

WIZ KID

WizKid, the Nigerian born, globally adored music superstar, moves easily throughout Africa and the world, between his native Afro-Beat and hip hop, Fela and Drake. His musical range speaks to WizKid's vision of 21st century youth culture where "all the music of the world is coming together."

WizKid's sensitivity to diverse traditions began with his upbringing in Lagos, where he was raised by a Pentecostal mother while his father practiced Islam. "Love is the thing that kept them together," he recalls with a smile, a powerful example of the deep emotion that flows through WizKid's music.

But his parents aren't the only family members who influence his music. WizKid grew up with twelve female siblings. From them, WizKid "learned to listen to what women go through," he says. "I also have a lot of female friends and pay attention to their stories. So a lot of my songs are inspired by the thoughts and feelings of women."

As a child, WizKid (his given name is Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun) listened to the music of Nigerian Afro-Beat masters King Sunny Ade and Fela, the latter remaining a key musical influence on him. Bob Marley had a regular place on the family turntable and remains an artist WizKid turns to for relaxation. Through friends, he got introduced to American MCs who were making an impact in Nigeria such as Bow Wow, Master P and Snoop Dogg.

His career in music began at his mother's Pentecostal church where as a child WizKid discovered, not only could he sing, but had a natural facility for writing songs. At age 11, he made his first album with a group called the Glorious Five. A few years later, WizKid signed with Banky W's Empire Mates Entertainment and began his rise to superstardom with the massive hit "Holla At Your Boy" in 2010. His two solo albums - *Superstar* (2011) and *Ayo* (2014), established him as both one of the most beloved artists in Africa and a performer with global appeal. The love his appearance with Drake on the track "One Dance" received domestically (it reached number one in the United States and in nine other countries) is a harbinger of things to come.

WizKid's full-on introduction to U.S. audiences couldn't come at a better time since 2016 truly established his prominence on the international scene. MTV EMA named him Best Worldwide Act. The British MOBO Awards recognized WizKid as Best African Act, while at the MTV MAMA Awards he won Best Collaboration, Best Male Artist and Artist of the Year. Another confirmation of WizKid's global popularity is that he is the first Nigerian musician to be featured on Billboard and the first musician to reach one million followers on Twitter.

Although Afro-Beat's undulating rhythms can be heard throughout his music, WizKid is reluctant to define his musical style. "It's hard for me to describe what I do," he says, "since I work with rhythms from Afro-Beat, reggae, hip-hop, dance hall and others. What's important to me is for music to be real, authentic, raw and timeless. I don't wanna be boxed in to any one genre."

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