

Rapper-Actor David Banner Makes Campus Tour

Contributed by Gregory Brand Jr. and Megan Kennedy
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Former SGA president promotes upcoming album

Hip-hop superstar and HBCU alumnus David Banner is in the midst of a cross-country promotional tour for his new album, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, which hits shelves June 3. His new single "Get Like Me" is available now for download on iTunes.

The multi-talented star, who recently filmed four movies, said he is ready to switch his focus back to music. Banner had a role in the hit holiday movie "This Christmas" that starred R&B artist Chris Brown, who is also featured on Banner's new single.

Banner's new album features some of hip-hop's masters.

"It was an honor to collaborate with Snoop. (Lil) Wayne is a genius, and Chris Brown is a hard worker," Banner said. "I enjoy working with everyone I collaborate with, otherwise I wouldn't do it."

Banner cited his struggle as the inspiration for the new album.

"Coming from the streets of Mississippi and rising up from that, I think my life is the greatest story ever told," he said.

Banner earned a B.A. in business from Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., where he was president of the Student Government Association.

Because the album is based on his life, he said he's not worried about the reception of it.

"Nothing would be a disappointment after all I've been through," he said. "Some people may not get what I'm trying to do, but my life is too good to worry about that. There are people in Africa who can't eat."

Banner recently stopped by Tennessee State University to talk about the album.

After a quick round in the TSU student center, Banner and a small entourage made their way into WTST The Blaze's control room for a round of interviewing that gave listeners and WTST staff a rare glimpse into the inner workings of a person that just happens to be an artist.

Student cameras swarmed about him as he lowered himself into a chair in the radio station control room, surrounded by half painted walls, a row of microphones and a wall of soundboards. He seemed right at home and eager to answer questions. He mentioned that he is honored by the support and attention that has been given to him on campus. He is, after all, an HBCU alum himself.

"We're just out here to show love," Banner said. "I made a pledge to do better than the artists that used to not show any love when I was in school."

At the radio station, Banner was interviewed by popular TSU morning show host Sherman 'Sherm Murda' Murdock, Alona Stafford, and Meter reporter Gregory Brand Jr.

In person, the rapper is smaller and slighter than his over-the-top album covers suggest, which can be attributed to an admitted 50-lb weight loss.

Though he said that he began trimming his body because of concern for his health, he also jokingly added that, "It has also given a boost to his connection with the ladies."

He used the opportunity to talk about his life following his graduation from college, and how he was homeless before finding his calling in music. He even went on to say he spent some time depressed as well.

"You can't be a soldier for God until you go through boot camp," he said.

He takes both his current blessings and past struggles as a part of his development as a complete person. Shifting from almost preaching to the listeners and staff, he talked about how his conscious decisions help to improve his life.

"I had to get new management, and even a new crew," Banner said. "If you weren't trying to do right I had to cut you loose."

He also discussed the present state of hip-hop and black people in general.

"Our generation is a generation of cowards. We only want to fight ourselves. We'll confront rappers and rap music but no real issues."

To shift the blame of violence away from hip hop, Banner spoke at the House Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee hearing in September. At the hearing, Banner pointed out that his hometown of Jackson, Miss., is one of the most violent neighborhoods in the country. He said music kept him out of the trouble he may have otherwise been drawn to.

"When I would get angry and would want revenge, I would listen to 2Pac," he said. "His anger in the song would replace my anger and I would live vicariously through his music."

Banner said he doesn't believe violence comes from art, but rather art can be an outlet that keeps anger from being expressed through violence.

Banner used this outlet to overcome the temptations of his hometown. He rose above violence to not only attend Southern University, but to lead it. As Student Government Association president of the university, Banner said he gained experiences that helped him achieve fame.

"Being SGA president, I was taught how to network," he said. "I also gained the ability to influence a large mass of people. It showed me that if you invest yourself in power, power will invest in you."

Banner also said he believes Historically Black Colleges and Universities should be small schools serve as the foundation of the black community.

"We have a different history, and we should be proud of it," he said.

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