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Rising Music Star CHEROKEE THE CHIEF On The Five Things You Need To Shine In The Music Industry

An Interview With Elana Cohen



Elana Cohen

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As *a part of our interview series with leaders, stars, and rising stars in the music industry, we had the distinct pleasure of interviewing CHEROKEE THE CHIEF.*

CHEROKEE THE CHIEF is an American Emcee and songwriter. Her career in entertainment began at a young age when she was inspired by a family of writers and mentors that sited her artistic abilities. Her breakout single "Moon Shadows", which was released Friday July 7th, 2023, is from her forthcoming debut album "Jazzmatikk " and has had the critics raving about her, calling her the one to watch.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to learn a bit about your “origin story”. Can you tell us the story of how you grew up?

I was born in North Hollywood, California.

My mother is a poet and also managed musicians in the past, so I grew up in the recording studio, I'd be 2 years old thumb in my mouth bopping my head to the beats. The studio has always felt like home to me. I innately knew how much performing made me feel alive, happy and useful so I was on the dance team in every level of grade school kindergarten, middle and high school. My mom always supported me as a creative and facilitated a safe space for me to express myself. Actually, when I wrote my first full rap, I hid it because it was definitely inappropriate for a young teen. She found it, although she was upset there was no denying how great it was. From that point on we all knew this was what I was truly going to do.

Can you share a story with us about what brought you to this specific career path?

From the first day I could talk I jumped into the arts. Around the age of 4 I took acting classes with Betty Bridges who has coached many successful acts such as Nia Long. Once my parents split up my mom and I were unable to afford my acting classes so that did put a temporary halt on that craft nonetheless, the many things I learned while there I applied to dance, music, fashion and all the methods in which I express who I am today. Growing up my mom always bought me notebooks and I'd write thoughts, ideas, and eventually full songs in them. I didn't overthink it it's just who I

am, was born to be and what I inevitably started working to become professional at.

Can you tell us the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

I would say the most interesting occurrence since I began my career was my artist development period with the Trackmasters. It was a wild time. I had just quit being a receptionist to fully jump into my artistry. I was door dashing for every cent and super skinny because I didn't have money to eat all the time. I would door dash all day and then go to the studio for hourly blocks to study music history, write and record. It was such a thrill. It taught me that circumstances don't dictate what you can do if you have that inner drive. That was a pivotal moment in my career.

It has been said that sometimes our mistakes can be our greatest teachers. Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

I would say the funniest mistake I've made when I first started recording was working with an engineer that didn't know what they were doing. They would still charge me by the hour while they were figuring out whatever they were trying to figure out. It took my mom saying you've been there almost 5 times, where is the music. At that point we hadn't finished anything listenable and of course I stopped going to that engineer right then and there.

I would say, especially if you are young, an adult should always be present to make sure that everyone apart of the team/process is qualified and that things are actually getting done in a professional manner.

None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

I've had many mentors, too many to name in this moment. I'll have to say this reward belongs to my parents. They have showered me with love, support and invested in me throughout my journey thus far. They have sacrificed so much just so I can comfortably pursue my dreams. They are my biggest motivators and motivation. The times certain situations had the potential to steal my joy, they were right there with words of encouragement and a list of all the ways I could salvage the challenge. Family is everything and I wouldn't be at this point without that anchor.

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

I would say the quote "The reward is the walk not the destination". It keeps me present and grateful for the opportunity to live my dreams daily. I am a star every day because what we seek, we already possess. No matter what your career path is, when you believe it will happen then it will. You should live every day as if you've already achieved what you are working towards. I do just that and it works wonders.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now?

I am currently wrapping up my debut album "Jazzmatikk" set to be released in August which is hip-hop, and jazz infused. My family is from Kansas City Missouri, so the jazz roots run deep. To put this body of work together and showcase my take on two of my favorite genres has been the best time ever. I was able to work with the Jazz veteran Sonji Kimmons and so many great musicians that have shared their expertise and contributions to make this

project a masterpiece. I'm progressive so I know what the next five projects are going to be but for now let's let this jazz sink in.

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We are very interested in diversity in the entertainment industry. Can you share three reasons with our readers about why you think it's important to have diversity represented in music, film, and television? How can that potentially affect our culture?

I truly believe each one of us as individuals is different and unique. We all have something valuable to bring to the landscape. If everything was the same this would be an extremely boring life so you're almost doing an injustice by not showing up. Exploiting your abilities could inspire others that look like you, change the game as we know it and set the tone. The kids are the future and they're watching us, what we do now has a major influence on our culture and beyond.





What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why?

For starters, extreme perfectionism leads to extreme procrastination and time wastage. People want to grow with you. Just come on out already. Overthinking led to years of me recording and not putting anything out because it wasn't “perfect”, then I'd play my old catalogue and I'd get the same look from every listener. The “Are you crazy you'd be on by now if you were releasing this”.

Second would be that no one cares about your career more than you, so you need to be self-reliant and not expect anything from anyone you wouldn't expect from yourself.

Before I knew you should always leave the studio with your sessions in your possession, I naively did not do that. My first two singles were poorly mixed because the producer mysteriously lost my sessions, and we couldn't get a good mix with no stems. This is your intellectual property we are talking about. Learn the game and protect your lively hood.

Third, it's critical to remove yourself from anyone that does not believe in what you are doing, you need nothing but optimism and positivity around you on this journey.

I once had a relative give me a compliment on my art and followed that with a “I just want you to have a plan B”. That truly irked me to the core because

this is what I was born to be, and it was so disheartening that they had the audacity to say that. I blocked them, started setting boundaries and now take pride in the fact that everyone I allow in my life (family included) truly supports my mission.

I would say that the only place for feelings in this industry is in your music. You need to be a warrior and not take things personal because this is in fact a Business.

Fourth, it's natural to expect a certain responses or actions from someone that you've grown close to or fond of but in this industry friendship and money are on opposite sides of the spectrum and being friends does not mean anything when it comes to the nitty gritty.

The last thing I wish someone told me when first starting out was how much influence you have over someone's life. It's bigger than you. Luckily in my teens when I first started recording it wasn't published and no one heard that mess. I know now that I needed to grow in my experiences and vocabulary to be on the level I am today. Words are powerful so if you get on that mic and you're talking a bunch of mumbo jumbo you aren't taking advantage of the gift that is the power of a voice.

Which tips would you recommend to your colleagues in your industry to help them to thrive and not “burn out”?

I would say learn to rest, learn how to say no and to incorporate some fun in your schedule. There was a point in my life where I was just working and that's all I did. I enjoy what I do so it doesn't feel like work but I wasn't making the time to do anything outside of that. Once a relative asked me what you do for fun outside of my music and I just instantly cried because in that moment I realized that I had deprived myself of anything else. You still

must have fun as you pursue your goals, and you have to live life to become a better artist. Life is going to give you inspiration.

You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

My Family and I have always made it a point to assist the homeless in any way we can. It's the small gestures that matter. If I go out to eat and have unfinished food, I package it with to-go utensils and I'll either sit it on a bench or offer it to someone. I would say grocery stores and restaurants should allocate a few meals a day to the local less fortunate. Once in the position to do so on a larger scale, providing food, hygiene and resources to those in need will be an ongoing effort from my team.

Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)

That's easy, Rui Hachimura. I just love him and his disposition. I followed him from Gonzaga and happened to randomly be walking into a restaurant one day after hiking and looked up at the screen and there he was being drafted. It was such a proud moment to see someone accomplish the dreams they've been working so hard for. It inspires you to continue pursuing your own dreams.

How can our readers follow you online?

You can find me directly on my website www.Cherokeethechief.com as well as on all streaming platforms, YouTube and Instagram under CHEROKEE THE CHIEF.

This was very meaningful, thank you so much! We wish you continued success!

It was truly an honor, and I am so grateful for your time thank you for the opportunity.

Photographer: Mike McPherson

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Written by Elana Cohen

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Elana Cohen is a freelance writer based in Chicago. She covers entertainment and music



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