



Photo: Christina Stefanski

The furthest point from the origin...

The always-original Buck 65 tells us why it's not easy being original



Live Photos: Shannon Webb-Campbell

... is the origin.

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Rich Terfry grins into the MuchMusic camera to record a clip for *Going Coastal*. He places his hands on his hips in cowboy stance and, in his signature husky voice, announces to the world, "This is Buck 65 comin' at ya, live from the Khyber in Halifax." His eyes shift as he glances down Barrington Street — a former stomping ground that has certainly changed in his absence, though obviously still quite familiar.

Terfry moved to Halifax from Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia over 15 years ago and got his first taste of exposure while hosting "The Bassment," a radio show on CKDU 97.5 FM.

He now returns to the city of trees as a signed recording artist with Warner Music Canada, and a new release to boot. *Secret House Against the World* displays the current views of Halifax's former local hip-hop hero, now as an older, more eclectic rhymers with a few more notches on his belt and torn stickers on his suitcase. His latest album integrates a broad stream of musical influences into a style and presentation that's difficult to categorize but undeniably Rich.

Despite gaining newfound recognition and international acclaim, Terfry's current approach to music has been questioned by many hip-hop fans whose expectations lean towards the Buck 65 they used to know.

The Gazette met with Buck 65 at the Khyber Centre for the Arts to discuss hip hop in Halifax and beyond, where he's been lately, and where he plans to go.

Gazette: What do you think about categorizing artists into musical genres?

Buck 65: People have a need for that. It has a lot to do with the way that the human mind works. We're only comfortable if we're able to compartmentalize our thoughts. This doesn't always work when you're talking about

people who have enough freedom in their thought and enough free will to go outside the parameters.

Gazette: How would you classify the genre of music that you make?

Buck 65: If you're trying to describe my music to someone who's never heard it before, and you say it's hip hop then that's not going to give them any indication of the sort of very important influence from folk music, country music, punk, etc. It's problematic for me, and it manifests itself in that it's difficult to find radio play or it becomes a question of where in the record store to put my record.

A couple years ago, I got nominated for a Juno Award in the alternative category — they didn't nominate me in the hip-hop category at all. I had mixed feelings about that. There was a part of me that was really flattered, but I also have a little residual heartbreak over that. There's a certain amount of glory that comes from being an outsider and there's also a little bit of insecurity.

Gazette: What is your reaction to the media labelling you as a hip-hop figure?

Buck 65: The first real lesson that I learned as I began to face the world outside of Canada with my music, was that I wasn't making "normal" hip-hop music and that my credibility as a real hip-hop artist was called into question right away. I saw that there was almost like a hostile reaction to everything about the way I was doing things — the way I looked, dressed, the records that I was sampling at that time, and what my influences were.

I think there are several different schools of thought when it comes to hip-hop music. It's really easy for university educated white people,

like myself and others, to intellectualize the music and say, "this is what makes [hip-hop music] healthy and interesting." Hip-hop music that comes from the ghetto in New York or L.A. is just one part of the story but there's so much more to it than that. If there are white people out there saying that I'm some sort of important hip-hop figure, they're just way off base.

A lot of people have these idealized visions of hip-hop where everyone's welcome and graffiti writers, breakdancers, DJ's and emcees — no

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matter what they're doing and where they come from — can coexist side by side. It's a pipe dream. We're using this one word to sum up a very broad area of music, and it doesn't really work. We just can't get everyone to agree on it and I've basically given up trying.

Gazette: What responsibilities does the title of a hip-hop figure carry?

Buck 65: I have only one simple responsibility, and that is to continue to make music the way I'm making it and to be as honest about it as I possibly can, because I am very respectful of the politics that exist where a lot of people have the opinion that

maybe white people don't belong in the hip-hop world at all.

I'm not going to make any comments about any given performer out there, but it seems to me that if you get a person who is not from one particular cultural background, but who basically comes in and pretends that they are, that is appropriation people talk about in a negative way.

I'm not going to put on some weird offensive show and start affecting some kind of look, approach and tone of voice — and start talking about subject matter that has nothing to do with me — at the risk of offending people. I think it's a dangerous thing and I'm surprised that more people don't speak up on it.

I'm hoping that a certain message will be sent and that maybe it will turn on a person here or there. But I figure most of the statements that I could make about hip-hop music I make with my music. Being shunned by the greater hip-hop world at large, maybe there's a measure in the results of my work that do help in aiding that. I'll admit that it does make me feel good to know that there is a bit of an audience out there for what I do and that there's people out there that it strikes a chord with.

Gazette: What are your impressions about the difference between European and North American audiences?

Buck 65: Street credibility is strongly perpetuated in North America by the media. In Europe [people] have a different perspective on art and they just judge art on whether it's good or not. We judge it on what we define as "cool" at any given moment. For that matter, you stand a better chance of selling a lot of records in North America if you look good. The entertainment business as we used to know it in North America has been

completely replaced with the business of marketing in a lot of different ways that a lot of us consumers don't even recognize.

Gazette: Why are opportunities for hip-hop artists from Halifax limited?

Buck 65: Problems with the music business and network [in Canada] are intensified in the Maritime provinces. In Halifax, we have a great sense of community. If you get an idea in Halifax, you have the opportunity to find that immediate audience. We're very much overshadowed by the rest of this country. Canada is in the shadow of the United States, it's one hurdle after another that you have to overcome.

The solution is never going to lie in sitting around here and waiting for the world to show up on our doorstep. I myself waited for more than ten years for someone to show up here. I always had this belief that Halifax would become a city like New York with a great cultural focus on it because there is so much talent here. It never happened — I think due to economic and political factors.

The difference between me and some other people who made some records in this city is that the only choice you have is to go out beyond [Halifax]. I had to give my life up almost completely for the pursuit of music.

One thing that really bothers me, and this is a real syndrome that we have in this part of the world, someone might look at me in signing a major record deal and dismiss it. They will look at someone like me as a sell-out.

I'm out here in a lot of ways taking on a role for myself as an ambassador for Canadian music. It seems like the only way in certain circles that you'll ever have your efforts be respected is if you just stay where you are and never make a dime. There's a certain romantic glory in that. [It seems like] that's the only way that you can be credible in the eyes of a lot of people.