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DX AWARD CATEGORIES

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R&B SONG OF THE YEAR
R&B SINGER OF THE YEAR
COLLAB OF THE YEAR
RAPPER OF THE YEAR
RAP VERSE OF THE YEAR
HIP HOP SONG OF THE YEAR
HIP HOP ALBUM OF THE YEAR

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MORRAY, BLEU, BLXST, 42 DUGG + MORE: THE 2021 DX RISING STARS WRAP-UP

Published on: Dec 31, 2021, 12:07 AM
by Amber Corrine

What a year! Back in November of 2020, *HipHopDX* took the liberty of pinpointing 10 emerging and talented rappers with the most potential to make a name for themselves in 2021, beyond a cypher or magazine cover.

Setting the bar for what a Rising Star's digital paper-trail should look like in their break-out year, *DX* has given readers weekly solid information to understand what a *DX* Rising Star is, what criteria is needed to be considered one and also what to expect in the 2022 Rising Star year.

RELATED EDITORIAL

BEST NEW RAPPERS OF 2021 - ROOKIES OF THE YEAR

DECEMBER 6, 2021

For those who are *extra late to the party*, a *DX* Rising Star is a burgeoning talent we pinpoint within the year before *or* after their initial introduction and rollout of new rap music. These are the artists *DX* feels have the ideal total package in terms of their musical sound, stage presence and genuine personalities.

For the entire year *DX* has documented and highlighted Rising Stars: 42 Dugg, BLEU (formerly Yung Bleu), Blxst, DDG, Flo Milli, Foogiano, Morray, Sheff G, Sleepy Hallow and Toosii – proving each week to have been spot-on about the potential star power of the talented bunch.

You can read earlier articles about the Rising Stars' milestone through our overview of why *DX* was right about this bunch before the *entire world* caught on to their waves here.

HIPHOPDX'S RISING STARS

BEST NEW RAPPERS 2021 (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

1. 42 Dugg
2. BLEU (formerly Yung Bleu)
3. Blxst
4. DDG
5. Flo Milli
6. Foogiano
7. Morray
8. Sheff G
9. Sleepy Hallow
10. Toosii

42 Dugg

Now, when you hear the notable whistle ad-lib in the beginning of a track, you immediately know its a 42 Dugg cut!

HipHopDX chose rapper 42 Dugg as a 2021 *DX* Rising Star ahead of what would be his break-out year for his 2020 smash-hit "We Paid," which was originally a freestyle. The Lil Baby-infused-track peaked at No. 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 – making it the highest-charting song and turning point of the Detroit-bred artist's career.

Since the success of "We Paid," 42 has gone on to do more than just put on for his city, he's put on for the world through for Lil Baby's music label 4PF & Yo Gotti's Collective Music Group imprint.

42 followed up to the two-time multi-platinum single, with his debut mixtape *Free Dem Boyz* which peaked at No. 4 on the Billboard Top Hip Hop/R&B Albums chart, along with popular singles "Maybach" and "4 Da Gang." 42 also scored another charting single when he featured on Tyler The Creator's "Lemonhead," which peaked at No. 19 on the Billboard Hot R&B/Hip Hop Songs chart, and ultimately landed Tyler Hip Hop Album of The Year at the BET Hip Hop Awards.

Towards the fourth quarter of the year. 42 hit the Hot 97 Summer Jam stage in New Jersey and performed at Rolling Loud Miami. He also embarked on his first-ever Young N Turnt headlining tour from September to November. Truly making a name for himself, 42 has become a rapper that is distinct from others through his sound and delivery on any beat.

Although 42 has had a few setbacks like having his Roddy Ricch-infused video shoot shot up, his ex-girlfriend making a diss song about him, the controversy behind showing his son some unusual love, or skipping out on Rolling Loud California – 42 has continued to weather the storm showing why he deserved to be a 2021 *DX* Rising Star!

Blxst

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Since announcing Blxst as a 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star, the West Coast multi-faceted rapper has pretty much *blasted* off in his career, creating a name for himself that goes beyond producer and rapper.

Ever since the onset of his Rising Star status and the joining forces of his Evgle imprint and Red Bull Records, Blxst has pivoted in his career by breaking the ceiling when it comes to streaming, touring and collecting nominations. Blxst's 2020 *No Love Lost* EP, peaked at No. 3 on the Billboard Top Heatseekers Albums chart, garnering over 200 Million streams in 2021 on multiple streaming platforms, collectively. Blxst's follow-up tour sold-out within its first week as he later released a deluxe edition of *No Love Lost,* featuring Ty Dolla $ign on "Chosen," a "Wrong Or Right" remix with Bino Rideaux and "Got It All" with Dom Kennedy.

Besides performing at one of the biggest music festivals in the world, Rolling Loud, Blxst was also recruited to feature on *your favorite rapper's favorite rapper* Nas' album for the *King's Disease II* track "Brunch On Sundays," and would later featured on Rick Ross' *Richer Than I Ever Been.*

Beyond touring and performing, the California-bred rapper has shared the stage with Rap royalty, Snoop Dogg while on tour in September and made his BET TV debut performing the "NLL Experience," to celebrate the one year anniversary of his album *No Love Lost*. Moving towards the end of the year, Blxst's hard work has ben recognized widespread as he was nominated for multiple awards like: Best New Hip Hop Artist at the BET Hip Hop Awards and Best R&B/Soul Male Artist, Album/Mixtape of the Year, Best Song of the Year and Best New Artist, at the 2021 Soul Train Awards.

Blxst's consistency has defiantly proven him to be a *DX* Rising Star!

DDG

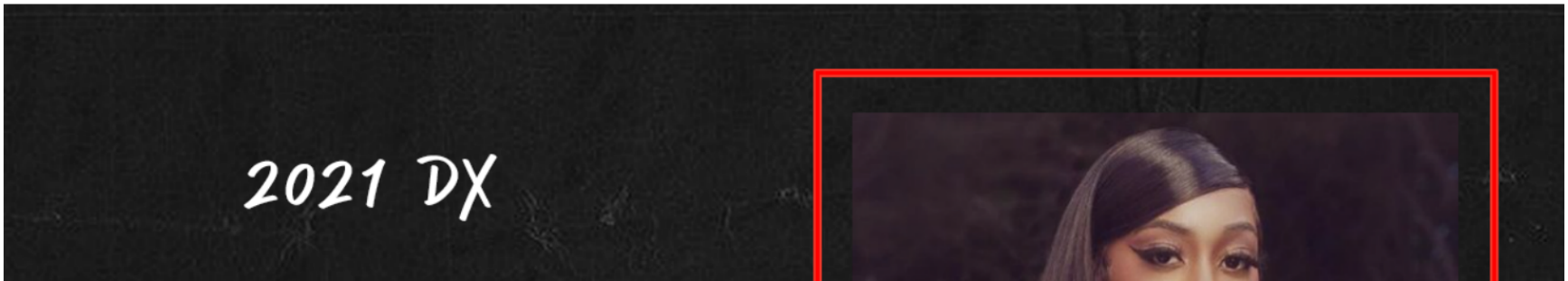
It was a no-brainer to lock-in DDG as a 2021 *DX* Rising Star as the YouTuber-turned-rapper's 2020 remix to his single "Moonwalking in Calabasas" featuring Blueface put the laser-focus on him. The two paired up for the official remix which boasted over 68 million YouTube views and became DDG's first song to enter the *Billboard* Hot 100 at No. 82, while signed to Epic Records. The *Die 4 Respect* smash went on to gain certified platinum status in 2021.

Since the first quarter of the year, DDG has had some of the most gossip-worthy news surrounding him, whether stemming from his on-and-off relationship with Rubi Rose, threatening to delete his popular YouTube channel, or "beef" with other *DX* Rising Stars and social media figures. However, DDG let his hands do the talking when he agreed to fight Tik Tok star Nate Wyatt in a *Social Gloves* boxing match in which DDG won — *convincingly*. Although DDG did not score any nominations this year for any major awards, he did put in time to tour with Kevin Gates in September.

As a well-rounded social figure who's had serious cash before signing on to be a professional rapper, DDG has continued to work his way up to make a name for himself in the game. The Pontiac, Michigan star has already shut down stages at Rolling Loud Miami and Day N Vegas, in which he relived his "Moonwalking in Calabasas" success with Blueface live.

DDG's ability to be successful in any industry he enters has shown time and time again, that he definitely embodies what a *DX* Rising Star is!

Flo Milli



2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star Flo Milli has blossomed right before our eyes!

As the only woman holding down the 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Stars list, Flo Milli's rise to stardom has been an example that many aspiring "rap girls" can admire and emulate.

DX has watched the Alabama sensation closely over the last 12 months as she continued to grow in versatile spaces of her career. From her consistent BET nominations to becoming Rap's fashion "it girl," the prior predictions for Flo has superseded where she is now.

Crediting social media to the rapid broadening of her audiences, Flo's stardom stemmed from her certified gold singles "Beef Flo-Mix" and "In The Party" going viral on TikTok, amongst other features. Once she signed her record deal with RCA Records in late 2019, her debut 2020 mixtape *Ho, Why Is You Here?* lead her to being nominated for Best New Artist at the 2020 BET Hip Hop Awards and 2021 BET Awards.

Since then, Flo's unique voice has been sought out time and time again to create bangers like her feature on Yung Baby Tate's "I Am" track, which surpassed one million views on YouTube. Flo also released her biggest song of 2021, "Roaring 20's," in which she continued to play on her colorfully stratified existential persona with her bouncy, punchline flinging raps. Flo's success in her Rising Star year has had her recruited to perform at major festivals like Rolling Loud Miami, Rolling Loud NYC, BUKU Planet B., JMBLYA, Outside Lands, Firefly and Day N Vegas.

Ending her fourth quarter with a full-circle moment – Flo stepped all the way into her fashionable side by partnering with Amazon Music and HYPEBEAST for her own capsule collection, designed by streetwear designer, Katie McIntyre.

Flo Milli has clearly proven to be a *DX* Rising Star that keeps evolving!

Foogiano

Foogiano's trajectory to stardom came to a halt when he became incarcerated back in March, he still was on fire before then – making him an honorary 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star!

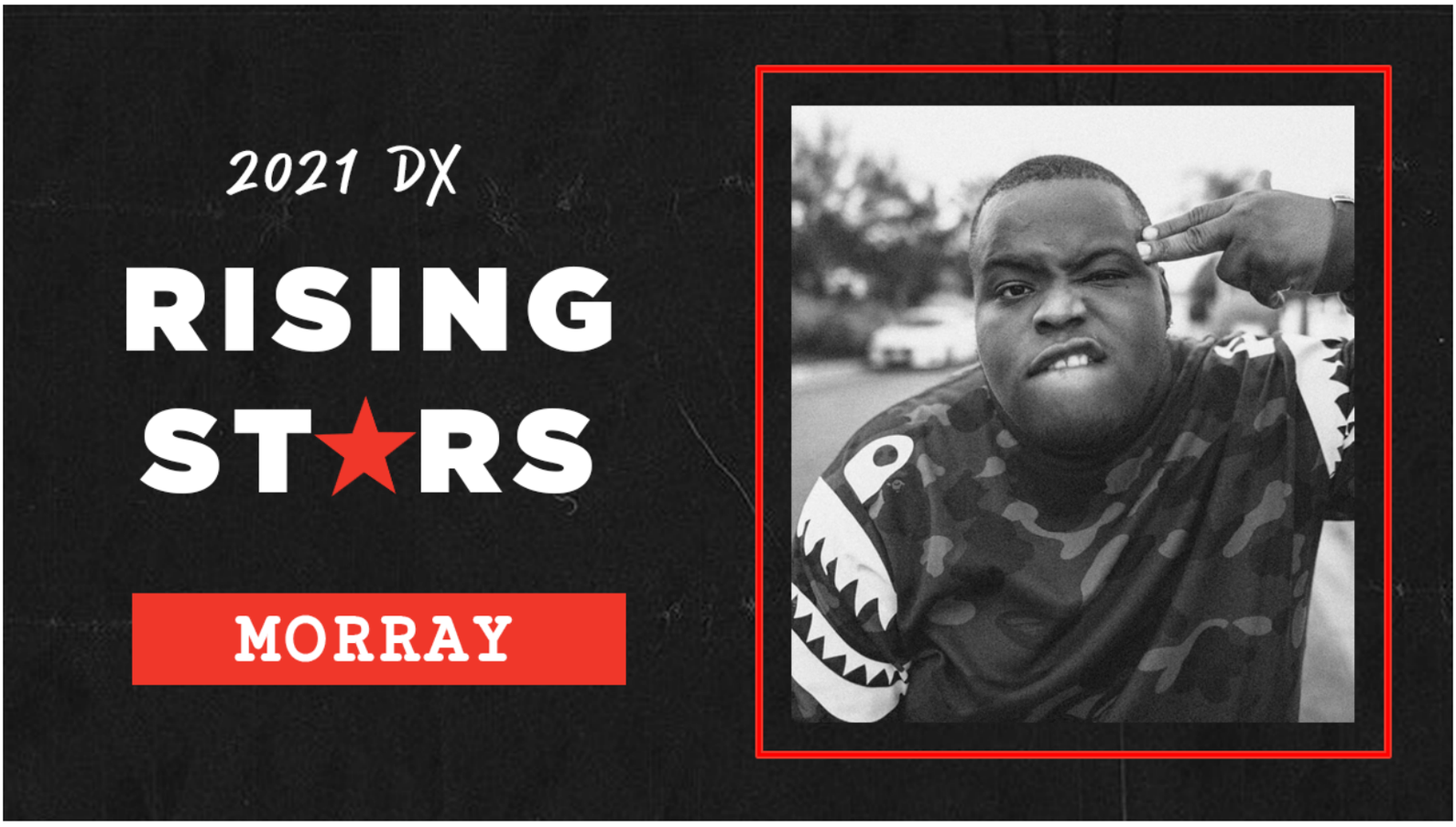
DX chose Big Foo as a Rising Star because of his stellar 2020 breakout year. The Greensboro rapper had snagged eight different features on Gucci Mane's *So Icy Summer* compilation album, which was more than anyone else on The New 1017 label that Gucci created. Foogiano even saw his numbers go up with over 40 million plays on streaming services and 140 million views combined on YouTube – so he was on the brink of success at a rapid pace.

Although his year was cut short within the two months that *DX* did get to cover his journey, he was able to gain over one million views on YouTube for his single "First Day Out," and also drop his joint mixtape *Backwood Boyz* with Geezy Escobar. While on the inside, Big Foo's support system has been holding down his fortress by releasing music that's in the vault, keeping fans up to date with his time away, and also keeping his Instagram active with posts about his family and artists he supports.

Foogiano has been able to keep his name afloat with features on Gucci Mane's 2021 *So Icy Boyz* compilation album and super-producer Zaytoven's *Pack Just Landed Vol. 3*, in which Foogiano is featured on the track, "Wolf."

The world hasn't had the full opportunity to see Foogiano's reach within rap, but in a short span of time he's proven himself worthy of recognition on a larger scale!

Morray



HipHopDX didn't waste anytime recruiting Morray to the 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Stars list – especially after receiving such praise from J.Cole, DaBaby and Rap royalty JAY-Z himself.

The Fayetteville-star came out the gate swinging with his 2020 certified gold single "Quicksand," which peaked at No. 65 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and surpassed 100 million views. Morray's humble beginnings, which can be heard throughout his music, have led so many people to feel connected to his story of coming from nothing-to-something.

For 12 months *DX* has dedicated each week to documenting Morray's journey to success as he has cemented his name in Rap. From inking a deal with Interscope Records, holding a top 10 spot on the Apple Top Albums chart for *Street Sermons*, featuring on J. Cole's "my.life" (which literally broke Spotify), hitting million of streams with "Quicksand," performing at Rolling Loud, to having a full-circle moment by going on tour with J.Cole – Morray was destined for greatness early on.

As one of the most successful *DX* Rising Stars this year, Morray went into his fourth quarter being nominated for Best New Hip Hop Artist at the 2021 BET Hip Hop Awards, as well as Best New Artist at the 2021 Soul Train Awards. Morray's nominations became even bigger when he announced his two Grammy noms for Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song for J. Cole's "my.life," which will be decided in 2022.

Morray's *DX* Rising Star has truly been one to remember as he continues to grow into super-star!

Sheff G

Eyes have been on 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star Sheff G since 2017 when Sheff dropped "No Suburban" in response to "Suburban" by 22Gz. Since then, the Brooklyn-bred rapper has been a pillar in his city for drill music earning him a spot in 2021 as a *DX* Rising Star!

Sheff G proved himself to be a promising rapper when his 2019 *The Unlucky Kid* mixtape's success set him up for all eyes to be on him in 2020. After showing his hunger for more when he released his May 2020 album *One and Only*, he was put on a whole new playing field as a trendsetter with New York-drill. *DX* made sure to share with readers when his album landed at No. 13 on the Billboard 200 chart, positioning him in his Winners Circle label with fellow Rising Star Sleepy Hallow.

After the momentum Sheff had in 2020, his 2021 started off rather slow as he was musically quiet from February to May. However, he turned up the heat in June when he dropped "Start Some Shyt," landing the video's No. 17 ranking on the trending charts of YouTube and surpassing 3 million views.

As Sheff G's Rising Star year was just getting ready to take off, he was arrested on July 17 during a traffic stop after allegedly being witnessed driving recklessly and without a license plate. Upon search of his vehicle, police were said to have found a .45 caliber Glock. Prior to his arrest, Sheff had performances lined up for Hot 97's Summer Jam and Rolling Loud NYC – unfortunately he was recently sentenced to two years in prison after pleading guilty in connection with that traffic stop arrest from earlier this year.

Although his trajectory to stardom has been interrupted by this setback, Sheff's name has been able to keep relevance through his right-hand man Sleepy Hallow, as well as his label Winner's Circle. *DX* still believes that we were right about Sheff G's Rising Star power!

Sleepy Hallow

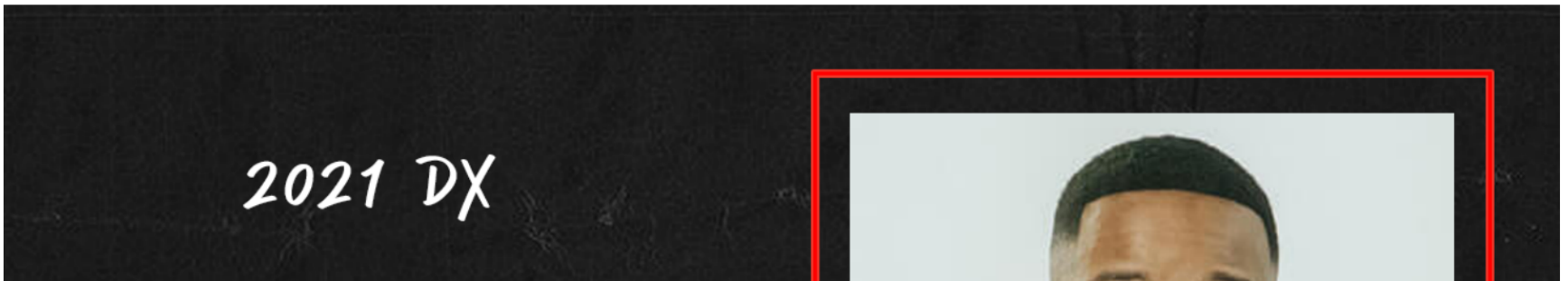
DX introduced readers to Sleepy Hallow as a 2021 *DX* Rising Star after his certified platinum single "Deep End Freestyle" peaked on the Hot 100 at No. 8 and became certified gold in 2020. With over 4.4 million monthly Spotify listeners, the RCA signee has worked quietly to prove why he is a pivotal piece to the New York-drill sound as well as a 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star!

Like his Winner's Circle label mate Sheff G, Sleepy too started off the Rising Star year slow; kicking things off in April when he dropped his certified gold single "2055" off of his debut album *Still Sleep?* which peaked at No. 38 on the Billboard 200 chart. Sleepy's traction picked up when he was recruited to Day N Vegas, Rolling Loud Miami, Rolling Loud NYC, and Hot 97's Summer Jam.

Sleepy kept the momentum going when he announced his *Still Sleep?* tour which took place from October to December. Since performing on some of the biggest lineups in the world, Sleepy has made his BET debut at the 2021 BET Hip Hop Awards in the "Hot Now" cypher along with Erica Banks, Rico Nasty and Fivio Foreign. He has also performed virtually and has been recruited to 2022's Brooklyn Drip's showcase in February.

Although Sleepy Hallow may not have done as much as some of the other *DX* Rising Stars this year, he has still shined in his own right!

Toosii



Toosii spent his 2020 being super-productive, earning him a spot as a 2021 *HipHopDX* Rising Star.

After releasing his 2020 mixtape *Platinum Heart*, it reached No. 1 on the *Billboard* Heatseekers Album chart immediately. Charting at such a high position must have been all the ammo Toosii needed, because after that, he didn't let up. Toosii followed up with his debut project *Poetic Pain* which peaked at number 17 on the Billboard 200 and as Toosii's traction began, he went on to collaborate with Summer Walker for his 2020 certified platinum single "Love Cycle" and with Lil Durk for "Nightmares." After signing to Capitol Records in late 2020, Toosii's 2021 took off.

Kicking off the year with his *Thank You For Believing* mixtape, which featured Latto (formerly Mulatto), DaBaby and Key Glock, the project peaked No. 25 on the Billboard 200 chart. Thanks to Toosii's album rollout, he even went on to sell out multiple cities on his first headlining tour, which took place from October to November.

Toosii's fourth quarter of the year included performances at Rolling Loud Miami, Hot 97 Summer Jam and Day N Vegas festivals. He also made his BET debut in the "Digital" cypher alongside up-and-comers Lakeyah, Kidd Kenn and Symba during the 2021 BET Hip Hop Awards. He also dropped his *Pretty Girls Love Toosii* single pack before the year let out.

Not nominated for a single award this year, Toosii still made sure to let us know how hard he worked 2021 with a recent tweet. "2021 Toosii," he started off. "Went platinum. Did a billion streams. Sold over a million copies. Sold out tour. Made XXL. Made BET Cypher. And my whole career I've yet to drop an ALBUM just mixtapes. 2022 is mine."

The decision to make Toosii a *DX* Rising Star was the right one!

Yung Bleu

There isn't one regret making BLEU a 2021 *DX* Rising Star!

The Alabama-artist started off the year as Yung Bleu, and as his buzz became bigger he decided to go big with renaming himself just BLEU, *all caps.* BLEU has now become a powerhouse in 2021 as he has collaborated with some of the biggest names in Hip Hop, as well as had some of the biggest songs out of the bunch – despite initially not receiving all of the flowers he deserved.

In 2020, *DX* knew Alabama had a lot to offer the wide world of Hip Hop from Grammy-nominated MC Chika to fellow *DX* Rising Star 2021 Flo Milli, and BLEU became another validation of that. With major co-signs from Louisiana royalty Boosie Badazz and "Certified Lover Boy" Drake, BLEU has lived up to the hype of his Rising Star power.

Having been on the Rap scene since 2013 when he signed a deal with Columbia Records via Boosie's Badazz Music Syndicate, BLEU used his 2020 to set up his spotlight in 2021 as a *DX* Rising Star!

Already earning a few certified gold singles prior to his prime, he went platinum for his 2020 smash, "You're Mines Still" featuring Drake – which also hit more than 100 million views on YouTube. BLEU's uncanny ability to sing and rap has attracted heavy-hitters like Chris Brown, the late DMX, A Boogie, 2 Chainz and more to want to collaborate with him. Prior to releasing his debut 2021 album Moon Boy, which peaked at N0. 12 on the Billboard 200 chart, BLEU dropped the infectious single "Baddest" with Chris Brown and 2 Chainz. The single peaked at No. 56 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and No. 17 on the Hot R&B/Hip Hop Songs chart.

After embarking on his inaugural headlining *Moon Boy* tour this year, BLEU went on to have a full-circle moment in his fourth quarter as he became the first artist to win both Best New Hip Hop Artist and Best New Artist, at the 2021 BET Hip Hop Awards and 2021 Soul Train Awards in the same year. BLEU was also nominated for Song of The Year and Best Collaboration for "You're Mine Still" featuring Drake.

BLEU's trajectory to super-stardom is one that has been enjoyable to watch and also a learning experience for other artists. BLEU's journey has shown that even if you are counted out in the beginning; working consistently will allow you to one day reap the fruits of your labor.

HipHopDX has been more than proud to document BLEU's Rising Star year!

As DX has consecutively documented the major and minor moves of the 2021 HipHopDX Rising Stars, the talented 10 has proven why DX was right about them from the very beginning. Go back a revisit articles from this year's Rising Stars and stay tuned for the crowning of our 2021 Best New Rapper!

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