**JESHI**

By Dan Hancox

Simultaneously tongue-in-cheek and deadly serious, Jeshi is speaking a hundred miles an hour, and explaining his ambitious plan to unite the disparate tribes of London.

“I want 13-year-olds who binge-watch Link Up TV to be able to also fuck with my music, as well art students hungry for genre-bending sounds, and people my nan’s age who just listen to Marvin Gaye - bring everyone together. It’s about balancing the world I was in when I was a teenager, hanging out on an estate all day, seeing loads of fucked up shit, and now, sitting at home watching Wes Anderson movies,” he laughs. “These worlds never mix, which is a shame.”

Growing up in Walthamstow in east London in the early 2000s, Jeshi’s childhood was soundtracked by the likes of the Neptunes, Eminem, and Erykah Badu - ripping his mum’s CDs, paying devoted attention to MTV, and blue-toothing Giggs’ underground tracks with his friends. When he was 11, he discovered legendary grime and UK rap cable station Channel U and was drawn to its DIY, low-budget aesthetic. “Because it was kids like me in the videos, it felt very accessible - like anyone could do it”.

From the start of secondary school, there were kids around him making music, hanging out in the local area, or at school, and he started writing lyrics. “These were grime tracks with like, ten kids doing 8-bar raps over Stimpy and Screwface instrumentals - pretty basic stuff, obviously, but it kind of blew my mind. We used to stand outside, really late at night on this estate, and just rap to each other, playing beats off of a shitty Sony Ericsson. We probably *sounded*ridiculous,” he laughs - but he learned a lot.

The DIY spirit continued to inspire Jeshi, and in his early teens, he and his friends would use whatever they could to make music. He set up his first ‘studio’ in his house - using his Nintendo Wii USB microphone from a karaoke game plugged straight into a desktop PC for recording. He learned how to mix on Cubase from a friend’s older brother, used instrumentals he’d ripped off YouTube, and they were away. He was full of cocky confidence, and made a £50 bet with a girl at school he’d be a millionaire rapper by the time he was 16 - that never materialised, but instead, Jeshi found his own voice.

His musical horizons broadened later in his teens, to take in stranger glitchy electronic music - hearing Toro Y Moi’s ‘So Many Details’ at college was a game-changer. That along with seeing Lana del Rey’s ‘Video Games’ video with their rough-hewn, rap-esque aesthetics and production, were the launchpads to dive into whole new worlds of music. For the first time, Jeshi felt liberated to work outside of the social norms built around him, exploring and experimenting and culminating in the freewheeling, unique rap sound he is known for now.

After this epiphany, what he came up with was a stark and unsettling debut EP, 2016’s glitchy and paranoid Pussy Palace. “I liked it because it didn't sit in the vein of typical rap music. I didn't really know what I wanted to be, or how I wanted to sound - I just knew I didn't want it to be like everything else,” he recalls. The following year, a 7-track EP, The Worlds Spinning Too Fast, garnered more plaudits, and solidified Jeshi’s reputation for enigmatic, captivating storytelling and disarming honesty. Receiving a flurry of press attention from the likes of Wonderland Magazine, Fader, Notion, i-D and Clash for his high-profile link-up with Mura Masa on the “dark and stormy” single Paranoid, after the pair began chatting online. Acclaimed sessions for Colors, Boiler Room and NTS followed.

“I don’t really care about a rapper’s skill of rhyming complexities together, or someone's vocal ability too much, I want them to say something *that resonates*. And that could be as simple as telling me that you're sitting on the sofa, smoking a cigarette and watching TV - the point is it’s real, and you're telling me something about yourself.”

In 2019 he toured with like-minded renegade Slowthai, and, and saw the release of ‘Summer’, a sultry, low-rumbling 2019 collaboration with Celeste has racked up over a million Spotify plays. But 2019 mostly saw deep, productive studio time, and a wealth of new material is now ready for release. Celeste also features on Jeshi’s new EP, Bad Taste, which is slated for release later in the spring of 2020 - a perfect concoction of blitzed bangers and unconventional, mind-bending detours through the young rapper’s vivid take on the world. It will be preceded by new single Same Songs, and accompanied by a new flurry of live shows. “I love bringing together weird reference points,” he reflects - “things that don’t seem like they belong together. Bad Taste sits in that sweet spot for me.”