



# DRANKIE

## The Next Generation



**“I have always embraced the American lifestyle more because it was just so genuine to me even at a young age, but I am more than proud to be from Canada.”**

**- Drake**

Aubrey Graham is probably best known to the average person as Jimmy Brooks on hot Canadian TV export *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, a role he's played for the previous five years since first auditioning at the tender age of 15. But Graham is becoming more widely known for his rap alter ego, Drake, an honest emcee comfortable rapping about life and love and not afraid to mix his hip-hop with R&B. He just finished a movie with Robert Downey Jr (*Charlie Bartlett*) and has an album planned for a 2007 spring/summer release, but outshining it all are rumours that Drake has signed a deal with Universal Music Group and is working with The Clipse and Little Brother. Swagg Newsmag takes the time to uncover the truth and learn a little bit more about Aubrey Graham, actor and rapper.

**Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee and Toronto, Ontario, did you find many differences between the two?**

Life overall on a daily basis is completely different in Memphis compared to here. In Toronto, people are accustomed to coexisting with many different races, they are used to these bright lights and tall buildings and fine dining. In Memphis, it's straightforward black, white and Mexican, and its like: fill up at the Citgo, get a cheque cashed, buy a tall Steel Reserve or Busch, which you drink in the car, and then either go to your very average job or just sit on the front porch and watch folk pass by. It's sad but it's real life. I am actually trying to pitch a show to MTV right now about Memphis because I feel like the people there are such characters due to the lack of options for entertainment around them. They just find joy in being around each other.

**Do you identify more as a Canadian or an American rapper?**

I have always embraced the American lifestyle more because it was just so genuine to me even at a young age, but I am more than proud to be from Canada. People always tell me my music doesn't sound Canadian, but I guess the only Canadian music they really know is Kardinal Offishall and in that sense they are right, no disrespect to him at all.

**How did you discover hip-hop?**

I started rapping when my dad was in the feds doing a year and a bit. He was in there with this dude who rapped, and my dad knew I used to write down little rhymes in a book, so he put me on the phone with this guy and every week it kinda became a routine. I would talk to my dad and then he would pass the phone to his cellmate and me and dude would rap back and forth 'til the call cut out. Then I started battling at school and doing the real hip-hop thing trying to earn some stripes, which led to me realizing that I need to embrace and accept myself as a person and learn to not only be a rapper but turn myself into a musician. People like Slakah and D10 helped me get to the musical point I am at right now.

**Your family has a rich musical history. Can you maybe drop a little knowledge on that?**

My uncles Willie Mitchell and Teenie Hodges wrote a lot of Al Green's major hits and my father

was a drummer for Jerry Lee Lewis. Larry Graham [Graham Central Station] is also a member of our family and my dad's grandmother babysat Tina Turner.

**Were you able to learn anything about the business side of things from them?**

I learned my business from the acting side because it's conducted so well and it just causes you to observe organization and professionalism and then apply it to your own life. I got my drive from seeing my father do whatever he had to to get whatever was needed.

**What do you draw inspiration from for your music?**

If something is challenging or confusing me then I feel like it's something I should write about because maybe it'll be something people can relate to. I write about emotions and experiences also because it's just a way for me to clear my mind. Once it's down on paper, you almost feel cleansed. It's a serious thing for me. I feel like truth is about to take over hip-hop. There are a handful of artists with a truthful element to their music whether it be on a club or soulful tip, doesn't matter — there are just some people you believe and some you don't. The two rappers that have changed my life are Phonte and T.I., so that shows you the broad spectrum right there.

**Why do you write about girls and relationships so much?**

Because that's all I know! I love women and I feel like my mission by my fifth album is to have a song where ladies are like, 'Damn, he really has us close to figured out.' My first try was "Thrill Is Gone," which was a decent attempt. Here's an exclusive story never told before: when I was about 10 or 11 and I had little girlfriends or crushes and we would break up or they would get mad at me, I would cry for the longest time because I hated the thought that that girl was going to have to turn to someone else for love and end up marrying another guy. My only wish back then was to love every woman I ever met the right way, and I guess this is my grown approach to that childhood phase. Now it's more like, even if you have a man or are in a relationship, that doesn't mean you can't put on some headphones while you're laying down and privately fall in love. Nobody has to know but me and you.

**What's with your passion for R&B?**

I just feel like I should have been an R&B singer. If I could sing, I would probably make one of the greatest albums ever.

**You've written lyrics for up-and-coming R&B singers. Anyone you'd like to mention?**

Right now I have been focused on this DJ Khaled mixtape I am doing and my album, but I always have to give a big shout-out to Trey Songz 'cause he is that dude!

**How did you hook up with Clipse for their mixtape?**

I mess with VA all day! I love it out there. As far as the Clipse, Hugh Mulzac (H Dinero) and Shomi linked that for me. *Lord Willin* is my favourite

album of all time, that and *Trap Muzik*. But VA has some of the most serious rap talent in the world. I look up to Nickelus F in a major way.

**What about your collaboration with Little Brother? How did that come about?**

My man T Slack is like the king of tracking people down and getting them on your record, so he made that happen. I have them on two joints actually: one with Dwele which will be out soon, and then Phonte is on another song on my album with Elzhi from Slum Village and the song is produced by 9th Wonder.

**Any other collaborations for your upcoming album?**

Just know that it will be the most classic album to ever come out of Canada. I rarely pat myself on the back, but this one is well deserved.

**Rumour has it you've signed to Universal. Is this true?**

Nope.

**Do you think being on *Degrassi* has helped build interest in you as a rapper?**

I think it will peak people's interest and reassure the labels that they have to spend less money on marketing for my project.

**Do Jimmy and Drake have anything in common?**

We are completely different. I always feel like I am playing a character on that show because I don't talk or act in the same manner as Jimmy.

**Who do you see as your fanbase? Would you say there is a strong focus on teen girls who are fans of *Degrassi*?**

My fans are going to be plucked from different brackets because of my music and my image. I could tour with The Roots or I could hop on The Scream Tour and rock both crowds properly. I am confident in that.

**Are you worried about being taken seriously as a rapper coming from an acting background, especially coming from a teen drama?**

I think the music will speak for itself. Maybe if I was making dopeboy music or trying to rap about the murders I have carried out in the last few years then I would be dismissed. I like that people underestimate and doubt me, it makes for the best faces on execs whenever I take a label meeting — I wish I had a camera.

**Do you think it's possible to be successful at both music and acting?**

I plan to win a Grammy and an Oscar in the same year like Jamie [Foxx] did. I love both of them and I will try my best to balance it and make it work. 🍏

Thomas Quinlan

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