

Aziatic Los Angeles Interview Los Angeles, CA

Aziatic: Did you record all that, because this is what you call behind the scenes.

Aziatic: Is it on?

Ben: Alright. Alright Aziatic, we'll probably do a little bit of camera switching, making sure the shot's set up and that sort of thing. First of all, go ahead and say and spell you name.

Aziatic: Alright. Yeah, what's going on, it's Aziatic A-Z-I-A-T-I-C.

Ben: Tell me, who are you, what do you do?

Aziatic: Well, um. I'm a Garifuna musician, and um I been doing music pretty much since ninety-six, my first album dropped in ninety six. And it is called Jam ninety-six. That was the name of the project and um and that's pretty much what I do. I'm a...

Ben: Sweet, so give me a little bit of you history, where did you start out, where are you from?

Aziatic: I been doing this, again, since ninety six and I started here in California in Los Angeles. I used to play with a band called Ibiney and um I play with them for approximately about a year and once I left the band, I decided that I wanted to do my own project. I went into the studio, did my own project and here I am. Since then, I've dropped at least nine albums um I have another album coming out in about a week on the twenty-fifth and that's that's just what I do. I been promotin'. I do a lot... actually that's what I that's my fi..one of my first loves, I guess. I mean however you want to put it. Besides music, I love promoting, cuz when i was in school I did a lot of promotions. I used to bring bands into my school. There's a band, a Belizean band called um Boblin Warriors and while I was in high school for, I believe it was a culture day or something that I I had approached my school and I asked them if it was possible to bring a a Belizean band in so that the students could experience Belizean music. And they gave me the go-ahead and I end up putting together a whole production. I brought the band in and I mean it was it was wonderful and since then I was hit by the by the promotional bug, so um since I been doing the music I've, you know I've been doing the promoting thing just as, you know just as um pretty much the same, with the same intensity with the same level and I love i love doing it. this is that's just what I like to do.

Ben: You already told me the story off camera, but tell me the story about how you go into music.

Aziatic: Um, like I said, my cousin Cue. He's like the number one drummer out there. He um. They had a band he and my godbrother at the time Shawn. and they had a band called ibiney and this band played punta rock music so. I guess they wanted a reggae singer, so they approached me one time and pretty much talked me into singing songs in the the

band. So one day we were doing rehearsals um I was kind of messing around. They were playing this Garifuna track, you know music and I started singing this song called um Down the Lane by Alvin Payne. It's the artist from Dangriga and I start singing it. I was pretty much just kind of in a way making fun. Like just kinda clown around having fun in the studio session and stuff, um rehearsal sessions and when I was doing it, everybody looked at me and like and they were like, they were pretty lookin' at me. I don't know what they were why they were lookin' at me the way they were but once I stopped doing it, they were like do that again. And I was like, do what? They were like oh no do that again. And I was like no I'm man, I'm not doin' that anymore. So anyway, they talked me into doing it again and they were like, yo that's dope, you gotta do that, we gotta perform that this weekend. I'm like, I'm not doin' that. So anyway, they talked me into it we had this show or whatever, we started doing the songs they you know and the crowd went wild like I mean, it was crazy. So from then on, almost every show we did I had to do that song because everybody was waitin' for that song. People started coming to our shows just because they heard about that about the performance I was doing. And it kind of went off from there and finally when I left the band, I I had decided, I was staying at this um producer's house, Howie Rice, he's a produced like the Pointer Sisters and Patt Label and all those people. He, he had a full house studio in his house. Twenty four track, you know reel to reel, everything. So since I was pretty much his assistant, I was working at his, you know, pretty much helpin' him out with his studio, whenever we had little down time I started recording. So he didn't know I was doing it of course. You know, whenever he was gone I would look, I would just start um recording some Garifuna songs that I would hear, on the streets or whatever. So finally my mom heard it and she was like, whatchoo gonna do with these songs. I'm like, nothing really, I'm just messing around you know. So she kind of talked me into recording and to some projec... some songs to release so when she told me that I said ok, so I started recording some more songs that that I that I would eventually put out there and that's what, those songs are the songs that I put on the album, Jam ninety six. And that was my first album and it it went viral you know, I mean everybody was loving it. It was bigger than I expected.

Ben: That's way cool (mumblings). Ok. Sweet. Aziatic, let's talk Garifuna music. So you started singing that one song tell me more about it, what was that song, what did it mean to you, where did you go from there?

Aziatic: Well, again, it was a song called um Down de Lane by Alvine Payne and it was pretty much one of those songs that um that pretty much dealt with, I mean the guy wrote the song, I guess based on experience, I really don't know. You know I really don't know much about the song, I just did it just because it was a song that was catchy, but once I started getting into this music and going into the studio and recording songs, I felt that I had, I needed to do songs that were relevant and that would be more like um based on the culture, you know, songs that that I believed people could listen to and and and have some kind of connection um of course in addition to that, I did do songs that were more like to me disposable songs, songs that were just like one hit wonders... I did those too but, the songs that were more important to me and I felt that the people who really appreciate the music would would um would probably have a little more, like feel a little, feel something from, those are the songs that are more important to me and I felt like I needed to write,

you know. And those are the songs like I came up with songs like Waraza, play that music, uh I mean Salufori, things like I have songs like that that I I those are like favorite songs, figuiabu, that dealt with social issues as well you know. And I really believe a lot of the songs that most of the younger artists of the time were doing not just me, but I think a lot of people felt you know, a lot of young artists weren't really dealing with issues, that the that that the culture, or you know the public and the country was going through and I felt that if that void was there, then maybe at least I could try to fill that void. You know. Um. I mean I don't know.

Ben: What is your music doing for the Garifuna?

Aziatic: I mean, I would hope, I would hope that the music is is is is is telling a story, to to the people who you know who are not Garifuna or even people who are Garifuna who who are outside of where I where I come from. I'm hoping that it's telling a story and and that they can pretty much see the picture I'm trying to paint, you know. Um. It's it's, we go through a lot you know. We we we grow up. I never would complain about the way I grew up because it is, even though we grew up pretty poor, I had a lot of good times, it was fun. And we could, we could tell the stories all day about the things we went through. And those stories and those um and the moments that I that I still see in my head from those times are the stories that I want to tell to tell the world. And again, I could only tell you what I've lived and what I've gone through and it's really up to the people see their, you know, to see if they appreciate it. If they can if they can feel that cause I can only try to let you feel what I you know, what I what I see in my head. I got so many things in my head it's ridiculous. So all I can do is just put 'em to put 'em to music.

Ben: (mumblings)

Aziatic: You hurtin' bro?

Unknown: Don't stop now.

Ben: Um, so what. You kind of mentioned this while we were talking before tell me what's happening culturally around your music. You said you've got people out to causes, things like that. How is it helping preserve Garifuna culture?

Aziatic: Honestly, I really couldn't tell say exactly how it's helping because it's really hard to tell what impact certain things you do have on have on anything, but I can only try to do something and hope that it is it is causing or or it is helping. Um and far as the concerts and stuff like that here in LA in nineteen what year was that. I believe it was like two thousand nineteen ninety nine, maybe even two thousand. Uh um, my partner Stamina and myself we started doing concerts here in LA. And it was amazing how after like a about a ye... the first year actually after the first concert people from all over heard about this concert. New York, Chicago, you know Houston, Miami, wherever it may be, even Belize people started, started to wonder what's really going on in LA. And for at least eight years we did these concerts that people were like flocking to LA every year. It almost became I mean, these aren't my words but you hear people out there in in the streets saying that LA was bigger

than Dangriga for the nineteenth. And Dangriga was like the place to be for the nineteenth, I mean there's no other place where you want to be

Ben: will you say that one more time? There was a motorcycle going past.

Aziatic: I mean, again, you know the the concert was so huge that some people started saying that LA was so much more bigger than Dangriga when it came to the nineteenth celebration. Because the concert that that we put together was such a... was on such a level that most people hadn't seen before. We brought out big stages and the lights and the cameras and screens and we even had premiere lights that you would see in Hollywood you know you know in the sky and stuff like that and everybody knew there was a concert going on. We had the red carpets, we had you know photog (audio cuts).

Athena: It's nothing compared to Belize

Aziatic: yeah, it nothing compared to all those lights on stage. They would tear you up.

Ben: Alright. I want to know, because you're singing in Garifuna right?

Aziatic: Garifuna as well as in English or creole however you want to call it.

Ben: So tell me like because you said you just started singing it and then you were like then it became something that was like part of you. Because obviously you're Garifuna, but what what made that music come out? Because like I can't, I'm a little white boy, I can't go sing Garifuna, but for you, what does that music mean?

Aziatic: What makes it come out, honestly it is it's something, one thing people who do Garifuna music will tell you is that in order for you to have, in order for the music to have the the the true essence of the Garifuna, music, soul, however you want to describe it, you have to be Garifuna to really get that. You know, it's almost like, for instance, I've had people in the studio to play instruments and just a simple rhythm that we have in the music you know somebody who's not Garifuna, most people can't even get that. And it's not because they can't do a rhythm it's just it's just that, I don't know. You just gotta be Garifuna to have it man, you just have to be it just, it is what it is, I can't describe it.

Ben: There's a rhythm.

Aziatic: And I think that's what what I guess that's in my I guess you know. Um singin that.. singing in Garifuna lanuguage is is like an art in itself, you know umm. I don't know how it comes to me the way it does because most people, most people think I speak Garifuna as well as I sing Garifuna. And it's not because I can't speak it as well as I do sing it, but I don't practice it every day I don't speak Garifuna every day. Which, I 'm not proud to say it that way, but because I'm living here I don't speak it every day. If I lived in New York I probably would because I have family in New York and when I'm around them all they speak is Garifuna. When I say family, I'm talking about outside family, not in not in the house, because when I'm with my mom, she speaks Garifuna to me all day. But I, it's amazing like when I go New York and Chicago you find little kids, you know and they're like five year

olds, eight year olds, speaking Garifuna. You don't find that here in LA. Unfortunately. Um. So the way, so the fact that I'm able to sing it, the way I do is just comes from that fact that that's, my mom has spoken to me in Garifuna all my life and the fact that I came from Hopkins, I mean, if you're from Hopkins, man even now Hopkins is probably probably the only village in Belize, I mean I'm not saying that it is the only one, but it may it may be, it almost is, the only village in Belize that's that's we still find young people speaking Garifuna on a regular basis. Most villages now you know everybody's speaking you know Creole and it's almost like they something's got to happen you know, people aren't speaking it anymore like they used to.

Ben: Why do you think that is?

Aziatic: I don't know, I can't even pretend to know. I don't know.

Ben: Do you think that your music is helping people to reconnect with that Garifuna language at all?

Aziatic: I think, I think that what my music does is it gives the younger people, the youn, the younger generation almost like not a reason, but it almost makes it easier for them to like appreciate the music. You know, when you see somebody who somebody like you doing it. Cause when I came out again with Jam ninety six the, it it it it brought us like this bigger into the community. Not just in the Garifuna community, but in the Creole community in the in the Mayan comm... wherever it may be, all the communitis in Belize it's almost as if like everybody came together. I'm not, not talking about the older people, the younger group, the younger generation, everybody was like wow. Because the way I came out was almost like I was a hit artist, you know, I had on the you know the latest gear whatever from out here and everybody watching MTV and all that stuff it almost as if like it it validated something for them you know. Since then I mean, it's almost as if the music the whole culture of the music changed um in terms of the way artists representing the music. You know it's like they now, a lot time you see a lot of Garifuna artists, the younger guys, if you watch them now you may not even think they're Garifuna artists. You know before that, Garifuna artists had, were on the cover with the with the drum, with the guitar whatever. Now you see them with a Benz in the background you know or like a you know some fasatchi on and you know whatever. And so now it's almost hard to tell it's a Garifuna, a Garifuna artist, however when you listen to their music it is still that Garifuna music and the reason why people are doing that now is because is because of the because of the young, because of the way artists are representing it so young people are now gravitating toward it even more.

Ben: (mumbling)

Aziatic: (singing in Garifuna, bro.)

Ben: I want to know what it means to you to be Garifuna.

Aziatic: Garifuna to me means everything. I mean again you know who you are and your experiences define who you are I guess you know um. Growing up in Hopkins, as as as a young kid it's like I walk around here sometimes and I see the younger kids like and I think about the way I grew up in the experiences I went through like, going to the farm and waking up in the morning and just going to the beach you know to the sea and and just being able to just go in the sea and see tons of kids in the water you know and there was nothing to worry about you know. We didn't have any of those like issues that people have today you know in a major city. And growing up without lights, you know, I remember the first time, the first time I saw a light bulb. I mean, most people can't say that, oh you know, because they grew up into it. Like, it's normal to them. To me when I first saw a light, I didn't know what to think you know first time I saw a car I was scared to ride in the car, you know and just things like that. So it's like growing up a Garifuna person in in Hopkins, in in that kind of environment is just is just unique. You know and it it molds you. It it lets you see the world a whole lot different you know it lets you appreciate things that most people may not even appreciate. And and that's all I believe because of the fact that I grew up as a Garifuna person in in in Belize. Because I, here's the thing if I'm not, if I wasn't a Garifuna person growing up in the village of Hopkins, I'd be in the city maybe. If I grew up in the city, then I would have known about all those things. Because they had them in the city, they had lights and they had cars and stuff like that I'm sure. But I didn't know that stuff. So it is, it is what it is, and it helps you become who you are and it helps with the lyrics and it helps you reach down deep inside you to bring out those those words that certain, only certain some people, it only touches certain people. You know because it reminds you of of a day and a time when that that's gone you know. I know some people can tell that I tell a story in my songs and it I could just I could see some of the older people you know whether it's my mom or her friends or her whoever it may be. She grew up with like, I remember those days you know cause they lived in there way before I did you know and before we had all that stuff. So it's, I just like to bring back memories you know. It is, music is a universal language man and the way I try to put it together is the people who understand the music it touches them in a whole 'nother level. However the people who don't I create that emotion that even you listening to it will still feel that you know. You'll still be like wow like. I try to create something where you can feel, the music tell that story ok, even if you don't understand the words the music sets that, sets that tone. And that's what I try to do. Yeah.

Ben: Can I ask you a couple more questions. Um first of all tell me what types of media... as far as media goes, what types of media do you personally use?

Aziatic: Well, I use a lot of well obviously radio you know in the Belize music, but now of course, we're taking advantage of the internet, DVDs uh we do a lot of stuff on DVD's video, whatnot, but internet is definitely has taken over a lot of you know things in the past but, right now CD's and I got my, I got a new CD coming out like I said so we had the CD thing going on. Cassettes are out, VH is out the main thing I've been using right now are the CD's and the DVD's and in order for us to get it out there obviously like I said it's just the internet and television yeah.

Ben: How has that changed, I mean people like me would have never heard of you back in nineteen ninety eight.

Aziatic: Yeah

Ben: But perhaps on the internet I run into you.

Aziatic: Exactly

Ben: How does that change what you're doing?

Aziatic: Well, it's changed what we're doing because now it's allowing us to reach people, the world is smaller now. The internet has made, something this big come to this small. We could now reach people everywhere so by by by learning different to to use that that internet, that medium right there it's allowing us to now introduce the music to everybody as opposed to just the people who are in your neighborhood or just the people who know about it. You know it's like anything else you know, you search, you search the music now, you search punta rock music, you don't have to search my name, and I'm a pop up. You know, you search any other Garifuna artists, I'm going to pop up most likely. And by doing that again, like I said, it's allowing us to reach people we never would have reached before. I mean, you probably wouldn't have been here right now interviewing me if if we didn't have internet probably you know. who's to say.

Ben: Tell me about um. As far as like

Aziatic: LA is noisy, let's go to Hopkins.

Ben: I'm down. Um. What have you, have you noticed any sort of change in the people, those Garifuna who are using media a lot? Like Western media in particular. Have you noticed any like cultural changes or that sort of thing with them?

Aziatic: Um, again, I mean again, I have not, I can't really say I have I just, maybe I don't really notice. Or maybe I'm not really understanding the question but if I answered the way I'm understanding it, I've haven't really seen any change at all. Except for the fact that the way I'm using it or anybody else is using it. But a certain change in attitude is that what you're sayin?

Ben: Yeah

Athena: or like how has you listening to American music changed the way you make music?

Aziatic: That had a profound effect. Um. The influences that I've had growing up you can hear that in my music. Michael Jackson, obviously. A lot of people always say I sound like him and that that that played a big role. Jay-Z, I mean believe it or not, he's rap but even he you can hear the influence in my music you know. But it it does and of course the level that they do the music on you know whether it's pop music you know the bigger artists. that's a

you know, the fact that they're doing it the way they're doing it allows us to, at least me to strive for that. You know you know that this, that our music is still young so what we trying to do is get our music on that same level that everybody else's music is on. And that's the influence is there definitely.

Ben: I gotta ask this last question. You want to sing us a song?

Aziatic: I don't know. I didn't I didn't get my tuning fork or my tuning thingy.

Ben: I think it would be cool.

Aziatic: Let me take a break.

Ben: Ok, take a break.