

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> century youth culture where "all the music of the world is coming together." *Sounds from the Other Side*, his debut global mixtape, features collaborations with Drake, Ty Dolla \$ign, Trey Songz and Chris Brown to name a few. With tracks recorded around the world from Lagos/South Africa to Los Angeles.

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 on tracks like "Sweet Love," 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."

*Sounds from the Other Side* reflects WizKid's passion for mixing sounds from around the globe. Diplo, who made his international reputation as a DJ mining the Baile funk of Brazil, produced the track "Naughty Ride." Chris Brown, who WizKid has toured with around Europe, appears on the song "African Bad Gyal." Trey Songz was touring Nigeria when he joined WizKid in the studio to cut "Gbese." Los Angeles' multi-talented Ty Dolla \$ign joins WizKid on "Dirty Wine." South African songstress Bucie duets with WizKid on the love song "All That Love."

WizKid's latest collaboration with Drake, "Come Closer," was produced by Star Boy Ent producer Sarz, one of the many talented musicians who are part of WizKid's StarBoy entity. Sarz also produced the vibrant "Sweet Love" and "African Bad Gyal." In addition, StarBoy producer Del B was behind the board for the songs "Nobody" and "Gbese." A young African producer, Spellz ("Sexy") rounds out the album- with Brooklyn-based dancehall/soca producer – Dre Skull ("Daddy Yo").

*Sounds from the Other Side* truly captures the progressive nature of WizKid's musical taste and his peripatetic lifestyle. As the video for "Sweet Love" attests, he performs throughout Africa where he has a rabid fan base, while also making regular appearances around Europe. "There are Africans everywhere," he says proudly. A 2016 performance at Brooklyn's Barclays Center at a sold out arena show of African pop music let American audiences know WizKid was coming to take his place amongst this country's pop elite. After being introduced to many in North America by "One Dance," *Sounds from the Other Side* will broaden his fan base on a global.

Just because he'll be releasing music on a United States based label doesn't mean WizKid is changing his approach. "I'm not diluting things to satisfy an American audience," he says firmly. "Africa is my heart. I really want my Nigerian fans, my core fans, to get it."

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