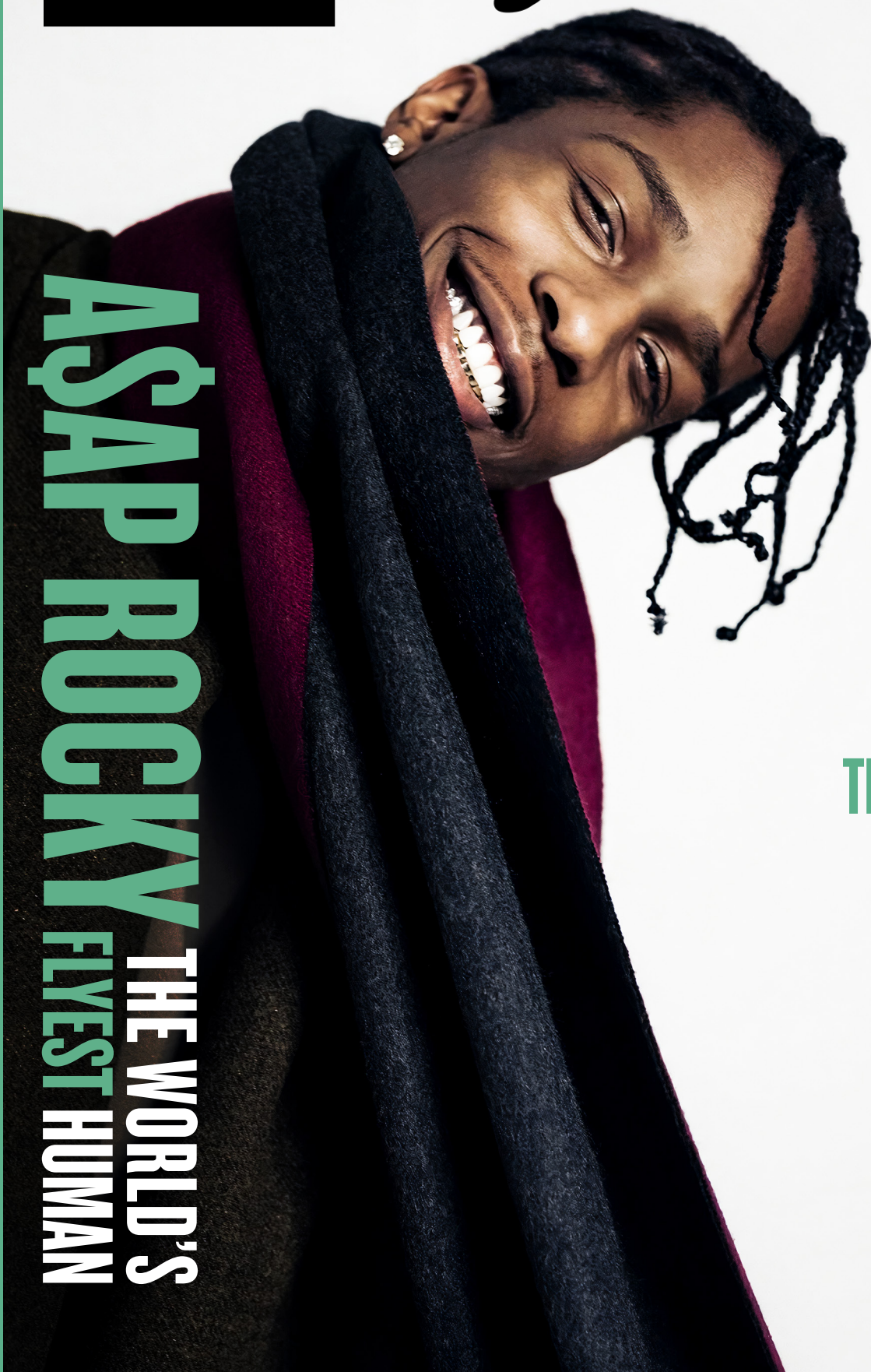


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A\$AP ROCKY

TALKS NEW ALBUM, UNDER ARMOUR DEAL, AND HIS DEEP LOVE FOR FLOWERS

Plus, Rocky answers questions from Raf Simons, André 3000, Mahershala Ali, and more for the cover of GQ Style's holiday issue.

By Will Welch
Photography by Robert Wunsch



Our interview with A\$AP Rocky was supposed to take place backstage after an A\$AP Mob concert in Philly, in a quiet, empty room, but in the moment, Rocky had a better idea. “We need to capture this chaos right here,” he said, gesturing around his dressing room, still packed with Mob members, girls, security guards, other unidentified loiterers, and even (according to A\$AP Ferg, anyway) a loose mouse. “Let’s embrace the chaos,” Rocky suggested. “Rolling Stones in 1967, feel me?”

He took his spot in the middle of a leather couch, surrounded by his old friends from Harlem—Ferg, Nast, Ant, and Twelvyy—and started methodically breaking down a small mound of weed as he spoke in a post-concert rasp. Every so often, he’d tease me for asking so many questions. But some of them he didn’t mind so much: GQ Style had collected them from a few of Rocky’s notable friends and admirers, with a promise of bringing back answers.

“WE NEED TO
CAPTURE THIS CHAOS
RIGHT HERE”

The chaos Rakim Mayers attracts is a result of his charisma, which is raw and uncut. It is el puro, perhaps the purest of any star in pop culture—Hollywood, music, fashion, whatever. And given that Rocky’s mom named him and his elder sister, Erika B. Mayers, after Eric B. & Rakim, it was only natural that a kid who seems to crank up the color saturation whenever he walks into a room would channel his God-given wattage into rap music. From the beginning, though, Rocky also established himself as a style innovator and made fashion an inextricable part of his music. In his breakout video, for “Peso,” he repped hard-edged, gothic-leaning streetwear like Black Scale, as well as more established avant-garde fashion like Rick Owens and Y3, while rapping, Raf Simons, Rick Owens usually what I’m dressed in. That was back in 2011, long before he cemented Simons’s unlikely hip-hop-icon status with the song “Raf” this July. It’s not a stretch to say Rocky is partially responsible for making European high fashion as much a part of hip-hop and pop culture as streetwear.

In the six years since he first appeared on YouTube, everything he’s touched has taken on a sort of magical flyness. He’s put out three successful solo albums; recorded hit songs like “L\$D,” “Yamborghini High” with the A\$AP Mob, and “Fuckin Problems” with Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and 2 Chainz; stole scenes in the



Pictured: A\$AP Rocky’s grill

surprise-hit indie film Dope, co-starring Shameik Moore; and launched a creative agency, called AWGE. Later this year, he’ll appear in Anthony Mandler’s Monster and he’ll begin a wide-ranging, long-term collaboration with Under Armour. He’s become a rap star, a fashion godhead, a music mogul, an actor, a designer-entrepreneur-influencer—a true creative in universes where everyone calls themselves creatives.

Now, after two years spent racking up all those hyphens, he is ready to return to the first thing that made him: rap music. But things are a little different this time. In January 2015, Rocky’s best friend, business partner, and mentor, A\$AP Yams, passed away in bed at his Brooklyn apartment from an accidental prescription-drug overdose. Rocky was there the night of Yams’s death and was among those who found him. A few months later, in May, Rocky released At.Long.Last.A\$AP; on the album cover, Rocky’s face bears Yams’s signature purplish red birthmark. This new album will be Rocky’s fourth, but his first ever made entirely without the guiding presence of Yams.

When we met in London for the GQ Style cover shoot, Rocky was deep in his work zone, trying to finish the record. He was keeping his phone turned off, more or less, so he could try to complete the LP before jumping to Milan for the Gucci runway show and then returning to the States for a long tour with the Mob. He’s 29 now—he’s seen a lot, and even his friends have questions about where he’s been and where he’s going next.

GQ Style: The first question comes from Mahershala Ali: “Considering you were named after Rakim, one of the greatest MCs of all time, what legendary MC would you name your child after?”

A\$AP Rocky: Wow, that’s a good one. Let me think on it.

You’re punting on the first question?

Yeah, but only because it’s so good.

All right, we’ll come back to it. The second question comes from Dior designer Kris Van Assche. You may have heard of him.

Rocky: Dior boys.

A\$AP Twelvyy: From Paris!

Kris asks, “What was a typical Friday or Saturday night out for you like when you were a teenager?”

A\$AP Ferg: Fighting in clubs.

Rocky: Oh, you want me to tell them the Santos story?

Ferg: You love telling that story.

Rocky: All right, one time in Santos [Party House, a New York City nightclub], it was like 2008. We took the train from Harlem. I had on this Marc Jacobs shirt, these D&G pants—’cause I was wearing D&G back then—and Marc Jacobs sneakers. Ferg, you had on the black Acne pants, with the blue jean jacket, and Nast, you had the blue jean jacket with the seam, with the black Acne pants, and the black Timbs, with the Super glasses on, with the ‘fro, ‘cause you was on your Jay-Z shit, trying to wolf up. A lot of A\$AP members were there that day. I’m a come clean, we was in the club, and A\$AP Bari was trying to talk to some dude’s girlfriend. Next thing you know, the dude got mad. He looked like some wrestling dude. He was big, with long hair. He’s like, “What?!” to everybody. We was like, “Yo, chill,” but he kept going crazy. So [Harlem-based visual artist] Jay West put him in a headlock, I snuffed him, he fell, everybody kicked him, we all dispersed, we ran.

A\$AP Nast: Let’s talk about the Ferg punches.

Rocky: Don’t forget about the Ferg punches! Ferg said, “Don’t touch my friend!” Boom, boom, boom! [laughter]

Ferg: I did not say that.

Rocky: That shit was echoing through the man’s body! When the dude got up, the first person he spot was me with the pink shirt on, so he just start charging, like a mad raging bull, and he grabbed my head. Now we on the motherfucking dance floor, fighting like females, pulling each other’s hair. I’m biting this motherfucker’s thumb and pinkie and shit, going crazy, snuffing him. This motherfucker must’ve been on mollies and liquor. Next thing you know, I just see feet running my way. Ferg came through. Nigga said, “Get off my friend!” Ferg was mad concerned. It was sincere. He was like, “Get off my friend!”

Ferg: I did not say that.

Rocky: So then, we all leave out the club. We outside. Your man, he was a manager of the club, so he come out, bugging out with his security guards. He throw ice at all of us and hops in a cab. We run down on the cab, take him out the cab, and start beating him up while we’re screaming “A\$AP!” So that’s how everybody knew us back then. Next question.

What’s your number one priority?

Right now, it’s music. Last year was businesses and developing all our new artists. Playboi Carti went platinum. Smooky MarGielaa is on the rise. Twelvyy album came out. A\$AP Ferg mixtape came out—he always got number ones and bangers. Nast, Addie, up

“PEOPLE ARE
SCARED TO TEST
NEW SOUNDS”

next. Cozy Tapes Vol. 2 is out right now. Now it’s all about me making music again.

What do you say to people who say that you’re “more fashion than music”?

I can see why they think that sometimes. I really wanted to take time out to show people I was an entrepreneur. I’m a businessman—you gotta take me serious. I can’t help that I look good doing it. But if you just look at my catalog from this year, everything I get on, I body. I’m selective about what I get on. I’m particular. I wasn’t really featuring with other artists. But this year, I’m showing niggas stop playing me, stop sleeping on me. I’m the god of this shit.

So when we saw you in London recently, you were on a phone-off lockdown, making an album. What was the vibe—the starting point for the new album?

My new album is really about testing new sounds. People are scared to test new sounds, so they go with what’s current ‘cause it’s the easy thing to do. The top 100 songs sound a certain way. People cater more to that because it’s a bigger demographic behind that, or it’s a guaranteed demographic behind that. I prefer to experiment and have my crowd grow with me and to reach new crowds. I don’t just rap—I actually make music. That’s why it takes time. These sonics represent me.

Did you go to London for the sound of London, or was it more just getting away so you could focus?

Both. London has a cool sound. I always record in London. But I needed to get away. London’s my second home.

When do you want to put the album out?

ASAP—no pun intended.

This year?

Yes, sir.

“MICHÈLE LAMY IS LIKE MY FAIRY GODMOM,”

Your travel schedule is intense. When you're always on the move, where's your center, or your home? Do you ever wake up in another hotel room and wonder, "Who am I?"

Fuck no. Sometimes I do wake up like, "Where the fuck am I?" But not "Who am I?" I'm the same nigga I was when I went to sleep.

You've had relationships with Dior and Gucci. You seem to have a personal relationship with Raf. How do you characterize those connections?

Sometimes it's business, and sometimes it's friendship. Raf had me flying out to Antwerp so I could smoke my weed and just catch a vibe with him back in 2012 and 2013. I've been looking at him and [Rick Owens's wife and muse] Michèle Lamy for advice. Michèle Lamy is like my fairy godmom.

What do you and Michèle talk about when it's not Paris Fashion Week double-kiss time?

Art. She's the reason I got all these diamonds in my mouth. She had hers since 1985. She puts me on. She tries to make me evolve as an artist. She encourages me to do more things outside of musical arts—more contemporary art. She taught me the difference between masters and Renaissance and contemporary and Pop art. It's been a journey. Raf, we talk about collections, we talk about his favorite scenes—what rave scenes inspired most of his career.

Do you talk with them about, like, feelings and personal stuff? Or is it mostly art and the industry?

Yeah, Michèle Lamy be hooking me up with all type of models—not all type of models, but her friends who she thinks is sweet. She says, "You need to meet her, she's a nice girl....," and I go meet her. They either crazy or nice.

Here's a question from Raf Simons.

Oh, it's lit.



Pictured: A\$AP Rocky with an A\$AP ring

"Dear Rakim—"

Oh, that's my guy. That's the lord right there, big bro.

"If you could not do what you're doing now, what would you do? What's another life dream of yours?"

If I wasn't doing this, to be real with you, I'd probably be an interior decorator.

Nast: You could be a florist.

Rocky: Yeah, I could. I have such good taste. I love flowers. I



Pictured: A\$AP Rocky posing

think decor value and feng shui is important. If not, I'd be a video director or a film director. But my whole life, I just wanted to be a rapper. That was it.

The Balenciaga sneakers that you wore in our shoot: They're a little controversial, and I would like to know why you like them.

I seen those early, and I like them 'cause they remind me of a Raf Simons sneaker, and on top of that, those shits are fire—

A\$AP Ant: Shit is trash—

Rocky: He's hating 'cause he got the fake Rick Owens Balenciaga shits. I don't fuck with them shits. I only fucks with the ones I got. I call 'em the Larry Davids, you feel me?

You've been wearing a lot of yellow recently—shoelaces, hoodies, et cetera. What's the deal?

You ask a lot of questions. I'm preparing for a final test, that's all.

Okay, well, the next question is from Shameik Moore.

That's my son.

"What advice do you have for getting more creative with your personal style?"

Nast: Wear what suits you and not what's trendy.

Rocky: Yeah, but when we wear stuff that suits us and not what's trendy, it becomes a trend. So that might be confusing for people.

I would just say that everybody's different. Everybody got different body shapes and whatnot, so I would say stick to what you know fits you best and what you feel comfortable in, even if it's not in style. Just wear whatever makes you feel cozy.

Nast: That's kind of what I just said.

Your creative group, AWGE: First of all, how do you pronounce it? Second of all, what is it?

Nast: That question we don't speak of.

Rocky: The first rule of AWGE is you never repeat what AWGE stands for. Second rule of AWGE is, whenever in doubt, refer to the first rule. So there you have it.

Is it not "A\$AP Worldwide Global Enterprises"?

Nah. You on some bullshit. That's sacred.

What have you learned about leadership since the Mob's rise into the public consciousness?

Fellowship. Brotherhood. I try to manifest leadership into anything I do as an entrepreneur, as a businessman. But when I'm doing music, it's the element with the brothers. We all lead by example and lead each other, so I lead and follow, too, you know?

You just announced a new deal with Under Armour. Why Under Armour? And what can we expect?

People would assume, with me going into a business deal with a sports brand, that it would be all about designing or curating a line—making things more lit. But what I liked about Kevin Plank, the CEO of Under Armour, was that he had a vision. He gives, gives, gives. When you donate or you do charities, it's not about showing people "Look, I'm doing this." I was in a shelter myself. And I know that when people be donating and shit, you ain't get no fly shit at Christmases and all that. You don't see no money. Pardon my French, but you don't see no money. So I really want to make a difference. So I got with Kevin and Under Armour so we could open up real rec centers with fly shit in them. Not hand-me-down toys and technology—new stuff. And programs for kids to learn to become entrepreneurs, designers, athletes. They can screen-print their own tees and sell 'em from the store, get that commission on it. I think it's smart. Those kids need laptops and phones today—that's their platform. So I want to do something that's really gonna make a difference, as opposed to fronting with the cameras like, "Ah, I'm doing this, doing that." We gonna show and prove when we go and design uniforms. We're gonna start in New York, the tristate area, 'cause that's where I'm from.

— A\$AP Rocky