

CYPHER IN THE PARK

By Roberto "Rob" Camacho

In the often overlooked underground Hip-Hop scene of San Diego, few voices are as unique as that of Jesse Cannon; known by his stage name Tall Can. For the past several years Cannon has produced his own unique brand of music, blending genres, collaborating with producers from across the world and releasing a string of projects.

When not working on new music Cannon can be regularly seen at Chicano Park, hanging out with friends, chatting with elders and photographing the neighborhood. This month however, the local emcee will grace the park in a different capacity; as a performer for this year's lineup, at the 49th annual Chicano Park Day celebration. Over the course of the day's festivities; along with dozens of artists Cannon will rock the mic before one of his largest audiences yet at Chicano Park.

The twenty-eight-year-old emcee spent his youth bouncing back and forth between Barrio Logan, North Park and Encanto, where he cites much of the inspiration for his music.

"A lot of the time I spent running around doing dumb stuff as a teenager molded my sound, getting into certain aspects of life that I had no business in doing."

Coming of age in the early 2000's, Cannon took to rhyming and writing poetry in his early teens; mostly as a pastime amongst friends and other like-minded writers. His first foray into seriously producing music began ten years ago after the tragic death of his best friend Ramon "DUBS" Garcia Jr. to whom Cannon penned his first song in memoriam to his fallen comrade. Since then Cannon has released an illustrious string of albums, mixtape and EP's with producers and an assortment of different artists across San Diego's Underground Hip-Hop scene.

Brought up on boom-bap style production and the hardcore sounds of Hip-Hop's golden era, Tall Can cites artists such as Ice Cube, Dead Prez, Cypress Hill, Tupac, X-Raided and Brother Lynch Hung as prominent lyricists that influenced him growing up.

"It started with just listening to music that was out-

San Diego Emcee Tall Can Prepares for the Show of a Lifetime at Chicano Park Day



Photo by Brent E. Beltrán.

side of TV that wasn't on MTV and BET. I got a lot of inspiration from basically street music, the underground rap that doesn't make it to the television airwaves."

Cannon's music has been described as: underground, hardcore, old school and more but one thing it can never be categorized as is predictable. Constantly pushing boundaries Cannon has been crafting his own unique sound which he describes as "dusty Hip-Hop." "It's a term the homies and I came up with, something that's so underground nobody wants to touch it".

Sampling from a variety of different genres from psychedelic, eastern religious records, rare international music and cuts pulled from strange, obscure movie soundtracks; this sonic collage gives a dark, gritty, atmospheric quality to much of his music.

While Cannon's unique brand of Hip-Hop can be difficult to categorize, one could describe his music falling somewhere in-between combing the aesthetic of Style Wars, with the imagery of Altered States and the political social satire of They Live. Though his music frequently touches on a variety of political and social subtext that even many independent Hip-Hop artists are leery to address, Cannon is weary of the Conscious label being applied to his music. "People say conscious rap or whatever, I've heard the term used a lot but I feel like a lot of the music is still unconscious; I like to call it mediation music."

Cannon's challenges to the status quo are not just regulated to his lyrics in his music either. On top of being a member of Cop Watch, a local police

oversight organization that films/photographs police-stops; he also volunteers as anti-fascist security detail, along with other defense groups such as the Brown Berets for various community events. Most notably the volley of protests which took place in Chicano Park last year, after white nationalists staged an occupation in retaliation for a failed attempt several months prior.

In light of the rise of violent attacks committed by right-wing extremists and white supremacists Cannon stressed the importance of community defense; especially in neighborhoods like Barrio Logan.

“That park has been under attack from white nationalists ever since its founding,” Cannon said. “From the Alt-Right, to Neo-Nazis, to the Minutemen they’re all cowardly fools. Their missions have always been flunked or totally wrecked by the community. I think real community defense comes from building in the streets and listening to the folks that have been doing it for a long time like the Brown Berets”.

Cannon also lambasted the SDPD’s tepid response to handling white nationalist who threatened violence in contrast to peaceful park goers at Chicano

Park last year. “There’s plenty of cops that admire what happened that day and loved it, because they hate that park too,” Cannon said. “They’ve always treated the neighborhood like that, they wanted that park to be a California Highway Patrol substation and they still treat it as such.”

For now, however, Cannon is focused on preparing for his up-coming performance for Chicano Park Day. “I’m nervous as hell but, I feel like it’s going to be off the chain! It’s going to be an amazing day! The energy is going to be extremely high and elevated as it always is at that park. The other bands playing are way out of this world so it’s an honor to even be on the lineup!”

Likewise, Cannon also plans to debut brand new music to the public as well. Alongside DJ Pawps and producer Terry K, Cannon heads group Digital Dust Mites; which will debut music from their self-titled debut at Chicano Park Day as well.

Cannon concluded enthusiastically saying, “I like doing shows, the shows are where it’s at! The essence of music is live music and I can’t wait to perform a bunch of new stuff and make sure every word I say is heard when I’m there!”