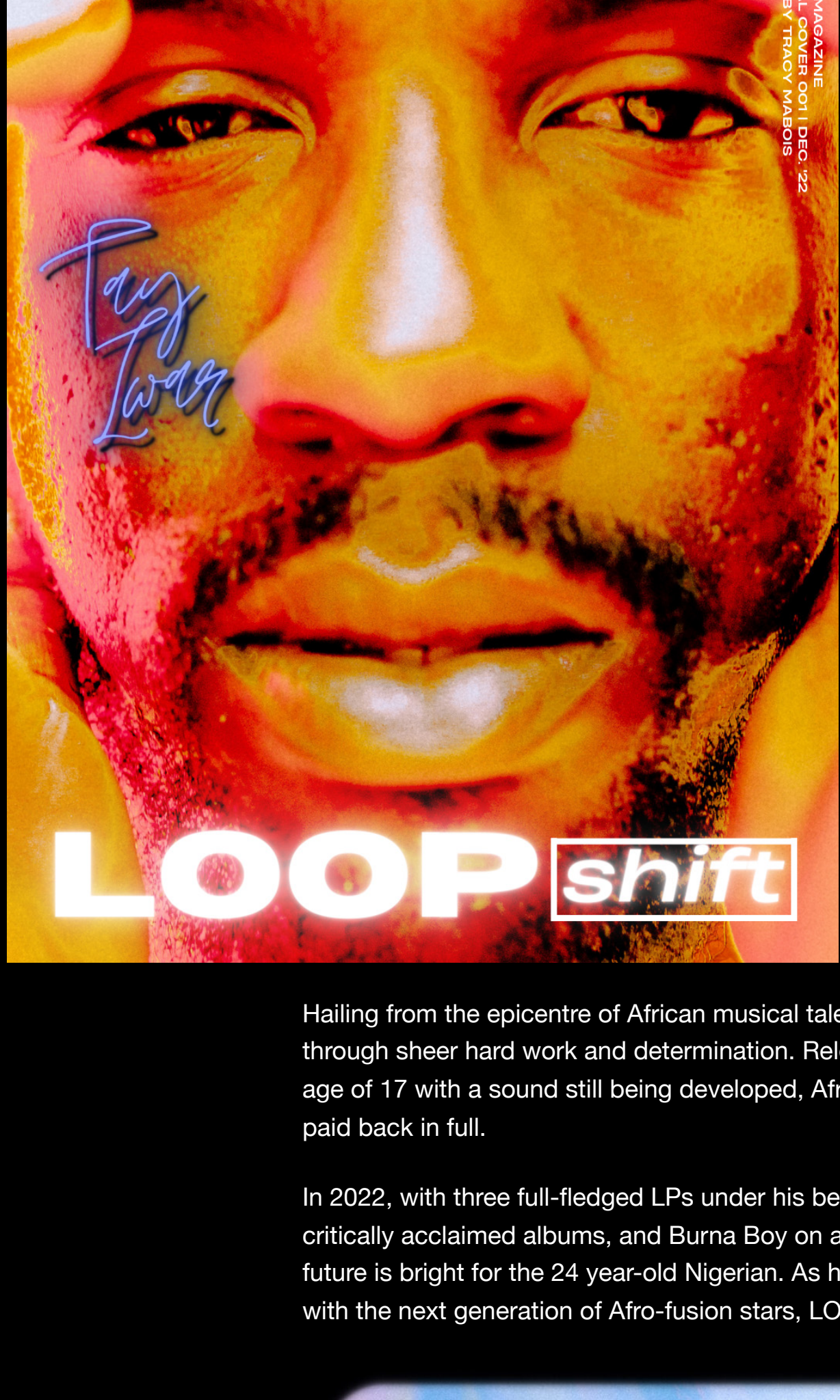


## Tay Iwar: Inspiring Afro-Fusion's Next Generation



Hailing from the epicentre of African musical talent, Nigeria, Tay Iwar has carved his musical path through sheer hard work and determination. Releasing his debut album 'Passport' at the mere age of 17 with a sound still being developed, Afro-fusion, Tay Iwar stuck to his guns, and it has paid back in full.

In 2022, with three full-fledged LPs under his belt, having worked alongside Wizkid on two critically acclaimed albums, and Burna Boy on a track for Black Panther: Wakanda Forever, the future is bright for the 24 year-old Nigerian. As he prepares to release a new EP, whilst working with the next generation of Afro-fusion stars, LOOP sits down with Tay to discuss his vision.



**Where in the world are you at the moment? I see you are constantly traveling between London and Abuja.**

I'm currently in Abuja – it's sometimes mistaken as my hometown. It's my hometown in the sense that I live here, but I come from Benue State. I've stayed in Abuja for a long-time, but I would not necessarily say it is where I am from.

**What would you say are the main social/cultural differences between Abuja and Benue State?**

Abuja is a very conservative environment. Being the capital of Nigeria, it looks to set the standard for the entire country. Primarily through religion, as Abuja is a very religious city. Whereas Benue State is a very rural and very under-developed part of Nigeria. So you can imagine how contrasting the two environments are.

**How have you found yourself navigating your own path through the two environments? And what impact does that have on your approach to your musical creativity?**

I've spent most of my time outside the rural lifestyle, so it's hard to pinpoint how I direct myself through the two environments. I would say that the main challenge has been navigating between Abuja, Lagos and London. I'm constantly travelling between the three cities throughout the year, which has been going on for the last seven years. Navigating those three cities has really influenced my musical direction.

**I can imagine, as each city has its own culture with very broad similarities.**

Completely different cultures. The main influences have been attained through my exposure to each of the cultures and the lifestyles attached to them.

**Have you noticed any differences in terms of the reaction to your music between the various cultures?**

It has been an interesting reaction. Initially, here in Abuja, the reaction was one of resistance as my music is stigmatised as not having a listenership in Nigeria. The usual phrase being, 'Oh yeah, this is cool but I don't think it's gonna work'. So I believe that the industry has really caught up in recent years, as when I first started producing Afro-Fusion, the sound was basically rejected, but now there are a lot of artists who are creating music in that space, mixing Afro-Fusion with R&B. So the reaction has changed now, and has become very positive and embraced by the community. Five years later.

**Unfortunately, that's how things usually go, initial rejection of the new and then embracement.**

Exactly. So I'd say I've experienced a variety of reactions even from just the confounds of my city. However, in London or even America, I've never had the resistance that I initially had within Nigeria. It has always been a very accepting environment. For obvious reasons, as the audiences within those countries are diverse and allow experimentation.



**With that being said, having worked with Wizkid on both 'Made in Lagos' and 'More Love, Less ego', would you say that the Nigerian community began to soften their approach to your music and become more accepting?**

I think there are two main things that happened after working with him [Wizkid]. The first one was that many people who had already known of me, or had heard my name could finally put a face to the name. Even though my sound was very popular amongst certain people, they only knew my name, as I never posted a brand; it was just music. Also, my music now reached more African listeners, even gaining a global reach, which I am very grateful for.

**I understand that you had connected with Wizkid through your strong relationship with Juls (A talented British-Ghanaian producer, who has worked with artists from Mr. Eazi to, most recently, Stormzy). How did your relationship with Juls come about, and what does it look like now?**

I've been working with Juls for around seven years now. The first song we worked on together was years before 'True Love' (A track from 'Made in Lagos'), which was actually called 'December'. Since then, it has been a straightforward working experience with him. We send each other beats from time to time, and we see what works. Juls, that's my guys man, we have made so much music together.

**How do you navigate when you are producer Tay and when you are artist Tay? As that can be pretty difficult for many musicians. They seem to be completely two different headspaces.**

For me, I don't see them [Artistry & Music Production] as mutually exclusive. They are one and the same and just different forms of expressing yourself. They are the same to me, I write songs, produce songs, mix and master songs. All of these are literally the same to me. Sometimes my expressions lead me to focus on mixing tracks, and then another time I feel like producing a track.

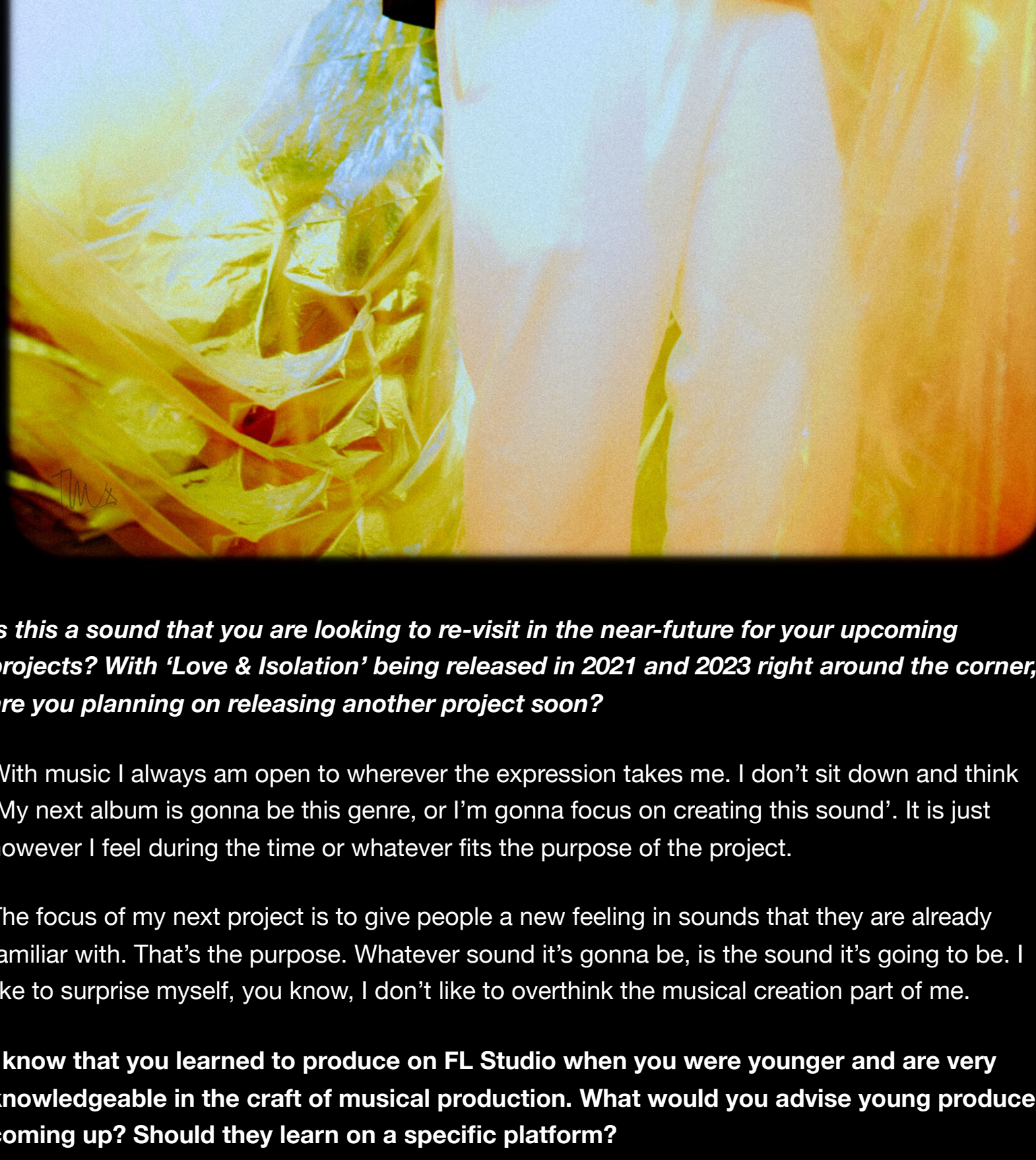
**In terms of navigating all of it, you just have to treat everything as the same because you cannot be two different people. You are still one mind. The difference, I think, might be if you were working with someone else and we decided I shouldn't place my vocals on the track. That's the only situation where I feel like there would be a limit in my mind, where I'd have to really navigate those aspects.**

**So moving towards your sound, would you say there is a movement within the Afro-fusion world, especially local artists to start creating this style of music?**

Definitely. So many people have started the Afro-fusion journey. Many claim to say that I have defined it [Afro-fusion], but it's something that has existed for a long time, even before me. Fusing western sounds with Nigerian sounds is nothing new; it's just there is increasing attention on the sound, and it's good to see people embrace it and start to go down the road of creating more music.

**With your most recent project 'Love & Isolation', what was the reception like to this side of your music? Its following suit from 'Gemini' yet places the listener in a further intimate setting and places heavy emphasis on R&B/Soul musical tonalities.**

I think it was a project that fit the time frame. I was trying to see what type of music I could create that would truly summarise the pandemic and that [Love & Isolation] was it. It was slower, contemplative and heavily inspired by the events and feelings of the pandemic itself.



**Is this a sound that you are looking to re-visit in the near-future for your upcoming projects? With 'Love & Isolation' being released in 2021 and 2023 right around the corner, are you planning on releasing another project soon?**

With music I always am open to wherever the expression takes me. I don't sit down and think 'My next album is gonna be this genre, or I'm gonna focus on creating this sound'. It is just however I feel during the time or whatever fits the purpose of the project.

The focus of my next project is to give people a new feeling in sounds that they are already familiar with. That's the purpose. I don't want to overthink it's gonna be, is the sound it's going to be. I like to surprise myself, you know. I don't like to overthink the musical creation part of me.

**I know that you learned to produce on FL Studio when you were younger and are very knowledgeable in the craft of musical production. What would you advise young producers coming up? Should they learn on a specific platform?**

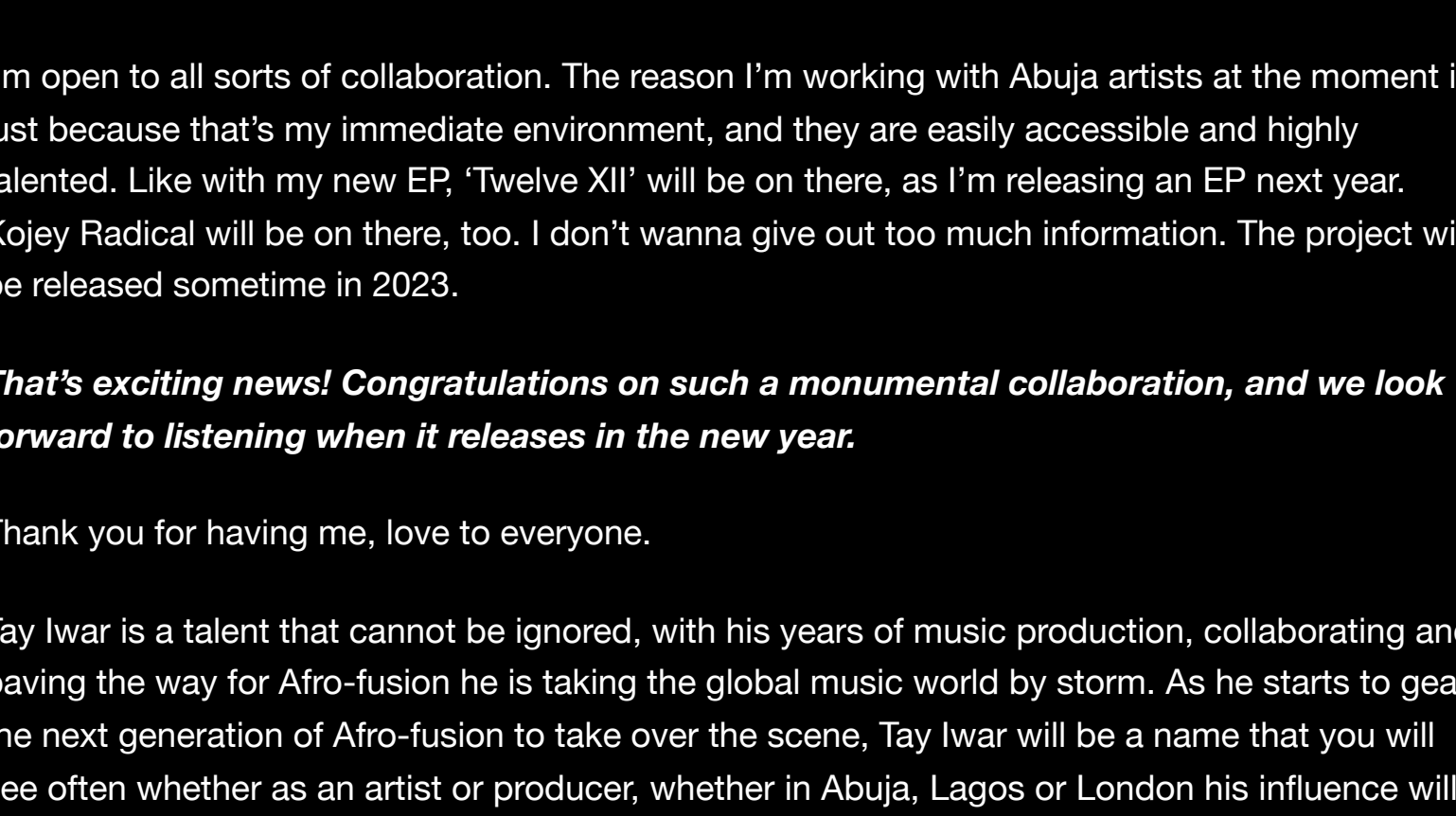
I work with Logic now 'He Laughs'. My advice would be to learn everything. Learn literally everything you can. I learnt on FL, but then I ended up learning on Logic Pro, Ableton and even Pro Tools. All the knowledge is key. Just keep learning, especially when you are starting it out. Knowledge is the most powerful thing. You have to become a sponge; just absorb all you can.

**With all the knowledge you have acquired over the years, what are your next steps and what can we expect from you in the coming year?**

I think the next year is more about showing and inspiring people that come from a place of doubt, inspiring them that they can actually achieve their dreams. There are not many people that come from where I'm from in the industry. There are many people like people from Benue State across the world that I want to inspire. New energy and new vibes.

**Are there any artists that are currently on your radar?**

Yeah definitely, there is an artist called 'Twelve XII' he is from Abuja. I've been working a lot recently with Abuja artists. There is another artist called 234jaydaa who is extremely talented.



**Is that your current focus at the moment or are you looking to work with Western artists also?**

I'm open to all sorts of collaboration. The reason I'm working with Abuja artists at the moment is just because that's my immediate environment, and they are easily accessible and highly talented. Like with my new EP, 'Twelve XII' will be on there, as I'm releasing an EP next year. Kojeje Radical will be on there, too. I don't wanna give out too much information. The project will be released sometime in 2023.

**That's exciting news! Congratulations on such a monumental collaboration, and we look forward to listening when it releases in the new year.**

Thank you for having me, love to everyone.

Tay Iwar is a talent that cannot be ignored, with his years of music production, collaborating and paving the way for Afro-fusion he is taking the global music world by storm. As he starts to gear the next generation of Afro-fusion to take over the scene, Tay Iwar will be a name that you will see often whether as an artist or producer, whether in Abuja, Lagos or London his influence will be felt. He is Abuja's rising sun.

Words by Ramy Abou-Setta