



LOOP sits down with Ghanaian superstar Stonebwoy, who creates a unique blend of Afrobeats, dancehall and reggae that has mesmerised his nation and placed the young talent in the spotlight of the global stage. Having won a BET Award, a Ghanaian Music Award and been a collaborator on various Grammy-nominated projects, he has made a sure impact on the industry.



Following the critically acclaimed 'Anloga Junction' in 2020 – a star-studded contribution to his diverse repertoire with the likes of R&B legend Keri Hilson and Nasty C – Stonebwoy looks to make an even bigger splash with his upcoming project due to be released this year, carrying the torch of Africa as he champions his motherland.

Understandably you are jet-lagged currently being in the US – How has your experience at the Grammys been?

It has been an amazing experience, to be honest. This is my first time at the Grammys, and it was magical. I've always had a connection with the Grammys, either through being involved in projects that have been nominated or even projects that have won a Grammy, like Morgan Heritage's 'Strictly Roots' in 2017. I also worked on three out of five of the reggae albums nominated for a Grammy last year, so I've always been around the atmosphere. However, this is my first time there in person. Being able to have the opportunity to also perform at the first African pre-Grammy event was an incredible experience. Being involved and seeing creatives networking and representing the African continent was beautiful.

What was it like for you to represent Ghana on such a big stage?

Few can break the upper echelons of the music industry, so for you to do so is a statement of your impact and reach. That representation to me is extremely important as, coming from Ghana, we do not get discussed heavily as a nation. I believe we slightly shy away culturally (I do not know where we got that from) from amplifying our prowess or achievements; I think we are too quiet and humble about who we are as a people. I feel like it's time for us to get out there and tell people who we are and what our contribution as a nation has been over the years, from our predecessors to our forefathers, and their impact on the music scene, especially the big global stages.

From the new-school perspective, I believe I'm one of the voices that has never ceased to amplify Ghana – I did not have to be nominated to be a representation; it's just who I am, and I want to add to that army. It brings a lot of joy to Ghanaians abroad, and it also brings a lot of joy to Africans as they see people representing their roots at the Grammys in America. It gives me a lot of joy and a lot of purpose to represent my nation.



With that representation, you are also mentioned as being a 'gate-keeper' of your musical sphere (Afrobeat/Dancehall/Reggae Fusion), the 'Highlife music' as you like to call it in Ghana – what are some of the opportunities or movements that you are providing for upcoming artists, and where have you seen the results of your efforts?

Every year, we hold an event called 'Bhim Concert' designed to bridge the gap between Caribbean and African sounds, the broader goal is to continuously push and produce harmony within the world of black-origin music so that the world can continue to enjoy the variety. There is a need to continue to be custodians and uphold the standard and growth – so the Bhim Concert is crucial as it gives upcoming artists the platform to shine and is widely covered.

Every year we bring an established artist from Jamaica or the Caribbean to come and share the platform. In the last few years, we have had appearances from Beenie Man, Busy Signal to Morgan Heritage. We also have a charity event called 'Ashaiman To The World' which is a massive platform, a very big platform [he chuckles with pride – Ashaiman being his hometown]. It is the biggest solo artist outdoor event in Ghana, with roughly around 40 to 50 thousand people in attendance. Haha, trust me, we give them music, we interact, and we vibe. It's such a beautiful thing to do. My community is one of the most populated communities. However, whilst being an economic hub, we have had the fewest artists reach global heights. I've always wanted to bring that back to the community. I never turned my back on them – I want them to feel the heights we have reached.

What does this all mean to you? None of what you have achieved is a small feat, and your impact on your local and national community is evident.

It gives me a sense of purpose. It gives me stability. Even though it shakes me a lot, as heavy is the head that bares all this. Impacting all these people, especially as young as I am, it is very inspiring to the current generation around me and the generation to come after me.

How do you transcend those emotions and feelings into your music?

The way that I do that is through the songs that I sing. It comes across in my style – I would say my style is more than just 'highlife'. It is more than just Afrobeats; my style is reggae, it's dancehall. I have become well known for this style which I've shortened to 'Afro-dancehall'. This is how I transcend all the emotions into my music, lyrically, and sonically. I have songs that speak to the people, activism songs, songs of love, songs of emotion; I sing all these things. I put all the feeling back into where it needs to be expressed.

Let's touch upon your most recent album 'Anloga Junction'. You've spoken about expressing emotion, the value in bridging the East with the West whilst staying authentic to the African sonic. How impactful were those themes in the creation of your album?

The album has a clear message, acting as a bridge as you sing in English and in Ewe [A Ghanaian Dialect]. I named the album 'Anloga Junction', as Anloga is where I'm from, to keep the project rooted in my ethnic background. People look to Africa as one big country, yet Africa is a continent.

As much as we are a people of one blood, there are millions of cultures, diversity and beauty. For me to streamline and call my album 'Anloga Junction' tells you that numerous cultures stem from Africa. The choice of word 'Junction,' it symbolises the mindset and point I'm at in my career, where I'm connecting everything from where I'm from. You hear on the first track, I'm singing in Ewe, and then I bridge with East Africa as the album continues, then London and America. It's an Africa to the world type of album, but I didn't want to generalise Africa. I intentionally wanted to narrow in on Anloga as even if you got the spelling wrong and thought of Angola it's still an African nation and becomes rooted.

Lyrically and sonically, when you check out the album, there are reggae songs, pop-ish tracks and dancehall songs. It encompasses all the styles I have been preaching and pushing throughout my career. When you listen to Stonebwoy, you should hear and see Africa. You should see all styles of black origin. That is how big my talent size is, and I wanted to showcase that through this project. I do not want to limit it.



You have just released your first single of 2023 'More of You' – Is this a glimpse of the sonic direction we will see from the next Stonebwoy project?

God willing, we will release the biggest project to date next month. 'More of You' is a single from an album 'Therapy' (Released in late 2022) and was the first to be released from the upcoming project. Both singles are part of the direction in which the album will be heading in, there is a lot more to enjoy.

There seems to be a theme of a romantic nature to both the tracks released – is that a hint as to what we can expect?

Yeah, man! We need more love in our lives as we take things for granted sometimes. Hate comes automatically, so we need to be more intentional about love. We can never talk about love enough, do you know what I mean?

How have you seen your music being received by the West?

Understandably in the East, you have an outpour of love and always have the support of your community. So how has in the West, there is no scope to stop growing [He laughs].

Over the last couple of years, the reception in the UK and Europe has been incredible. I was touring across Europe, headlining a festival. Playing with my band, 80-90 minute sets was amazing. As I was saying earlier, Stonebwoy is a brand, and when you pick Stonebwoy you have all-black origin music, it's an iconic kind of artist. I cannot pick an artist right now from Africa, who is championing reggae, afro, and dancehall and combing them. You only have artists that zero-in and focus on one style. The person that combines the three is a dangerous guy. So we can only be patient and take time for the world to receive said music. I'm in a good space right now, I'm grateful to God.

What would the core message be surrounding Africa that you would like the world to receive?

This message is not going to be new, but it's a message that needs to be heard. All human beings on Earth have the same colour blood; we all have one blood, one human race stemming from that. I want people to know of Africa as the cradle of civilization. There are a lot of narratives that have placed mother Africa in disrepute and have placed people like myself in a position where we have to change the narrative.

This is where the system tries to play the race card and make it an issue of white vs black – that's why I started by saying we are all one people. For whatever reason, there are a lot of narratives that do not bode well for ourselves, so I want people to know that Africa is a beautiful continent; it's a beautiful civilisation – a home for humanity. Through the music, through the art and through the culture that is home for us all. There is not one single culture in the world that you cannot find a similarity with in Africa.

What I'm saying may be a bit more ancient today, yet it's needed. Come visit Ghana in December [Bhim Concert] and have fun, go to Nigeria, go to South Africa, go to Congo, check it out, go to Egypt, go to Tunisia. Africa is special. There is no continent like it.

What are the goals and next steps for Stonebwoy?

God willing, my next few years will continuously increase what I'm already doing. We are young and energetic right now, and we will continue until the bones are rotting and the mind is weak, you know [He chuckles]. I want to increase and grow all these ideas I have in my mind globally, to continue to build the foundations needed for others to grow and place young creatives in a good position. So that the next generation can sustain itself – nothing will be wasted.

Who are some of the upcoming artists that you would co-sign and want others to be on the look-out for?

Yeah, man! There are some incredibly talented artists coming right now. Sunshine Soldier is one of the amazing talents coming through, a great dancehall artist from my hometown. He is one artist you should check out.

Thank you for your time Stonebwoy, and we look forward to hearing more from you in the coming year!

Love to all of you! Make sure to check out my music and get some African vibes.

Words by Ramy Abou-Setta