

Ryan.

Ryan Witherspoon, better known as the mononym Ryan, has a strong pedigree in the music industry from the studio to the streets. As he readies his debut EP *Games We Play*, the Brooklyn wunderkind is geared to change the game, bringing real artistry back to music. Born in East New York, Ryan spent his childhood in Brooklyn's gritty Cypress Projects, dodging the streets as best as he could. "I say it was R&B," he explains, "rough and blessed." His mother was a singer, almost signed by Quincy Jones, but she opted to attend Brown University and study Medicine instead. She later became a teacher to have more time to focus on raising her son, but still kept the music alive within him. At six years old, his mom even took him to Usher's 8701 Evolution Tour. "It was the coolest experience ever," he recalls. "Ever since I was a kid, I would watch music videos in the house, trying to dance like Usher."

The streets called, but Ryan didn't answer. "My mom put me in sports to keep me off the streets," he remembers. "But most of my friends were in the streets, so it was hard seeing some of them die out there." All throughout school, Ryan was a triple threat in sports, playing basketball, baseball and football. ESPN even featured him as one of the top ten athletes in New York City. Music was still always present, as he would listen to his mom's favorites like Mary J. Blige, Michael Jackson, Jodeci, and Usher, while tempering them with New York City street rap. He studied battle rap, fascinated by its competitive nature and likened it to the sports he played in school. "I viewed the music industry like a football field," he explains, "and knew that I had to apply the same strategies from one game to the other." He casually dropped songs on Soundcloud, until one chance encounter changed his life.

"I remember I was delivering water to a recording studio," Ryan remembers, "and it ended up being to Diddy at Daddy's House." While there, Ryan met Diddy's son Christian (bka King Combs) and told him that he was a rapper. "[Christian] told to me hop in the booth," he adds, "and I spit the hottest sixteen of my life!" They became fast friends. Ryan ultimately started building his resume, networking with top R&B and Hip-Hop artists and executives. He was fortuitously introduced to industry titan Wayne Barrow. "I saw something special in him, he understands who he is as an artist and articulates and delivers his vision with confidence and foresight," Barrow says. "It's refreshing to teach and guide a young artist you also learn from and grow with." Barrow then introduced him to his business partner, who is fellow industry veteran Mark Pitts.

With his own music, Ryan's focus gradually shifted more from rapping to singing, no doubt influenced by his ability to write for other artists, while still maintaining the spirit of Hip-Hop. "At first, I wasn't confident in my voice until I got in the booth and sang," he says. "I remember I was in the studio once and played a track for Chris Brown and Jeremih and they were like, 'Bro, you've gotta release this.'" The song was called "Real One" and became the catalyst that sparked the next steps in his career. He's got inevitable soul, mixed with ambition and an edge that is a clear testament to his upbringing. "I realized that if I could make it out of Cypress Projects, I can make it anywhere," he says. "You can take the kid out of Brooklyn, but you can't take Brooklyn out of the kid." It's time now for Ryan to move from songwriter for others to crafting hits for himself.

Ryan's debut EP *Games We Play* is an amalgam of every element of R&B and Soul music from past to present. The meaning is represented by the title track, as the game of love comes with many pieces. His recently released "Back Up" has hints of Caribbean flavor, a nod to Ryan's Brooklyn upbringing, but also his cultural background (he's Jamaican, African American, and Puerto Rican). The video comes complete with coordinated dances, reflecting a true dancehall vibe. His next single "9-1-1 (Emergency)" is a smooth love song about being there for his girl. "It's basically me telling a girl that whenever she needs me, she can call me," he explains, "any time, any place and even in an emergency."

Other tracks like “What To Do” ooze confidence while in love, as Ryan’s swagger is evident, wooing a girl right away from her man. “Aye Mami” brings intoxicating guitar strings with a Latin flair, where Ryan’s ‘90s R&B influences come into full view as he melodically eyes the object of his affection.

The project is a tight work, where every song is designed to be a single, penned primarily by Ryan himself. “I didn’t want to make a project of fillers,” he adds. “I wanted to make five singles that could work in all different parts of the world.” He also plans to add a strong performance element wherever possible. “I feel like performing is a lost art,” he expresses. Above all, he defines it as *unapologetically R&B*. “Not alternative, not hipster,” he continues, “just straight to the point R&B, invoking emotions, because if I’m feeling it I know someone else out there is feeling it too.” As Ryan enters this next phase in his career his goal remains clear. “My mission in music is to get people to feel good,” he says. “I want to take my love of ‘90s R&B and infuse it into my music, so people can take what they want from it, and keep coming back for more.”