

The Lyrics Mag Int'l



Transcript of an interview with DJ Humility of Rhythms FM 93.7MHz, Lagos, Nigeria Held at the Rhythms FM Studios in April 2008

May we meet you?

My names are Benedict Isimekwemuya Afagwu, also known as DJ Humility. I'm from Agbor in Delta state though I was born and bred in Lagos, mostly in Surulere. I attended Abimbola Gibson Memorial Primary School, Iyun road, Surulere. Started my secondary education at Stadium High school, also on Iyun road but completed it at Mobolaji Bank Anthony High school, Sabo, Yaba in 1997. I then entered the street, so to speak. I went to the school, the one they call School of Hard Knocks. That is to say, if they ask you which university I attended, just tell them, it is the School of Hard Knocks (laugh). And I think that is the biggest, most difficult school available (laugh again). I went in to learn the art of disk jockeying. This DJ thing.

How did you decide it was DJ you wanted to do?

'cos I felt that's my calling. I can't be a doctor. I cannot be a lawyer. I won't be able to do those. I sat down with my friends, and some said, "me, I'm going to be a doctor". "So you are going to be a doctor? Me, I'm going to be a DJ. So let me face my DJ thing." Actually there's a place called Plateaux Studio on Tejuosho, that was where I got my experience from DJ Funky Jay (Folafunmi Owolabi).

But something must have motivated you into wanting to become a DJ...

Yes, yes. Good. In 1993, there was this government crisis between Abiola and IBB. (June 12 Crisis?). Yes. That there was going to be war in Lagos, blah blah blah. Well, people from other parts of the country, they were running helter skelter. They were returning back. So this day, my dad said "ok," to my mum, "take my children and everybody to Delta, leave only me in Lagos." Then I didn't know anything about music. The only music I knew then was *Monica Monica* by *Junior and Pretty*. The song was like a National Anthem, you just have to know it, even if you don't know music. That doesn't make you a musician or music lover then. I just knew the song and travelled down to my village, spent like a month there.

While I was in the village, the song *Monica* had not gotten there. The song was so popular here in Lagos. People didn't know it my village yet! There I met my late cousin, Awinrin Ikedi, who was into music. He raps, sings. Right there in the village, he was well known, the happening guy. I was struck about them in the village. They were dressing well. Better than myself coming from Lagos. They even knew music more than I did. I hated myself. These people were meant to be village people and I was meant to be a Lagos boy. Well I didn't know about fashion, didn't know about music. I hated myself. You understand what I'm saying?

So I started moving out with my cousin. Whenever my younger brother and I were singing *Monica Monica*, they always freaked out. Wondering who was rapping in pidgin. Which one is pidgin rap? You know pidgin rap was strange to them. And my cousin was good at miming. He

mimed songs of Shabba Ranks, Chakka Demus & Pliers, music of that time. He sang them very well. One day, he asked me to teach him *Monica Monica*. So I told him, “you self, teach me *Shabba Ranks*, *Mr Lover man*.” That was how we got into writing. That was how I started. I learnt *Mr Loverman* while in the village and he was happy to learn *Monica Monica*.

So when we got to Lagos, then I was in JSS3. During (lunch) break time, everybody was playing, we started singing, “Mr loverman, shabba...” My classmates looked back at me, “continue now”. Then I started rapping the song. They were like, “Wao! Benedict, ah, ah, you know music! You know this song?” Then I played the song everybody were so happy, came our with drum-sets, you know, desks, sticks. So I was singing Shabba Ranks. That was how everything started. My seniors came in, “Benedict, you are good.” They started passing it round the school, “Benedict is now a singer.” Whenever we are doing Literary and Debating Society, doing like a get-together, they would called me to sing. Our teachers started knowing me. You know I became like a star in the school. Later some people started saying, “is it only Shabba Ranks that you can sing?” I started writing other lyrics. That was how I got into music. I started representing my school at Literary and Debating events, Press Club events and so on. I became a miming artists.

At what point did you change to DJ?

Yea, it was through this guy in my area called DJ Sinks (Sunday). He is late as well. He was a local DJ, cassette-to-cassette kind of thing. I walked up to him, said “you are a DJ, I’m a rapper. Watz up? Let’s do something together. We grew up together in this school, here in Surulere.” I started learning the DJ thing from him. I was actually like working with him: carry speakers, equipment for him. On this every day, we were having an event in the school and Sunday (DJ sinks) was supposed to play but he had problem with the police and I’ve collected money from the school, given him the money. There was nobody to play. People from other schools were in my school, Stadium High School. The president of Interact Club was like almost mad. “What’s happening? There are students here. Humility, where is Sinks? (Because I had started bearing the name. I got the name from my late cousin in the village. The full name is The Able Humility)” My fellow Interact Club members were like, “Where is the DJ?” So I just had to go and bring out the equipment. I didn’t know how to connect it. I had to look for a DJ that I knew to come and connect the equipment. He wanted to start playing; I said “No, I’d be the one to play.” When I didn’t even know anything, but trust me, that was how the whole thing stated.

That was when?

Uumm that was 93/94. But professionally, I started in 1995.

By professionally, what do you mean? That you started getting paid or what?

Not that I was getting paid. I was still doing it as a hobby, but then I was already moving out with professional DJs. I’ve known the job. And in fact, I was still in secondary school when I did my first professional DJ Championship, organised by *Fame Magazine* then. There used to be *Fame Music Awards* and *Fame DJ Competition* then.

Were you able to make any position?

Oh, I was too young. Just 17. I think I was 10th out of fourteen competing DJs. If I start telling you the story of how I did the competition, you will laugh. Then, I was learning under DJ Funky Jay, who was (and still is) a professional DJ. He was meant to take part in the competition. The form was sold for ₦100 but to watch the event as an outsider, you’d pay ₦200 gate fee. At ₦100, if you are participating, you are entitled to come in with one person as your record boy. I told my oga, “I’d like to go with you.” But he said, “No I already have one person. Lolade (as in, his brother) would go with me. Go and pay (gate fee) now.” I then hustled to get ₦100, bought the form, which would guarantee me entrance with an extra person. So when I got to the venue, I then saw somebody who was ready to pay ₦200. I called him, “bros, you can pay ₦150, I’ll take you in.” He said, “You this small boy?” I told him, “don’t worry,” collected the ₦150, choked it into my pocket (chuckles) and presented him as my record boy. They said, “You were too young!” I said ‘yes’.

MC was shouting, "DJ humility is in the building, he is the sixth contestant, blah blah blah." I was sweating. I had no records to do any competitions. Then one of my friends said, "Boy, go and do it. Take records from everybody." That was how I did the competition.

I was in the papers! Seventeen years old! I think I came out tenth out of fourteen of us.

That was worthwhile, at least, without any experience.

Yea, I had no experience. I only knew this was turntable. This was mixer. But I didn't even know how to mix. I just tried my best. The funniest thing was that at a point, I just played an instrumental and took the microphone and started rapping. Some people that were there were like, "but you were supposed to play not rap!" I said, "that's my style." It was like a comedy. I still did so many other competitions: Grandmaster Lees, DBN Mr Music & Video DJ Competition, came out second, Benson & Hedges Road Show competition, before I started working with the radio station, Rhythms 93.7 FM.

All these was while you lived with your parents. What was your parents attitude to your decision to be a DJ?

I'm still going to bring back from where I was coming from. My dad was so mad when I told him I wanted to become a DJ. He said, "D what? Are you mad? I'm sending you to school you are telling me you want to become a DJ!" My dad was so... you know (my dad was a policeman before he was killed three years ago). My dad was so crazy. I was having that problem with him. And I couldn't sleep outside. At that age, I was still in secondary school. But this very day, this very competition, I'd make up my mind, that come rain, come sunshine, I must go for the competition. At least, watch DJs perform. That day, I left home, got back home the following morning. My dad almost strangled me. He almost killed. I had to run from him. The competition happened on Thursday/Friday. That Friday, I couldn't go to school because my dad did not allow me to pick my uniform. Friday/Saturday, I had to sleep outside, on our corridor, somewhere in a car. You know in the barracks. My dad was looking for me. Anywhere he saw me, he would beat me. He said since I wanted to become an *Area Boy*, he was going to kill me. (That) I went to drink, I went to smoke, I was following *Area Boys*? And there was one thing with my dad, whatever anybody did to him, whatever any offence anybody committed to him, once it's Sunday morning, he would just forgive and forget. That was my dad. Once he has gone to church, he has forgotten. So that Friday night, I did not sleep at home. What I did was pass through the balcony, took my clothes. You know, climbed the one story building, picked my clothes. If there was any food in the house, my brothers would give it to me and I'd jump back again. You know, Saturday I did not sleep at home. Sunday morning they all went to church, I pass through the balcony and then took my clothes and went to church. So my dad saw me in the church putting offering. He was just looking at me. He didn't say anything. After church, I then entered the house. He didn't do anything. Throughout Sunday, if he needed to send anybody anything, he would just send my younger ones or any other person. If he needed to talk to me, he would tell my mum, "tell your son... woman, tell your son..." You understand what I'm saying.

Monday morning I went to school. Tuesday, that was the day *Fame Magazine* use to come out, I came back from school. Quite unusual, my dad normally came back from work 7 to 8 O'clock in the night, but this day, my father came back by six. When I saw him, my heart missed, "Gbrmm! men, this man is in today." He was calling me by my native name. "Isimekwenuya..." as in, he called it in full (laugh). Which means the day is good.

(Something nice was in the air)

Yea. "Isimekwenuya..." I said sir. "Come here my son". "My son?" I thought. "Come here, my son. Did you go to school today?" I said yes. "So you are a DJ. You are DJ humility?" He then brought out *Fame Magazine*, opened it. "Who is this? Is this not you?" I said, "En, en daddy, you see it. What did I tell you? This was the DJ thing I told but you never allowed me." He said, "en, en". Then he called my mother, said "come and see, come and see your son." My dad had bought like three copies of the paper, showing it to his friends.

How did it go? How did he know?

He said (that) while he was in the office, one of his colleagues called him and asked, “do you know any Benedict Afagwu?” He said, “I didn’t know him.” He denied me. Because, he then remembered I’d slept out and we were having problem at home, maybe I’d done something terrible. “You mean you don’t know any Benedict Afagwu?” My father said no. The man just brought out *Fame Magazine*. “You mean there is plenty of Benedict Afagwu?” My father went through the paper, ‘17years old, did wonderfully well at the DJs championship’. “That was my son!”

Since then my father just gave me full go-ahead and stood solidly behind me till his death.

Yours was a peculiar case. Maybe because of *Fame Magazine*, being a major magazine at that time. Seeing your face...

Yes. And when I got to school, I became a mega superstar. My teachers, everybody bought the magazine. I started going deep and deep into my DJ thing. That was how the whole thing started. After secondary school, it sound funny, you won’t believe me, I started writing exactly your kind magazine, lyrics magazine then. I and my friend called Lekan Ali, we called it *Awards Hits*. I think after *Hiphop World*, the next magazine then was *Award Hits*. We even had the faces of D1 and Kenny Ogungbe on it; D1 and Lauryn Hills holding each other. Then, D1 just came back to Nigeria from USA and started the Ray Power program with Kenny Ogungbe. It was D1 that personally gave me pictures. It was this guy that was sponsoring it then, Jude Ekwunife, the husband of Sandra Ekwunife (she used to be the editor of *Better Lovers Magazine* then), before we had financial problem after like six editions and stopped. It was so strenuous. How would I put it, I hail you guys that are still in this business doing it. I know the *wahala* and everything behind publications.

What can you tell parents? Is the profession attractive?

DJ is a professional job just like being a doctor or a lawyer. I am just a DJ. I don’t have any other job. With my DJ, I’ve been feeding my family. I’ve travelled almost round the world. I’ve been to US. I’ve been to UK. I’ve done so many events with United Nations, just DJing (deejaying). I would say it is a professional job and we are making money. I have people working for me, as P.A., managers, and some of them are graduates, you understand?

Yea, but some parents see it like a drop-out kind of job?

Yes, we were known to be drop-outs. People call us drop-outs. They think DJ profession is a drop-out. But thank God for DJ Jimmy Jatt who I personally call the icon of modern DJ in Nigeria, though there are other old DJs like Kola Baye, Grandmaster Lees. So many other old DJs, but Jimmy Jatt is the pioneer of modern DJ in Nigeria. People like Jimmy Jatt came out and changed the impression about DJs. Before then, DJs used to be kept somewhere away from the stage. Behind the curtain. But DJ Jimmy Jatt came out emphatic that his table had to be close to where the artistes were performing, if not on the stage. I used to watch him perform and say, “I wish to be like this man.” People like DJ Jimmy Jatt changed the impression about us, DJs, in Nigeria.

Are you married?

No.

But you are in a relationship?

Yes, strongly.

How does your girl friend take to your busy schedules? Passing night out of the house. Sometime out of town.

That’s the problem I always have with my supposed fiancé, I’m not always at home. Out of seven days, I’m at home for like three days. But that’s the job I do. I’m a DJ. I’m an entertainer. You don’t expect me to be at home. How would I make money if I’m always at home? There was no way I can make money. I make my money when I go to clubs to play, when I’m on radio sometimes on night duty on radio. Then if you don’t like me for that, it’s all good.

Maybe she's concerned of pressure from others girls, as a celebrity. How do you feel as a celebrity being approached by ladies?

I don't like calling myself a celebrity. I'm just known. I don't think I'm a celebrity. I know it takes a lot to be a celebrity I'm just a normal young boy. I'm just a street boy.

And still the normal young boy is being pestered by girls?

It's normal; if you know what you're doing. Remember, girl or the ladies, they are the ones that would yell your name, "DJ Humility should be the one to play at my party", "DJ humility should play at this show". And, you know, the girls, they are so important. When the girls say "it's DJ Humility o" the man would not even think twice. "Ok, let him come", because the lady has spoken. The ladies are there to bring you up and at the same time, vice-versa. So, as a young man, a young wise man, if you know where you are coming from, you should put it in your head that the same ladies that would promote you and bring you up, they are also the one that would take you down if you don't take your time. So you should balance it. Don't over-do it. You are with Angela today. You are with Monica tomorrow. You are killing yourselves. That would be your end.

One can guess that you don't have leisure time.

No, I don't really have except when I'm on leave. I'd just say "parties hold on. Let my boys played the parties. I'm going to UK to have a nice time or I'm going to US to relax for one month"

As a DJ, what gives you fulfilment?

When I see my people sweat. When I see my people shout in the club.

What would you say are the challenges for aspiring DJs?

DJing is all about being serious; know what you are doing, at the right time. You have to be punctual, your mode of dressing, the kind of clique you hang out with, your choice of music and yourself generally. The way you compose yourself. It's all about packaging. I'm not the best DJ in this country and I still say that, there are so many professional DJs that play better than me. I can name them. It is just that I am lucky and I'm following the trend professionally.

When was your most challenging moment in the business?

It was a year plus now (2007) when I played for His Excellency, Gbenga Daniel, the governor of Ogun state. You know what it is. I went with three mixers. Three amplifiers. My CD players were double. I went with everything in double. But when I got to Ogun state to play for the Honourable Gbenga Daniel, I just didn't know what happened, my mixer blew out. I brought another mixer, another problem again. I brought third mixer, music did not come out. You know what it means? I was battling to make sure I played, the mixers did not work. It had never happened to me throughout like twelve years that I've been doing my DJ thing. (Gov) Gbenga Daniel was standing in front of me, "DJ, play music. I want to dance." I started crying like a baby (laugh). I was only playing selection. People could not dance, because I could not mix. It was one song after another. When I got home, the mixers were working. You may not believe it. It was funny. Wao! (Laugh). But throughout that night, people could not dance. It was my most challenging night. God knows why.

And the other side of it...

Yes, your most fulfilled moment?

That was when I played for more than 35,000 crowd in Sierra Leone. At Freetown National Stadium. I was like, "yes, I'm fulfilled." Leaving my country to another man's country and people are shouting, jumping. It was a united national event. I felt so fulfilled.

When do we expect your album?

I'm working on my Mix Tape. I have good Nigerian artistes that I won't want to name that are going to be on my Mix-Tape.

Who is your favourite artiste?

Well, talking about Nigerian, D'Banj is still holding it down. D'Banj is great I think. He's been dropping hits. That makes an artiste. Once you drop hits. All your songs are hits. That makes you a good artiste. D'Banj is my favourite.

Your review of Nigerian music scene

Nigerian music is growing. That's my view. This is not the way Nigerian music used to be way back. Some years back, when I was still a baby boy, I know we had some quality songs. That was because there were records labels based in Nigeria like Tabassi Records, AB Records, Sony Music. They were all here in Nigeria and they waxed good music because the *oyibos*, let me put it that way, they were actively involved in Nigerian music. So, we were having good productions. But all of a sudden, everything changed. During the '90s, there were not good music productions. Recently, everybody has stepped up and they have been bringing in equipment for good music production. I must say Nigerian music industry is growing fast.

How would you rate the level of corporate sponsorship of musical events and publications in Nigeria now?

It's not been easy though. But right now, we started having some positive responses. Let me put it like 30, 40 percent. It's not yet 50%. It's not yet 60, 70, or even 100%. People still don't know the relevance of music. They don't know the relevance of entertainment. In US, you see corporate bodies 'fight' to sponsor an event. But here in Nigeria, reverse is the case. We go and beg. We 'kneel' down. In the US, they fight to be the major sponsor of any event, once it is related to entertainment. That's the reason why I said we've not achieved that stage fully now.

So, what would you tell corporate organisation?

They should see entertainment as something that is strong, that they need to invest in. Ordinary Ghana, they are investing into music. In Nigeria here, we don't have a standard performing ground, where people can do shows. We don't have a place where we can throw real shows. Corporate bodies need to come in. They'll make more money in entertainment. But they don't know.

Let them come and sponsor my DJ events too. There is big deal in it too. We have a DJ show, just like Comedy Night, Music Night. Corporate bodies should come in and sponsor.

The DJ show, is it open to everybody?

It is open to everybody. We have the first show, we called that "Night of the DJs". We are now remodifying it to street DJs where every DJ, everybody can come. We also have the one we do in Decembers. The last one was done on Dec 28th, we called that one "Classic DJs". It's for selected DJs and for selected people. It is strictly by invitation

Your projection of Nigerian music industry in the next ten, fifteen years.

Next ten to fifteen years, Nigeria is gonna be great. People are beginning to understand entertainment. So I'm so sure, people would have had that full knowledge of entertainment. Nigeria is like the next place here in Africa. Everybody is always looking up to Nigeria, after SA (South Africa). In the next ten, fifteen years, I see Nigeria go places.

Something for your fans?

I'm one of the nominees for the NEA Awards Best DJs, coming up on June 21st in New York City at Skyballs Performing Centre. Nigerians should go and vote for your boy. Check the website (www.nea2008.com, go to DJ category), vote for DJ Humility. It is Nigerian Entertainment Award but based in USA. (The category is for) Nigerian DJs all over the world. I am representing Nigerian DJs in Nigeria. We have Nigerian DJ in the US, DJ Mighty Mike. We have Nigerian DJ in the UK, DJ Suzie, etc. I'm representing home, *Omo Ile*. Naijas, vote for me and let me come back with the crown as the Nigerian's World Best DJ.

We appreciate your time with us

Thank you.

Further Enquiries

Website: www.thelyricsmag.com

Email: info@thelyricsmag.com, editor@thelyricsmag.com