

As Che Lingo prepares to set off on his European Tour following the announcement of his highly anticipated sophomore album 'Coming up for Air' due to be released in April, LOOP sit down with the South London wordsmith, to delve into the creative mind behind 'The Worst Generation' and what we can expect from this upcoming project.

The young star sits relaxed wearing a fitted all-black attire, a beanie adorning his head, a pair of round glasses trimmed with gold, a staple of the Che Lingo aesthetic; subtle silver jewellery accented across his frame catching the eye yet does not beckon for attention. It would seem like another Wednesday for the craftsman, had it not been for the atomic news announced that very morning. 'Coming Up For Air' was releasing in just over a month.

Congratulating him on the announcement, we begin to discuss the project and what the last three years since his debut album 'The Worst Generation' have been for the South London native. Che Lingo sits back subtly reliving the moment, grateful for the praise: 'Thank you, thank you. I think the thing that excites me the most is the message that will come across. These last three years have given me time to reflect and evaluate what is important.'

He takes a moment to ponder: 'Why am I making this music? What is it for? I mean, what purpose will it serve? What resonates with me the most was that I came out of youth clubs, they had a purpose and use for more than just myself as an individual I want that to be reciprocated in my music, a purpose beyond myself. Coming from a South London estate, growing up with my parents, my grandma; everything must have purpose. Everything has to have meaning and everything has to have a reason behind it.'

The young star shares many experiences from his upbringings and environment in 'The Worst Generation', tracks like 'Black Ones' (Feat. Ghetts), 'South' and 'My Block' delved into the hardships faced on the South London estates he lived in and the realities of growing up in said surroundings. From his mannerisms, gentle soul, and child-like passion it is difficult to wrap your head around the idea that this young man came from such a coarse environment.

He continues to discuss his thought process surrounding the creation of 'Coming Up For Air': 'I think that was the concept that I first wanted to get down, what is the purpose of this album and how do I break that down into pieces to create the songs/titles of the tracks? How do I ground it? How do I then expand it and make it bigger and give it a story musically?' As Che Lingo continued to speak, his passion and conviction intensified with each passing sentence. 'Yeah, then that's when I'm like, Okay, I want this sound for that song and this sound for that. I want this to sound dark and this to sound melancholic. This to be exciting in the back end and sound dramatic with the violins. Those are the kind of the components that make up the creative drive to make another album.'

A true love for his craft was tangible and could be seen in every intrinsic thought conjured throughout our conversation. Che started his musical journey as a young teen spending most days reciting his own bars to himself and his evenings in the local youth centre's recording studio.

We delve into the narrative direction of 'The Worst Generation' and if we can expect a similar story-telling paradigm from this upcoming album. Che fixes his rings, sits back and answers thoughtfully:

'So speaking on TWG [The Worst Generation] as an album, it was an exploration of my environment and how, as the 'figure', I fit in that environment. A gentleman, young, black male from South London, that was the 'figure' and a focus as I want people to feel seen within that album. I've always tried to find ways to make people feel seen.' He takes a moment to gather his thoughts, then adds 'It comes from my vulnerability, because I'm going to say things in music, that other people can't even say to their best friends, you know what I'm saying? So the TWG album was my escape of that environment, this [Coming Up For Air] is how I fit in my environment against the 'figure' being perceived.

'Coming Up For Air' is how the environment affected me personally, given in real time: over the pandemic, over the course of not been able to talk over the previous album, over the physical and mental strains, over the relationships and social situations that changed, over the weight of the world.' This weight of responsibility was clear, as each theme explored left his mouth like a weight being throw away, yet from Che's demeanour you would be hard-pressed to find any sign of pain or bitterness. He finishes his thoughts 'It's [Coming Up For Air] an observation but from an inward place, so if you have to view TWG as my estate and then zoom all the way in, we're looking at the story of 'CUFA' as me, in the room inside my head that I sit down in. Less of what I see and a lot more of how I feel and how it affected me.'

Che Lingo embodies a creative space within the UK rap scene that's inhibited by avant-garde conscious wordsmiths, with the likes of Knucks, Ghetts and Kojey Radical framed as his contemporaries. In 2019 he performed alongside aforementioned contemporary Knucks in a BET UK Cypher, little did Che know that he would catch the eye of a producer who would later link him with Queen, specifically, the legendary Roger Taylor.

Che, in this solemn moment of vulnerability sits forward in the cloakroom of a bustling London studio and speaks from the heart about the track: 'Just working with them was kind of surreal. We were working with Roger Taylor on it specifically, as he delivered the stems for the track. It had come about from a brand collaboration with MTV and Adidas called 'The Original'. The concept was to reinterpret a Queen song and they chose 'Radio Gaga', and I was like, okay, I know this song. A lot of the musicians I work with grew up on Queen, so just to be able to be in a room and have the original stems and the original vocals from Freddie was just unbelievable.'

He continued 'So the producer picked me based on the BET Cypher I did in 2019, which he had produced. I'd listened to the song [Radio Gaga] a million times and was trying to think of ways to really do it some justice. It clicked, I was just like, no, with the utmost respect, we are going to tear this song apart and rebuild it as a song that sounds like it comes from me. I've been picked to do this, so I want to use this to really do something impactful.'

Recently losing his grandmother, a true role-model in the life of Che Lingo, as she pushed the youngster to go to church on Sunday, interact with family members and taught him the importance of community, left an eternal mark on her grandson. Who then dedicated his track with Queen 'My Radio' to her lasting impact.

'Like I said, just giving purpose to it. So when I started writing the track, at first, I didn't even know what I wanted to write about, because we only had a day to write the song. At the time, I didn't really get an opportunity to say goodbye to my grandma through a song. She taught me about faith and God and she would call me and my mom and emphasise the importance of going to church, saying 'he can make a decision when he's 16, for now, needs to have some kind of faith, to feed the soul inside him' He takes a moment to adjust himself, 'This has played a massive part in my life going forward and helped my mental in a lot of ways, which is why I wanted to write that song. It was a difficult song to write. I mean, if I'm going to write a song with Queen, let it be about something that means something to me and mean and hopefully will mean something to people. Who doesn't feel positively about their grandma? I'm sure there's exceptions to everything. For me everything is my nan, the grandmother plays a big part in the family dynamic.' Che sighs deeply in gratitude for his grandmother's guidance and life, he relaxes and smiles.

From a South London conscious rapper to a global upriser, Che Lingo has become an inspiration to thousands of young people across the globe. The 'Black Ones' emcee, reflects on his personal journey and offers some advice to those seeking guidance.

'You just have to follow your gut, as your instincts can be interpreted as God's way of speaking to you. I respect the artists that hold on to that, because there's so much noise, and so many voices, all the things you see and consume, develop a voice/space in your mind. So I think it's very easy to get swayed by that, especially when you think about it from an outer-perspective - Everybody wants a tribe or wants somewhere to belong to, based on several experiences or a myriad of things that might have happened in their lives.

He analyses his train of thought taking a moment to phrase his message, 'So, it's important to stop and check yourself to make sure that you're coming from the right place. If you're not acting like the best and the most instinctual, raw version of you, who are you finding? Whatever it is [What comes from yourself], will be good for someone - But who are those people? Could those people have been your friends? Could they have been a part of your tribe? Those core instincts are so important to retaining your sense of self and your behaviour in following those instincts. That's what will keep you grounded.'

Confidence befits Che Lingo like a cloak of armour, his moments of vulnerability shine true with strength. The man you hear on anthems such as 'Screw Face' and 'Same Energy', is that very same man in-front of me. There is no façade or persona, and he wants to make that clear to his listeners.

'Take the time to feel me, take the time to feel it [The music]. Listen to it, don't just hear it. If you're a creative mind or if you're now actively practising your creative mind, you're here to stay. We all consume a lot of content, lot of other art, stories, interviews, a lot of things from a creative space. These are some things that are not scientific, they just feel good. That's where it comes from for me because I make things and I have ideas from that place. Don't be afraid to entertain your inner child. You're your inner child, you weren't overthinking stuff and that resonates with me. Don't lose that, some of the greatest minds in this world were eccentric minds that came across as juveniles. There's a thin line between genius and insanity. So, be that line.

Speaking further on his 'inner child' and the impact it has on his music and creative direction, Che Lingo divulges:

'Even if we just talk about 'My Radio', she [His grandmother] gave me my radio. How my grandma impacted my life up until her passing and even what stuck with me after then I would say is entertaining my inner child. In every song I leave the studio thinking, that's just mad.' He grows in enthusiasm. 'I mean, like, I just made some s***, if I played this to my friends or listened to this at home, I can stand in the mirror and go, yeah, this is this is lovely, this is exciting, this is infusing me. Since I've been in and around the studio from my early teens, going to youth clubs, never having money to go to professional studios even then, I was running on instinct. That's where the music comes from within me, from within my inner child.'

Che lands back in his seat as he finishes his sentence enamoured with the heights reached through his 'inner child's' pursuance of musical instinct. A smile makes its way across his face, and his eyes glimmer with joy through the round glasses. A young man with the world at his disposal, Che Lingo is set to take the global stage by storm. With a European tour set for April, a sophomore album on the horizon and the support of his local and national community there is no predicting the heights the South London star will achieve.