

J Hus, AKA The Ugliest, is the genre-defying Newham general blending trap, grime, reggaeton and afrobeat into an exciting, colourful, chart-stomping cocktail.

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I'm sitting in an icy studio in east London with MOBO-nominated MC J Hus, and the interview has just taken a very interesting turn. By that, I mean the two of us have started harmonising on our very own a capella version of Justin Bieber's "What Do You Mean?" – and it sounds pretty good. "I love that song, you know?!" Hus exclaims and we burst into fits of laughter, Hus' slightly more endearing and shyness-tinged than mine. "When I first heard it, I was like 'Wow'. I wish I wrote that!"

Hus has been making some serious sound-waves himself: I'd challenge Biebs to create the kind of club raucous Hus has started lately. His music is a very modern, colourful kind of melting pot: skipping from Krept and Konan-chart grime to Ashanti-esque R&B, afro-beat, dancehall, for music so popular and infectious, it's not easily categorised. There aren't any *Fader*-friendly tags to slap on this boy's sound - and there's a certain excitement in that.

You've definitely heard "Dem Boy Paigon", the lead track from his July-released debut mixtape *15th Day*. The song has become notorious after a viral Instagram video showed so-called "out of control" party-goers slamming to the reggaeton-trap tune, before being routinely shut down by the north London constabulary. "I never expected to achieve this," Hus beams of his newfound fame.

But despite blogging a picture of himself in a hospital bed having been stabbed back in September, his hands curled into a haunting gang sign construct, Police attention certainly isn't what he's about right now. No, Hus' music is about getting away from the trouble, not causing it. "Music was a way to get out of it. I was done with it all, I wanted to be someone... I had nothing to show for myself. That really pushed me."

20-year-old Newham, London native Hus - born Momodou Jallow - started making music only a year ago. You can tell. "I used to be so shy..." he says, through a whisper. "But then I thought, 'I don't care what other people think... I started putting tracks out on Soundcloud, then brought in the visuals to add some unique flavour..." It's safe to say he's much less coy in front of the camera. Hus' promo for skippy banger "No Lie" sees the rapper and his skull mask-wearing mates throwing gun fingers around like they're recreating the last five minutes of a Takashi Miike film.

In *15th Day*'s opener "I'm Coming", Hus spits about

the time he "*fell in love with a girl with a double barrel*", and in "Shawty Inda Bando", about how "*There's nothing I love more than a girl that's got her money*." Has he got a thing for rich girls, or is it just a bit of banter? Hus smiles sheepishly, "It's all life experiences, but sometimes exaggerated... Someone could say something, or maybe I'll say something on the spot and it's not really meant to mean anything, but my friends will say, 'Oh that's a good idea for a song, put it in a song!' So that's what we do, just banter around using our own lingo."

Hus's Newham crew are more like kins than music video hype-men. "They've supported me a lot. When I didn't have this, it was them who was there for me - like when I was homeless, I was sleeping at my friends' houses," he remembers. There's inertia to all this, though: Hus's mainstream popularity means he can start to pay them back. "I've got friends that are not employed and I'm helping them go to the gym, getting them to join my security. I've got drivers now that are my friends - I'm trying to get them into work. We're all doing something as a unit."

"Started from the bottom now we here" I joke, and Hus muses again on the music taking him and his crew away from trouble. "I always used to rap to my friends, and they used to say 'You're good, you're good.' I thought: this is a way for me to get away from all the bad things I've done. To get us out of it."

Following radio sessions with the likes of Tim Westwood and Charlie Sloth, a collaboration with Katy B, and the release of his chart-stomping single "Lean and Bop" via Black Butter records, Hus has a lot going for him right now. It owes a lot, he offers, to his positive attitude. "I read a book called *The 50th Law*, and it tells you about turning your thoughts into things. So I thought, 'You're J Hus, you're this star, you're gonna make it'. If I actually believe in it, I can make it a reality."

It's not only the music world the young MC is looking to conquer, he's got his sights set on the fashion industry, too. "I love street-wear, I'm so into it. Next year I want to start my own tracksuit line. I've called my line 'The Ugliest', because my friends used to call me 'ugly' innit!" he adds, taking off his cap with the lyric "bangers and mash" emblazoned on it. "I've got designs like this already, I really seriously want to get into fashion." The devious glint in his eye suggests he might not be messing around.



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