

# Twenty-two, and keeping it real

By Olamide

**S**AITSA's 'Gateway' pub recently hosted the CD release party for '22', the second album from Calgary's well respected hip hop entrepreneur 'Transit.'

Victoria, B.C.'s Daniel Bennett relocated to Calgary following his high school graduation with aspirations of a higher education and fulfilling his unrequited musical calling.

Though Bennett played several shows during his high school years, he recalls the lack of opportunity for emerging artists in an unbalanced scene.

"There was a lot of talent, and not a lot of venues. Victoria is a super relaxed city that emphasizes art over business," says Bennett.

When Bennett arrived in Calgary, he enrolled in Ambrose University College on the city's west side, where he would study behavioral science, psychology and sociology.

He also sampled Calgary's hip hop underground but found little of note.

"I remember going to one of the local hip hop shows in Calgary. I almost got stabbed and the rapper wasn't even that good," says Bennett. Something had to change, and that something would be Bennett's name, which became 'Transit'.

Instead of going against the grain of a broken scene tailored to his sound, he decided to break into the ones that were flourishing and full of fans hungry for what he had to offer.

"I had a hard time breaking into the hip hop community. The indie scene accepted me and that's where a lot of my friends are," says Transit. "I even do a lot of metal shows because they want energy, real passion and real lyrics."

Following his well received 'Insufficient Funds' debut, Transit released his second disc, '22' on Nov. 11. The events between his two albums would make a statement larger than any of his lyrical themes ever did, or could.

In the midst of a series of splits and EP's, Transit began working with personal friend and regular collaborator, Dave Wallace of 'Innovative Imageworks.'

The two would come up with a project was called 'The 8 hour Challenge.' Its objective was to mock the process of creating a top 40 'song' and that's when the Demon came knocking.

Previously known by his KISS moniker, 'Demon,' and born Tirat HaCarmel, Gene Simmons had special plans for young Transit. After

hearing 'Lights Camera Action,' the musical abomination that Bennett and Wallace doctored in the Frankenstein-esque farce, Simmons contacted Transit with a contract offer with 'Simmons Records' to record the sound they were satirizing.

"He's a businessman and doesn't care about art," says Transit. "But I respect him for doing what he does well."

The first track on 22, 'My Own Terms,' became a memoir song of the incident with the KISS bassist turned business maven.

Transit believes a musician's self respect means not selling out to labels and compromising artistic integrity for the quick buck and a short lifespan that mainstream praise offers.

"I'd like to be an artist that has a devoted following over time," says Transit. "Something that would last over 20 years."

Transit said thanks, but no thanks to Simmons via e-mail.

But the video of the satire would attract some 500,000 hits, including one from the 19-time Juno nominee Jann Arden of Calgary, who subsequently expressed an interest in collaborating with Transit.

When Transit went to work on a music video for his new song 'Calgary,' Arden would appear on the song's chorus.

As an Arden fan and a subject in the song, Calgary's new mayor Naheed Nenshi, would make a cameo in the video, along with several notable Calgary bands either as an on-camera cameo or as a subtle but clever lyrical reference, including 'Go For The Eyes,' 'Frankie McQueen' and 'The Nix Dixons.'

"Insufficient Funds focused more on problems with the hip hop scene," says Bennett.

"With 22, I challenged myself to speed up my flow, write conceptual songs and songs about

myself."

Through challenging the way music is geared towards a scene and testing the music industry's big wigs, Bennett is proud to have maintained his relationship and direction with real music and real fans. And they appreciate his stance.

"I'm glad he's doing it for the community, proving to kids there's more to rap," said ACAD student Karl Bareham. "It's not 'show-rap' and he stays true to what he's saying."

Bennett's accomplishments also recently earned him a speaking spot at the Chamber of Commerce at the University of Calgary and an audience with ex-governor-general Michaëlle Jean.

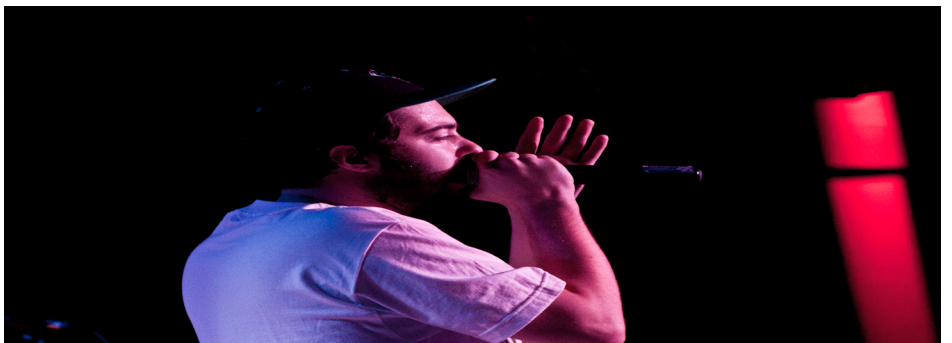
"The people on the Internet are the ones that helped enable me to do this," says Bennett.

"Without that community supporting me, it's difficult to know if I would have been as successful as I've become."

The new CD '22' is available at local record outlets and in the iTunes Store.



Transit connects with the audience at the Gateway during his performance



Transit, a.k.a Dan Bennett, performing at the Gateway on SAIT campus on Nov. 11, 2011.

Photo by Olamide