

Salt Lake City-based rapper Unknown I grew up with a natural gravitation to music—his childhood was filled with the sounds of Tupac, and even if Unknown didn't understand all the themes of that kind of music at the time, the legendary rapper's musical presence inspired the young Unknown I to start writing poetry, stories and music of his own. Before reaching a real studio and real equipment, his first experiments in composing were low-tech, one-take products made with old cell phones to record and read lyrics off of while relying on a beat playing from the TV. He'd upload them to SoundCloud just to know what it would sound like. Jumping through all those hoops finally led him to real, professional production, though, and a shiny contemporary album by way of 2020's *Da Vinci*, a 12-track effort full of pop-forward beats and well-spit raps about the trials of living.

Unknown I also found early kinship in the rapper Big Pun, a fellow Puerto Rican. "We're a very proud people and embrace our culture to the fullest. Music is our culture!" he says of the famous rap figure. Unknown has, after all, split his life between living in Puerto Rico and SLC. "As a kid he inspired me to be the greatest lyricist, as opposed to a rapper." Since Big Pun reigned in the late '90s and early millennium and the motifs of that time are apparent in his sound, Unknown I takes instead the subtler qualities from that rapper's legacy, namely an appreciation for his complex lyricism, delivery, grammar and breath control. Unknown's style is faster, though, in a way that places him firmly in a contemporary world of rap music.

On songs like "Lost My Mind," his pacing is quick and changeable, but executed with audible ease, and on "Fears," he's rapid-fire, getting his words out as quickly as his thoughts are racing. As far as his effort to be a powerful lyricist, *Da Vinci* demonstrates that he knows himself well even in stressful times, and his delivery of that self-mythology is complemented by catchy production like that on "Lord Knows," a serious song where Unknown chases achievement despite obstacles. These are themes that he often comes back to, and if he's got any posture at all while rapping, it's bare honesty. He admits to that, explaining his approach to his music simply: "I'm telling my truth. That's something everybody can appreciate."