

Crazy James

by Mike Barnard July 2, 2021

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Crazy James is a rapper and singer-songwriter from Luton in the UK. He writes music that is a mix of political rap with hints of grime and trap on which he speaks openly about his mental health, dealing with racism, his past struggles, and day-to-day life. We caught up with him to learn more about what drive him to write music, and his album *Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol 1*.



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First up, tell us about yourself - what got you into music?

My name is Crazy James and I am a rapper, writer, and poet from Luton UK, I have been creating music for close to 20 years and I have experienced highs and lows throughout my career.

As for what got me into music, I was born into a home that always played music, regardless of the testing upbringing and witnessing consent domestic abuse, music was my escape from reality. It goes without saying that Michael Jackson is probably the reason why I got into music, I found a passion for dancing in that solitude and became an incredible dancer because of it.

Were there any particular bands or artists you took inspiration from?

I get asked this question a lot and I don't think my answer changes much each time, I normally feel guilty because sometimes you leave a band or artist out who inspired you through a specific moment in time. As I am a true music lover the following list might surprise a few but here goes: MJ, Eminem, Queen, Papa Roach, Nirvana, Hans Zimmer, Wu-Tang Clan, Big L, Bob Marley, Protoje, Tina Turner, Jimmi Hendrix, GIMS, Chronixx, Marilyn Manson, The Prodigy, Wizkid, Naughty By Nature, Bone Thugs n Harmony, Ice Cube, Method Man, SchoolBoy Q, Redman, Kendrick Lamar, the list honestly goes on as so many have inspired me in different ways.

I mean 2pac *All Eyes On Me* and Biggie's *Life & Death* albums I studied so hard in my younger years, even the early 50 Cent stuff was incredible because you could hear his hunger. I will probably stop there for now as I might get carried away.

How would you describe your musical style?

I like to think I have a diverse style and signature sound which makes it difficult to place me in a specific genre. I guess my sound is a mixture of political rap with hints of grime and a touch of trap, but I also create hipcoustic tracks that resonate with a totally different audience.

All my songs have hidden meanings, metaphors, and twisted wordplay, but I never shy away from speaking openly about mental health, dealing with racism, drug abuse, and family trauma either. As one promoter told me after my last gig: "I can't put you in a music genre because you are you have your own genre, your genre is Crazy James." For me that was an incredible compliment and one that kind of answers the question.

Why 'Crazy James'?

The name stems from my adolescence. When we first moved to the UK (age 10), I was faced with none stop racism, bullying, and both physical and verbal abuse. I learned from a young age that in this world you must fight to be respected otherwise you will always be trampled on. It was either fight back or get bullied basically, and I fought my brown arse out of it by doing things I am not proud of.

Like anything at school, names start to fly around and so does your reputation, and the next thing you know you are labelled as "Crazy James", that crazy kid that's fearless and does stupid shit. The name stuck with me and it still represents me in some ways, but in a positive sense as my personality is crazy, fun, cheeky, or whatever you want to call it.

If you could collaborate with any living artist, who would it be?

That's a tough one because it depends on the time, but let's say I am picking a UK music artist from the last two years, then I will probably go for a thought-provoking lyricist. The first one that comes to mind is Dave, I think we would test ourselves and bounce off each other in a special way, so Dave, if you ever stumble across this article make sure you shout for man's.



Tell us about your album *Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol 1*. What's it all about?

Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol 1 has been 20 years in the making, and although that seems like an incredibly long time, it's the experiences and failures that have led to this project. This is 20 years of pain, love, tears, fear, successes, setbacks, and accomplishments all racked up in one.

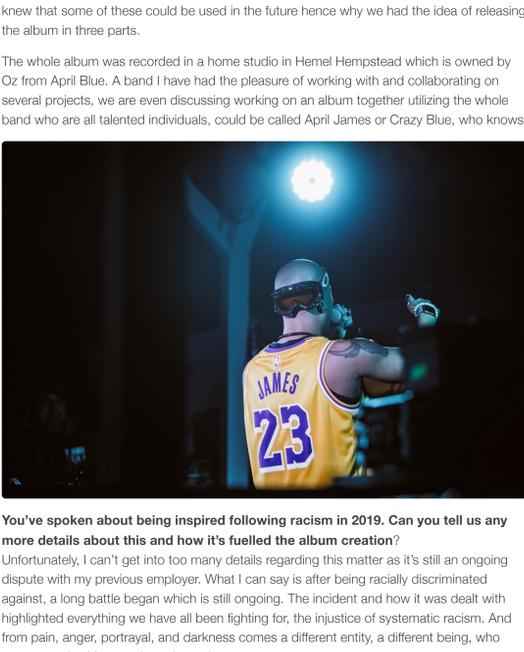
The album is produced by rising grime producer Trooh Hippo who has worked with the likes of Skepta, JME, Giggs, Frisco, and many more UK artists. As for the mixing and mastering that was completed by the phenomenal Adam Lewis from Adam Lewis Mixing and not forgetting TR3DDZ who arranged the whole album and who's been by my side from day one.

When did you write it and where did you record it?

I started writing the album in 2019, but by 2020 I was going in a different direction musically. I kept dropping weekly #OneTakeTuesday videos with ideas of songs performed all in one take, whichever ones got the most views, reactions, or comments I would make a note off and then continue the process.

I eventually started recording the album in late 2020 and completed it a week before starting my new job. Even though I was recovering from spinal surgery that same year (2020) I thought, I have to make the most of this time off and finally record the album. The hardest part was picking which songs to record as I had written over 30 tracks in a year, but I also knew that some of these could be used in the future hence why we had the idea of releasing the album in three parts.

The whole album was recorded in a home studio in Hemel Hempstead which is owned by Oz from April Blue. A band I have had the pleasure of working with and collaborating on several projects, we are even discussing working on an album together utilizing the whole band who are all talented individuals, could be called April James or Crazy Blue, who knows.



You've spoken about being inspired following racism in 2019. Can you tell us any more details about this and how it's fuelled the album creation?

Unfortunately, I can't get into too many details regarding this matter as it's still an ongoing dispute with my previous employer. What I can say is after being racially discriminated against, a long battle began which is still ongoing. The incident and how it was dealt with highlighted everything we have all been fighting for, the injustice of systematic racism. And from pain, anger, portrayal, and darkness comes a different entity, a different being, who wants to voice his rage through music.

A lot of inspiration also stems from me discovering my muse, because love is such a powerful energy it can produce creativity beyond our understanding, that combined with suffering created this album.

Can you talk us through each track?

'Finest Export': This is the intro that sets up the whole album. I believe in this project so much I know that lyrically, and musically, there is no one out there that has my aesthetics and style. I aim to take my music globally hence why I state "I'll be your Finest Export". I truly believe I'll be the finest export coming out of the UK.

'Cilla Black': This song was written for anyone who suffers from mental health, be it anxiety or depression. I have battled with anxiety on and for years now and felt it was only right to express the symptoms I felt as I know so many people will be able to relate to it. The idea of the song all started with an acronym he created called 'Cilla Black', which stands for 'Challenges In Life Like Anxiety Bring Love Acceptance Chaos & Knowledge'. For me, that sums up exactly what we all have to go through.

'That's My Life Cuz': This track is a mixture of fact and manifesting the life you desire, I was fortunate enough to have travelled around Europe performing in different countries before the pandemic. "We are traveling the world that's a nice buzz, been working on my streams like some mad floods". The power of thought is important to me, and I want to share my knowledge and make others realise that they can achieve anything they put their mind to.

'Hitting Spots': A song inspired by the lady in my life, who has become my muse in a lot of ways, and funny enough we met each other after a gig in Rome in 2019. Our connection has undoubtedly exploded my creativity to new heights which can be heard in my music with many references to the love of my life.

'Helicopter': A song about racism in disguise and how we are perceived by other people's eyes. With a direct attack at Robertson's jam that depicted black people in a stereotypical manner, I tackle this by saying "They built a palace on the stuff that you evade, gollywogs on marmalade was something they would parade there". Never one to shy away from the truth and having dealt with racism my whole life, I can finally speak openly about it and is proud to do so.

'Murmurs': This track is a reflection of the town I was raised in, with the crime-rate being high, gang-related deaths, homeless filled streets, a drug pandemic - it's easy to see where I got in my inspiration from: "I come from the town of murders, and I'm living in back street circus". As they say we all have a past, and I doesn't shy away from talking about my past experiences whether good or bad.



'One King': This song has many hidden meanings, not only do I talk about my friends that have been jailed, but I also talk about how the drug game works.

I am the voice of a living. This track also touches on the stereotypes we are faced within society, but most importantly I'm letting the world know that there is a new 'King of Hip Hop' in town.

'Sicka Sicko': "What do they advocate, Kill kids and celebrate, The news they fabricate, Talk loud they terminate. Sometimes we look like pagans, Chat breeze like Ronald Reagan, This is hard like pavement, Music corporation". A controversial song that openly talks about child trafficking and the people in power who orchestrate it all. People need to wake up to the truth and maybe this song will get the masses researching and exposing the poison that fills our media.

'Reconsider': I wrote this song imagining a break-up, but also incorporating past splits to make this classic break-up song. It's got intelligent metaphors encompassing androids from *Star Wars* and a catchy hook that pays homage to Project Pat and Three 6 Mafia.

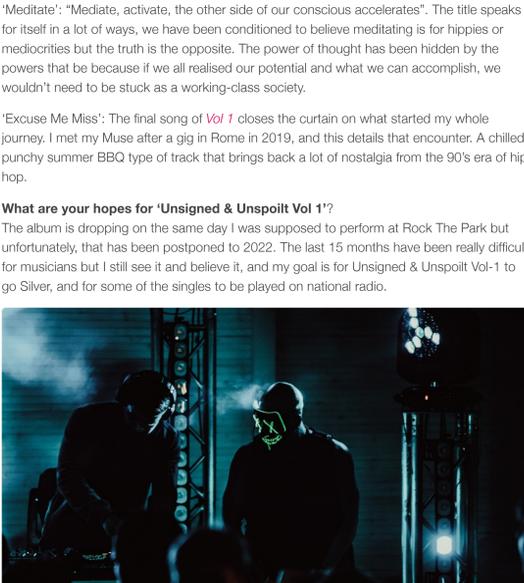
'Busting Busting': This was one of the first songs I wrote for *Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol 1*, and the track really sets up the mood for the rest of the album. It's another example of Angry James, you can hear the ferocity, hunger, and drive that I have at the moment. Again with many metaphors incorporated, 'Busting Busting' can be interpreted in different ways. Whether that is busting onto the scene, busting through your speakers, or the feeling of urgency when you're busting to take a leak. This is the kind of track that gets you pumped before a meeting, interview or to help you finish the last rep at the gym, whatever it may be unleash your inner beast by busting busting.

'Meditate': "Mediate, activate, the other side of our conscious accelerates". The title speaks for itself in a lot of ways, we have been conditioned to believe meditating is for hippies and mediocrities but the truth is the opposite. The power of thought has been hidden by the powers that be because if we all realised our potential and what we can accomplish, we wouldn't need to be stuck as a working-class society.

'Excuse Me Miss': The final song of *Vol 1* closes the curtain on what started my whole journey. I met my Muse after a gig in Rome in 2019, and this details that encounter. A chilled, punchy summer BBQ type of track that brings back a lot of nostalgia from the 90's era of hip hop.

What are your hopes for 'Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol 1'?

The album is dropping on the same day I was supposed to perform at Rock The Park but unfortunately, that has been postponed to 2022. The last 15 months have been really difficult for musicians but I still see it and believe it, and my goal is for *Unsigned & Unspoilt Vol-1* to go Silver, and for some of the singles to be played on national radio.



What else is coming up for you in 2021?

We will be marketing the album as much as we can, and even release a couple of music videos throughout the year. I want people to love it, share it, and spread the word and by 2022 I will be able to perform wherever the album takes me.

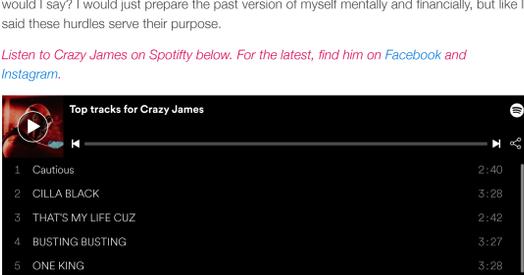
If this pandemic settles by the end of the year then there's no doubt that 2022 will be a big year for Crazy James & DJ Prophecy. From August onwards you can find us on the last Friday of every month at The Crooked Crow Bar in Leighton Buzzard for 'The Hip Hop Lounge'. It's an event I host with April Blue with performances from the best upcoming artist around the area, plus performances from myself and the band respectively.

We are also hoping to host another event called 'The Brunch With No Lunch' which will be taking place at The Hat Factory on the last Saturday of August or September, depending on government guidelines.

Finally, if you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of advice, when would it be and what would you say?

That's a tough one because I believe that every challenge and hurdle we face is part of our journey, and how we overcome those experiences defines our future. I guess I would go back to 2019 to warn myself about the past battle I will be facing over the next two years. What would I say? I would just prepare the past version of myself mentally and financially, but like I said these hurdles serve their purpose.

Listen to Crazy James on Spotify below. For the latest, find him on Facebook and Instagram.



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