in a rhyme seems to glaze an OK joke with a gleam of betterment and I have to go backwards to make it a joke in the style of my standup heroes.

You have a knack for mining humor from some solemn regions. How calculated are you to continue your thread of funny on all topics? When the pandemic took over did this tendency become more challenging?

It's funny, you remind me of what Steve Martin once said. He said, if you want to be known for eloquent dialogue, that doesn't mean the whole play has to be erudite beyond belief. A few turns of phrase here and there will have that impact and the audience will leave saying, "Such dialogue! This playwright has a special way with words."

To me it's not accomplishing funny until you're busting a gut and you really are gasping for air. [Earthquake](#) is like that, his jokes don't just have tags, he keeps hitting you with punchlines. To me that's the goal so I

really appreciate you saying *A Year Of Octobers* is funny. It was as funny as I could be based on those times but really my spirit took control and everything burst forth.

What is your writing process?

Well Mike Eagle once said, "First the beat has to get me pregnant." That's an ideal beginning. Rakim and Busta don't write rhymes until they have the music, that's how their lyrics are so married to the music. Myself, I'm sometimes not so patient. If I got a concept, I gotta run with it, and I may be doing things totally impertinent to music in the interim. So as thoughts and scraps of paper coalesce, lyrics weave round each other like double helixes.

Let me put it like this: The song concept gets me pregnant. A clever rhyme here and there is cute, but when I see a void in hip-hop and it marries an un-restrainable feeling, there's nothing like it.

Your debut LP is a group effort. What do you look for in collaborators?

I'm looking for talent! That ineffable quality that Little Richard called "Your toe going up in your boot."

Just like Celestaphone. His sound is undeniable. You hear the first one, you go, "Wait this is good." You hear the second one, you go, "Something's going on here." You hear the third one, you're like, "This dude got it!" You hear the fourth one, you're like, "For crying out loud, he's got the sonics, the variety, the knock-knock who's there? Knocked so hard, my head fell off my neck--"

What do you mean by variety?

Well, it's like there's a super melodic one but then there's a rhythm you never heard before. And then there's one with a built-in chorus, and then there's one with a hypnotic loop that you could zone out to for hours on the highway, but then the next one has unexpected changes. The thing that is consistent about them is their level of inspiration and quality, not a single formal characteristic to stamp with a branding iron.

The legendary Keo a/k/a Scotch 79 contributes to A Year Of Octobers. Could you explain how that came to be?

I was in quite the bad mood and texting back and forth with my man Keo since way back. It ended up being a thrilling back and forth rhyme exchange written very very fast. There's no audience like someone you respect so much and plus it appears we kinda view rhymes the same way. I've never put another person's words to wax before but that's what he preferred and I thought, "Hey, why not try something new?" I always wanted to write for others just to see how it would go. Masta Ace once told me not to buy too much into the mythos that the I-stand-alone MC isn't the product of a crew effort. I consider myself old school but I guess I'm naive in that regard.



A Year Of Octobers cover art

In songs you've referenced your dog, Stinko Salami. How did your journey with Stinko begin?

He's just like me, people gravitate towards him like a straight shot from a compound bow. He shows me you can be loving and tough at the same time. That's how a young hound go. Oops, I'm writing a song now though.

People take Stinko as a joke just because his legs are as tall as his ears. Keep in mind his kind was bred to yank spinning badger claws out of little old holes. I'd like to see a person do that! Even with gloves.

His gang is bigger than mine, sometimes I'm jealous! Does that make me part of *his* gang?

On "13th Month" you say you're from "Booklyn." What and where is "Booklyn"?

I'm so glad you asked me that
You can't get there by taxicab

I bought up a whole town that'd been abandoned
I got all the buildings in addition to land then

I converted each building to its library analogue
And we spent the whole pandemic there, me and the dog

So for example Town Hall holds all poli/sci
Sweet Golly pie, it's nice to get smaht while we die

We live in the school. It gets the best light
Putting words to ideas is like a test flight
Then I revise till it's jest right
Of course Stinko Salami by my bedside

We first filled the church with religious texts
But theater troop loved the atmosphere
So we switched the sets
What was never taxed owes biggest debts

Comic strippers fill frames
Before guests, strip the beds

Art and culture deserves a windfall
What's happened to this country makes my skin crawl
Thin walls divide the Kindle and Ken doll

Observatory holds Scifi
Which holds the Wi-Fi
Which we keep off- nice try

Film books fill cinema
You get the gist
It also houses all the books I've yet to write that I wish would exist

Like what?

A collection of four-panel comic strips based on yours truly.
"In My Arrogant Opinion," short prose pieces drop more jewelry.

You mentioned in your bio that landlording is more lucrative than rapping. If not for the money, why do you do this?

I have this rhyme, "Table in the back. I own my own restaurant / You used to think I'm wack. Now I'm the best ya got!" That's an exaggeration, I was never wack, but in the era I'm from being merely excellent didn't make you stand out. No disrespect to the new generation or the one before it or the one before that, but I'm cut from a different cloth like quilting. It just tickles me to be the best. I couldn't have done that before now!

But more on the serious tip, we are all creative beings and it is essential to steal or earn time away from capitalism. You have to have that joy. People live for the two minute lift of a novel experience. I have received it many times from my art heroes and it's only natural to play it forward. No matter how many people hear you, no matter how many times they return to it or you. And let's say that number even touches zero. Guess what, you owe

it to your muse to share what you make. Just like you owe it to yourself to take the time to make it.

And for what I consider an artist, there's no choice anyhow. It must be done, it must come out. We are like silkworms, digesting, synthesizing, then outputting. If all one does is consume passively, you're either constipated, hypnotized, or both.

How do you define success?

I find most artists are lonely and are searching for the people they don't know but should. The work is a message in a bottle, so if you are calling kindred spirits into your zone, you know you are on to something, especially if it results in true collaborations. Beyond that, the undying respect of your peers and leaving a stamp in your genre is nothing to sneeze at. Sergio Aroganes is going strong at 85. He says the work and the world's respect keep him alive. Let's call that success!



Stinko the dog, by Josh Grotto

YOUNGMAN's 5 Favorite People:

CATHERINE O'HARA

JOAN BAEZ

CHANDRA

YOVIRA THE HIPHOP ELVIRA (ON THE COVA)

GAL COSTA

Name

YOUNGMAN

Vocation

MC, comedian

□

Zohar Lazar