

Vermont Arts Council

Transcript

Vermont Made, Episode 10

“A Twenty-year Legacy in Vermont Hip Hop with Boomslang”

This document is available in large print upon request.

Desmond Peeples: (00:04)

This is Vermont Made, the show where Vermont creatives tell me, Desmond Peeples, all about something they've made. For this episode I invited Dustin Byerly, a.k.a. MC Sed One of the Montpelier-based hip-hop group Boomslang, to join me at the Vermont Arts Council offices to talk about Boomslang's recent work. Their third album, Boomslang III, was just released in October of this year featuring collaborators from across Vermont's hip-hop scene. Now in progress is their final album after performing and recording for nearly 20 years, Boomslang Forever, expected in late 2023 or early 2024 and supported by an Arts Council Creation Grant.

This next album will be Boomslang's final because one half of the group, Johnny Morris performing as JL, died of brain cancer on September 3, 2021. Working posthumously with Johnny's last beats to produce Boomslang Forever, Dustin hopes the album will honor and spread the legacy of a talented force in Vermont hip-hop, and a friend gone too soon.

Dustin and I dig into how Vermont hip-hop has changed over 20 years, what it's like to collaborate on tracks remotely, the healing potential of music, and more--and I even got to use my DJ skills to layer in some samples from Boomslang III.

[Music playing: Heart thumping

Beat bumping loud

Bass you can taste

Just a face in the crowd

How'd it happen

It doesn't matter much

One look all it took

It was too hot to touch

Come on

Fire]

Sed One: (01:45)

So let's flash back to 1998. I was a student at Goddard College studying creative writing, poetry, literature, loving it, digging deep into all of it. And also sort of disenchanted by what I saw as sort of a really stagnant scene, as far as live performances go. Even the most incredible poets would just be reading out of their books, like nothing, no energy, not memorized, not looking at the audience, or really not a performance, more of a recitation. That wasn't working for me.

Slam poetry, a little closer. I like this. There's more energy. People memorize their work, they're performing to a crowd and looking for feedback and interaction, but sort of lost me with the competition, voting. That side of it didn't quite feel right to me, and it sort of got really stale and formulaic as well. So I'm still looking, like, "Where is my community where I can do the creative writing, the poetry that I'm doing in a way that I really feel connects with people and moves them?"

And I just happened to happen upon, and I should say, I grew up on hip hop. I'm born in '78, came up in the '80s. Hip hop was brand new, in your

face everywhere. And I loved it. And I was so drawn to it. And living in a postindustrial steel town working class, my parents really didn't shy away from it. My first tape that I owned in 1985 was Run DMC, Raising Hell.

Desmond Peeples: (03:17)

Where did you grow up?

Sed One: (03:18)

I grew up right outside of Pittsburgh. So Butler County in this area, postindustrial steel towns struggling to get by at best, and not really super exposed to hip hop or diversity in general. So hip hop on the TV and then the radio was a really new sound and experience for my family, but I just grew up on it and loved it. But sort of fell out of it when gangster music completely took over, and that sort of commercialization era of hip hop. And I heard Talib Kweli's Reflection Eternal and Mos Def's Black on Both Sides in the same week. I think I bought those albums in the same week. And it sort of reminded me that hip hop was this dynamic force for change, and that it was a real vehicle for poetic expression and sort of lyrical innovation. And it sort of resparked this love I had for hip hop. And in that moment I decided that I wanted to be making that type of music. That's what I wanted to do with my words. That's what I wanted to do with my poetry. And I just jumped into it. Only problem was, I didn't know anybody who was making hip hop music. I was sort of in this little poetic cocoon. And so we started looking, and I combined with a good friend of mine, David, who was a student at Goddard as well. He lived up on East Hill. And we basically just made a rap group out of nothing. No beats, no equipment, no gear. We were basically like a conga drum and like some good ideas. Maybe they were bad, hard to tell. But at some point someone said, "Oh, there's this guy in Montpelier who makes hip hop beats. You guys should

connect with him." We're like, "That's fantastic, let's do it." And I was like, "What's his name? We don't know, but we do know his girlfriend's a yoga instructor." I was like, "All right, challenge accepted." So we went around Montpelier and Plainfield collecting slips of paper off bulletin boards. No internet. You couldn't really search "yoga instructor Montpelier" in '98, '99. It wasn't going to get you very far.

Desmond Peeples: (05:23)

This is your only clue to find out who this is.

Sed One: (05:24)

This is it. We got one clue, one clue, one clue. This is actually more like 2002, I'm sorry, after college, coming back around again. Anyways, so we pull all the slips of paper and we just start calling people and calling people and calling people. And finally we get to Lindsay Armstrong, who was Johnny's wife, and she says, "Oh, that's my boyfriend. He makes hip hop beats. You should come over." So we went over that night. He played about 10 beats for us. The next day I was in the studio recording with him.

That was 2004. And so here we are, 2022, 18 years later, and we're still going at it. Johnny and I just linked immediately, I loved the sound he was putting out. All vinyl based hip hop samples being used in the beats, just had this warmth and this depth, and also this diversity of everything from funk to soul to blues to any type of sound, a flamenco guitar. Anything he heard was fair game to bring into the beats and the sounds. And it was sort of like every time he sent you a beat, you never knew what you were going to get. It was sort of this magic file you were going to open up. What sort of sonic rabbit hole did Johnny go down to create this next soundscape for me to try to figure out what's the story of it?

And a lot of hip hop producers get into a sort of super formulaic structure. You know exactly what it's going to sound like. You can hear it from anywhere, man. Every time I opened up something, it was a new adventure from that guy, and it kind of kept me on my toes, because you couldn't just do the same thing over and over again. You really had to figure out, "What is the story he's trying to tell here? What's he laying down?" At any rate...

Desmond Peeples: (07:11)

Now Johnny, you're no longer working with Johnny because he has passed. Can you tell me a little about...

Sed One: (07:21)

Yeah, I mean we put out Attack the Vampire in 2017. That was our second album, and we were super pumped to be doing it. It was so much fun, just like in the heart and the thick of the creative process, putting it out. And it was at that time that we realized something was going on with Johnny. Not really sure what it was exactly, but it quickly became revealed that he had a super rare and aggressive form of brain cancer, which is obviously pretty much the worst news you can ever get.

Took a hiatus from 2017 on. And Johnny really attended to family, got focused on getting treatment, doing what he needed to do. And we were really fortunate that the treatment and the procedures and the surgeries were all a wild success. And that he came out of them almost like better than ever in some ways, and really bounced back after that first round.

It was at that time that I reached out to him and I was like, what do you need to do? Do you want to make music? Do you want to focus on family? Where do you need your attention to be spent? Because I'm not going to push you to make music if you have other things you need to do.

His response was like, "Music is medicine. What would we be doing if we weren't doing that? How could we not make art? How could we not use the skills and talents we have to express what's within us?"

And I wasn't surprised that that was his answer, but it was still super moving. And he was in a position where he couldn't really work or drive, and the kids and wife were going to school every day. He had the studio open, and the time and the wherewithal to really get in there and make beats.

So we started really working on a third album, kind of two people who know that their time's limited. Every moment becomes sort of charged in this way that it wasn't before. Every beat that came through the email was different than it felt in the past. You got to seize this moment while you have it. And we put together our third album Boomslang III, really quickly actually, and it's our best work to date. We just released that on vinyl, had the album release party for it. Again, our best work to date, his best beats by far ever. Our good friends at Buch Spieler Records were supplying him with crates of records, and he happened to give him this box of soul and funk records right before he started the beats for Boomslang III. And the whole album is just funk drenched in soul, just like such sweet break beats and soundscapes.

Desmond Peeples: (10:05)

I do have the vinyl. I do have the vinyl. I really love, what's my favorite track? I think it's Just for Me.

Sed One: (10:11)

Oh yeah, Just for Me's good. Got that sort of disco soul sample in there.

Desmond Peeples: (10:15)

I love always the disco soul sample.

Sed One: (10:17)

No, he played that out. That's the second song, when I heard that sample, I was, "This album's out of control." I was like, "Let's do it."

Yeah, the third album was like a gift. I mean, it could have not happened. And in many ways it was like, I think, my experience working with someone who's terminally ill to create a project is, I think a lot of their life revolves around that illness, and people talking about that and managing it, and figuring out the appointments, and, "What are you going to do with X, Y, and Z and how are you going to...", these super challenging things.

And so my approach to using the music as medicine, back to that, was like, "I don't want to talk about any of that with you. If you want to talk about that, cool." But for me and Johnny, it was like, "Let's just talk music. Let's talk the album. Let's just keep going back. Where's this track at? What do we need to do? Who do we need to be in touch with?"

And that way we really used that album, I think, as a therapeutic process for him. Just, "This has nothing to do with sickness, right? This is all about creation." And in that way we really were able to, I think, make the album. The album reflects that this was an escape, this was an outlet, and it came out really well. It came out so well that we ended up having a lot of beats left. And we're talking about making another album. "Let's do one more." We felt like we had enough in the tank for one more album, and it quickly became clear that Johnny wasn't going to be able to see that album come to fruition.

And so we sat down in the studio and kind of like, "What do you want to do? Do you want me to proceed with this album that we've sort of started at least conceptually thinking about, or do you want to let it be?" And his answer was really like, "I want to make as much music as I can until I'm not here. And whatever we start, if you want to finish, that would be an amazing sort of gift to me and to others, to be able to carry on the project."

So it was that moment that I decided, "Yeah, let's do Boomslang Forever. Let's do the fourth album. Let's close this project out. Let's finish what we started and really make it sort of... put out that lasting piece, complete the legacy, and really share what Johnny had to offer with the world one more time."

Desmond Peeples: (12:48)

So let's talk a little bit about your collaborators in both, I know about in Attack the Vampire you worked with a lot of different folks across the Vermont hip hop scene. And you've talked about really how it was exciting to see the wide array of talent at the time. And then there's lots of collaborators on Boomslang III, as well. Are you going to be working... Well, I don't want to, right, let's just talk about-

Sed One: (13:16)

Yeah. No, let's talk about collaboration. I think collaboration in hip hop, in particular in the pandemic, we created this entire Boomslang thread. I know we keep talking about the record that's just come out, but I think it applies to the record that's about to be put together as well.

The pandemic changed the game for everybody. It doesn't matter what kind of art you made, visual artists, photographer, dancer, hip hop artist, poet, whoever you are, your practice was changed. And the incredible thing about it was, at least for a lot of our peers and a lot of the people we work with, the lack of physical venues, the lack of actual opportunities, turned into an actual boom in many ways, because you were forced to go, basically go to the lab and cook. And that's all we did. We got in the lab, we cooked up so much music, because we had nowhere to play, and no other outlets, and nothing to do.

And I know that that really was the catalyst for so many of the collaborations that you see on Boomslang III. We were able to work with Learic from The Aztext, ProNotes, music from The Aztext, two just legends in the Vermont hip hop scene. People we were looking up to when we started in 2004. It set the standard really high. We got to get Jarv on that record as well from the Maiden Voyage crew. Jarv was just blowing up doing his own thing. What an incredible hip hop artist.

My friend David, who goes by MC Bloom, was in the iteration before Boomslang, got to get him on the album, DJ Kanga on the album, Mavstar, a great friend on the album as well. Just so many folks. And really it was like everyone was looking for that outlet, and we had an album coming together, so bringing those people together was like creating community when you couldn't be together in person. And it was so important. Without that, I don't know how I would've survived that period of shutdown and lockdown, to be perfectly honest with you.

Desmond Peeples: (15:04)

So were you collaborating... You weren't all in studio together?

Sed One: (15:06)

Never.

Desmond Peeples: (15:07)

You were sending tracks to each other back and forth. What was that process like?

Sed One: (15:10)

So cool.

Desmond Peeples: (15:11)

Were you used to it or was that a new thing?

Sed One: (15:13)

No, very new. I mean, generally we would get in the studio, Johnny and I, and he'd have a beat, and I would start scribbling in a notebook, and before you knew it, we'd have the microphone on, and before you knew it, a song would come together. It was a very sort of in person process, also time consuming, because it takes time to have those revelations on paper, and in a different way when you have to sit within on your own time.

Johnny and I didn't get in the room together one time during the creation of that whole entire album. So it's a completely different process, and one that we really thrived in. I don't think we ever really realized how much we could do on our own, in between studio sessions.

So it really opened it up for me to just be like, "Boom, I'm just going to go. I'm going to write this song tonight. I'm going to record it tomorrow. I'm going to send it back to you in the morning." So for us, it really opened it up, and in a lot of ways, gave us more time to think more deeply about each track, because we weren't rushing to complete it in the time that we had together. We had to set up a whole week or whatever.

So I think the pandemic was a game changer for us, and changed my approach to production and creation forever. I don't need other people, I want them, I value them, but I have so much I can do on my own, that I can bring already fully formed, half formed or whatever to the table, so that we can just jump right in. It doesn't have to be starting with a blank slate in front of us.

And for me, that was a really new process piece for me. So yeah, I think collaboration going forward with Boomslang Forever, there's no secrets yet, other than to say that it's still cooking, it's still simmering. I have a pile of

beats, and it's really interesting, Johnny gave me this pile of beats before he passed, and he was like, "This is probably all the beats I'm ever going to give you."

It's heavy. Before that, for the last 18 years, it was a never ending stream of sonic soundscapes entering my inbox, always available. So many, I was just declining them right and left, like this connoisseur, waiting for the exact right flavor.

And all of a sudden he's handing me a flash drive with the message that this could be it, this might be your last pile of beats. And that's a really different experience. That's really final in so many ways. Opening each one of those beats up now, it's hard not to see them as, it's hard not to imagine the importance of the beat. Even the beat name, what was the one? I'll Wait for You was one of the beat names. Normally that wouldn't even strike me. All of a sudden it's like, "I'll wait for you." Another beat's called Listen.

Desmond Peeples: (18:02)

Everything takes on this greater significance.

Sed One: (18:05)

It's charged in ways that probably you're probably reading into it, but are you? You got to wonder the whole entire time, every beat you open up, what is the story to this? One of these last, this was his craft. This is what he spent decades honing, the ability to construct and hear and reconstruct sound, and put it together in a new way. And to inspire others, to evoke others, to create something to put into that, to make it whole, to complete it.

Desmond Peeples: (18:40)

To invite others in.

Sed One: (18:41)

And these are the final soundscapes that this master made. And so yeah, you open up each one and it's "I'm fine with it," but it was overwhelming at first. But yeah, it's hard to really, it used to be so easy, because there's more coming. The stakes were lower, in many ways. If this one doesn't work out, I'll do another one. If this song doesn't do whatever I need it to do, there'll be this next thing.

No, that's not happening. So that being said, I am reaching out to The Aztext family, they're some of my favorite MCs of all time, of Vermont, Learic and Pro, just top notch. We've had Pro on an album, we've had Learic on the album, we've had the Nightcaps, we've done all these variations of that crew, but we've never had strictly Aztext, the two of them on an album, definitely going to have those guys on.

Talking to Konflik who just dropped an incredible album in Burlington, just a long time veteran of the scene, such an incredible rapper. Want to get him on one of those tracks. And other than that, I'm going to keep it sort of secret. There's feelers out there. People are definitely going to be engaged. And one of the goals was to try to get folks on this final Boomslang Forever album that Johnny hadn't had the chance to work with formally. Sort of complete those relationships and check those boxes of folks that I know he wanted, and we just never were able to get on an album for one reason or another. But I think in hip hop collaboration's key as a rapper. I hate being the only voice on stage. I love when there's multiple voices coming in and out. That dynamic energy and flow that really is more engaging than a single voice. We're more powerful when we come in crews. You know what I mean? So definitely looking to have at least three or four more features on Boomslang Forever, but still putting it together.

Desmond Peeples: (20:32)

Well, you talked about how the previous album, the most recent one, Boomslang III, you were able to make it into something of a therapeutic process for Johnny. Would you say that you're able to do the same thing with the working on Boomslang Forever? How is it feeling? How is it fitting into your healing process?

Sed One: (20:55)

Yeah, I didn't really realize it until it was happening that that's what was going to occur. Yeah I think, what I didn't really realize, or what I knew but hadn't fully accepted, was how essential art and music is to healing. How essential it is to community building and community maintenance. How coming together and joining one another in a common goal and cause can really help resolve so many things.

And for me, thinking about it, I wrote the first song for this album within three hours of finding out that Johnny passed. And the beat that I opened was perfect. The message that came out was perfect. The hook just sort of wrote itself. It was as if there was just something moving through me, and all I had to do was get out of the way and let it happen.

And before I knew what the song was done, and it was an incredibly cathartic experience. I felt like I did the whole entire mourning process within six hours, thanks to this blessing I have, to have access to this musical process and these musicians that I know.

And I was so grateful for it. And I honestly, I think it would've taken me weeks to have done, to have made it to that point with his passing, and one song and I was there. I think that process is going to continue.

And I also realize it's bigger than me. There's Johnny's family, his friends, as he's passed and we've been putting out more music and sharing it with

folks, hearing this outpouring of support and thanks and gratitude from them.

But I'm keeping them connected to him, and sharing what he loves so much, and encapsulating his passion, and putting it into files that people can carry with them and open anywhere and experience and feel again and again and again.

That I can offer that to other people, not just myself. So I think this is really cementing Johnny's legacy, Boomslang's legacy, creating an avenue for me to continue to process my grief, which I'm certainly still working through, through this creative process.

Quite honestly, I think music is one of the best tools to manage and process something so deep and so profound as a loss of an individual like this at such a young age, in such a tragic way. In some ways I've been really blessed because I didn't have to let go right away. I feel like I'm letting go super slowly track by track, line by line, project by project to Johnny. And that the tether between he and I is still connected. I feel there is still some strange communication through the veil, and not in some sort of New Agey way, but truly I feel him. He's in that beat. That's his, the way he saw the world, the way he imagined it, the way he saw things, and heard sound and put it back together. It's right there.

And that was who he was. So I feel connected to him and I continue to be like, "What was he trying to say?" And I do feel like it comes through, and I feel like I am capturing it. And I feel like with every track I get closer to that place where I'll be fully able to accept that sort of devastating loss, and to have turned it into something absolutely beautiful in the process.

So I mean, I'm looking forward to creating it. It's been an amazing project. Boomslang has changed my life. I mean, my kids have known about Boomslang since they were born. They think it's been here forever. It'll be sad to close that last chapter, but also really satisfying.

We did it. We did it right, and we did it well. And countless parties rocked countless stages burned down, so many microphones, so many beats, so much fun that we were able to generate, through our connection and through our creative processes. And I'm grateful for it all. I wouldn't change anything. And yeah, Boomslang forever is going to be the thing.

Desmond Peeples: (25:06)

Well, let's talk a little bit about Vermont's hip hop scene and how it has changed over all this time. We've dug a little bit into the folks that you've worked with, but we haven't, you've seen a lot of the scene here, and how it has evolved over 20 plus years. And not only that, but have also started, helped to start two... a record label in Montpelier and a collective as well. Let's just dive in.

Sed One: (25:33)

Whew. Yeah, I mean, I think you think about hip hop, you have to look at it globally. It's an international phenomenon. And as studio equipment and recording equipment becomes cheaper and more accessible, and removes the barriers, both economic and otherwise, there are folks, more and more people have found it as an excellent tool for self-expression, and even to build a career, to make money, and to move out of certain situations into others.

So I think Vermont's part of that, certainly. Hip hop's growing and expanding everywhere, so that's happening here as well. But Vermont has a lot of interesting demographic and geographic things that set it apart and create unique opportunities and challenges for it in this tiny little state. But what I can say is, as we get to the place where we are the oldest, and I still say we, Johnny and I, every time I talk about this, I'm still at the "we" place with it, because that's true. But as we get to the place where we were often the

oldest people in the room, my son said to me, "Are you guys the oldest rappers in Vermont?" at one point.

And it's a question that's so absurd. You think you know the answer until you think about it for a second. And I was like, "Man, are we? Are we the oldest rappers in Vermont?" The answer is no. There's two other guys that are older than us. That's cool.

Desmond Peeples: (26:53)

You've done the research.

Sed One: (26:54)

We did the research, we checked the numbers. Not that it matters either. I mean, you look at Wu-Tang, like RZA's 50 plus years old, Ice Cube's like 55. Hip hop has finally gotten to a place where it's not just in the hands of the young, although the young are certainly running it, as they should. The next generation's coming up. And as you see that next generation coming up nationally, I'm like, "I don't get these guys, what are they doing?" That's exactly the effect they want to have.

Desmond Peeples: (27:20)

Are you having some of that generational...

Sed One: (27:22)

Yeah. Yeah, I mean I respect it. I love it. I'm not a hater of it. Well, there's a certain place I just don't get some of what they're doing. It's just different from what we did. And I think rightfully so, they should be making music that makes their parents upset. You know what I mean? You're not...

Desmond Peeples: (27:43)

Oh, you're the parent, you're getting upset.

Sed One: (27:45)

Yeah, I'm the parent now. No, I'm the parent now.

Desmond Peeples: (27:46)

Okay, but you're also a rapper.

Sed One: (27:47)

I know. It's really weird. It's a really weird dynamic. I'm working on it. I'm working on it, but there's some of the... I don't get it. They're just saying the same things.

Desmond Peeples: (27:54)

Well, do you think that you, when you were a younger rapper, were trying to do the same thing? Or at least, you had spoken about creating conscious rap, but I'm sure there was also a little bit of rebellion, a little bit of... How do you think you...

Sed One: (28:12)

Well, it's interesting, we didn't really touch on it, but the earlier days, pre Boomslang, it was super political conscious group, trying to be like a Public Enemy, Dead Prez type, Talib Kweli like. And really, that's cool. But it ended up just being kind of preachy and boring. And so we realized really quickly that you need to be conscious and positive, and you need to be family friendly and create something that's inviting.

Certainly hip hop has a real challenge with homophobia, excessive violence, some of which is just a reflection of the society we live in, others of it is an act in which to use to gain popularity, whatever. You could go down all those roads. But we really decided quite early on that we wanted to do something that we could be proud of, that people could listen to and not feel compromised, ourselves included.

But we quickly realized that conscious needs to be combined with the party, because no one's going to listen to what you're saying unless it's fun, unless they could dance to it and move to it as well. So Boomslang sort of evolved from this political poetic entity, into this more of a party machine/message maker, that could bring it to people so they could hear it at the party, have fun, but still walk away and be like, "Wow, those guys were really saying something that... A couple of those lines hit me. There's a message in there."

And I think that was our evolution as artists over the years. And it's one I'm still working on. What is that line between party, fun, message and poetry? How do you blend those things together in a way that really captivates and engages people? I don't know the answer yet.

I'm still on that journey down the line. But when I see what's happening in hip hop, generally, just huge numbers of young rappers coming up and making huge splashes in the scene, I can't help but be happy for them. I mean, this is the tool that they have available to them, to express what their generation wants to express. If we don't like it, we've got two options really. One is to not listen to it. Well, maybe three. One is to not listen, two is to complain. The third is to create a better society, so that the message coming out of this music is more in a line with what we want it to be, but for people just to complain about the message without thinking about the sort of world it comes out of and is informed by, is just shortsighted at best. And I think a lot of people miss that about hip hop. Like, "Oh, it's so violent," but within a film it's fine. You know what I mean? Has a double standard for hip hop music as far as content messaging goes. Anyways, I'm off track there.

Sorry, that was a little bit of a tirade. That's the parent in me, "These rappers!", but it's not even. Anyways, but the Vermont scene's super cool right now. What I could say is, my generation has really, we built on what the generation did before us, they were the pioneers, really The Aztext,

Fattie B., Konflik, Vermont Union, I mean Manifest Nexto Me, so many, Third Agenda.

So many groups that were doing really incredible work in a non-existent scene. They were just building it. So the Boomslangs, and we came up after that work had been done, and were really able to capitalize and build on what had come before us. So I'm grateful for all of them and they know it. And I've told them every time I've seen them, that thank you for doing that work. We've come and we've added our piece, our generation, not just Boomslang, but a whole slew of crews.

And now when I see shows being booked in Burlington, these kids are all like 21 and under. They've got names I've never seen before. They're making music I haven't ever heard before. And they've got an energy and a vitality to them that is absolutely an essential infusion at this point. You need that infusion of new ideas, new sounds, new voices. And I'm super pumped about where hip hop's going in Vermont in general.

If anything, I'd like to see it be more unified. There's Burlington, Central Vermont, Southern Vermont, all those groups. I mean, geographically, it's not just like they don't like each other, but you're in a pocket of artists and you're creating with them, and it's hard to get from one part of the state to the other. If anything, I'd love to see those groups come together and cross pollinate more.

Desmond Peeples: (32:28)

I feel like I hear that critique a lot, that the arts, no matter whether it's music or writing, or... it is very siloed in each region of Vermont. Have you thought about how you would like to see people bridge those gaps between the regions in your community, in hip hop?

Sed One: (32:53)

I think it comes back to something you mentioned earlier. Boomslang was part of the Golden Dome Musicians Collective and the State and Main Records label, sort of an effort by a bunch of local artists of Montpelier. Basically, we were all sitting down and realized that no one could do anything, because they didn't have any resources, and no real support, and sat and talked about it long enough and realized, what if we formed a nonprofit and pooled our resources, both financial and otherwise together, we could really support one another to get these projects out and do our work together.

That idea was really powerful. It worked really well for a while and then it didn't, like a lot of good ideas end up, just sort of petered out and lost steam. But what I saw in that was that there is the capacity to use the shared resources of a scene or an area to build something bigger and better together.

So I think, I don't want to say that something like that needs to be formed, but a collective, certainly, with people that aren't in charge of it, but that are holding it together and keeping the engine going, I think could go really far to bringing those groups together in really intentional ways.

Let's have a festival, or let's have a show that has Southern Vermont, Central Vermont, Northern Vermont. Let's do that once a month or quarterly, whatever. But I think if you created a concept where it was happening and intended to happen again, and have that direct stated intent to bring different groups together from different places, you might start to see more of that cross pollination, what we used to do with State and Main records, which I loved, and no one does anymore. Well they do, but it's very uncommon, as we would have three or four different genres on any one bill. You'd have a punk band, a rock band, sort of an electronica band, and a hip hop band. And so you would get people that were punk but didn't like hip

hop that came to the show, and oh, now they saw some hip hop. "Oh, hip hop's not bad. That's actually pretty cool. I enjoyed that." Vice versa, your hip hop guys came out and like, "Oh we don't like punk rock. And I saw a punk rock show." Now they liked it. And those types of shows I think really helped to break down those silos between genres too. Because there's geographic silos, but there's also genre silos, which are super boring really, ultimately, especially in hip hop that's borrowed from every single musical type imaginable, unabashedly to create something new. So I think there's a lot of ways to do it. The problem is it takes some people to really organize and hold it over time. And I think that's been the issue in Vermont, is just no one has taken that sort of mantle and held it.

Desmond Peeples: (35:33)

So why don't we go to what's next?

Sed One: (35:35)

Yeah, what is next?

Desmond Peeples: (35:36)

What's next after Boomslang Forever?

Sed One: (35:38)

Boomslang Forever is certainly the focus of my attention right now. I really want to give this my full attention and make it be all that it can be. And really put it out there as the final marker or the final chapter, and make it worthy of that. Make it worthy of being that sort of milestone.

What's next? You know, what's next is really exciting in the pandemic. Johnny, JL and I had a really exciting opportunity to create an EP with one other producer and one other emcee. The story's really actually incredible. I've been talking about Learic. The story's actually incredible. I've been

mentioning Learic and The Aztext throughout this interview because they're such an influence on me and have been.

But in the pandemic, I reached out to Learic so many times for a solo project, to do a verse on this, to do a verse on that, Boomslang III. And finally, he's like, "Let's just make an EP." And I almost lost my mind. I never told him this, but I just pretty much had to mute the phone. I was like, "Oh my God, this is going to be incredible."

Desmond Peeples: (36:36)

Well now he's going to know.

Sed One: (36:38)

I know, he's going to know, he's going to know, this is cool. It's a good story. So anyway, so I called Johnny up and I'm like, "Johnny, oh my God. Learic wants to make an EP. I need beats right now. This is going to be incredible. We have to do this." And Johnny is like, "Yo, that's amazing, because I've been working with Rico James."

Rico James is a producer out of Burlington. Incredible vinyl bass beats. Just everything he does is amazing. He's like, "I've been working with Rico James. We've been working on collaborative beat-making over the last three weeks." And I said, "Collaborative beat-making. Tell me more. What's that even look like?"

So basically the process is that Johnny would find a drum break on a record somewhere. He would send it to Rico. Rico would start building a beat on it. He would send it back to Johnny, and eventually they would get to a place where a beat was made and constructed.

And they made, I think they made 55 beats in three weeks, which is very rapid rate of beat production. So he's like, "Rico and I have 55 beats sitting here untouched. We're the only ones that have ever heard them. Why don't

we just form a super group? Me, you, Learic and Sed One, Dustin." I was like, "A super group. Sounds amazing." I knew I was missing something in the pandemic. Apparently it's being part of a super group.

So boom, I reached out to Learic and I was like, "Yo, we have 50 beats if you want to, we're going to form a super group basically right now. Because we're so excited about this. And let's put together an EP."

And same thing as Boomslang III, all of us just working independently in our own studios, creating, working on writing, recording, sending the files back and forth. It took about eight months. But we produced an incredible EP, and literally never stepped in the same room together, never saw each other. That's all done, mixed and mastered. And it'll probably be released under the Kinetic Fource banner probably this winter. We should see that on Man Bites Dog Records.

Desmond Peeples: (38:33)

Is Kinetic Fource the super group?

Sed One: (38:35)

Yeah. Kinetic Fource is the super group. Yeah. We are Kinetic Fource, F-O-U-R-C-E. Sort of a nod to the Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five era of hip hop. And it's an incredible album. The only feature on it is DJ Kanga makes an appearance on that album, but so excited to have been able to not only produce Boomslang III, but a whole EP with Johnny there during the pandemic and really put out some of the best work. This stuff is so cool and different. Can't wait to share it with folks.

What's next for me personally? When Johnny got sick, I first branched out as Sed One and did my own solo stuff. I had never really done that before. I'd always been part of a duo. So it was really foreign to me. It took me a while to really get my footing as a solo artist.

What does that mean? Where do you even get your beats? What do you do when you don't have a producer and a beat maker in house? And it really led, at first, it was a really difficult hurdle to get over. Kind of felt like I was being less than loyal or something. I had this feeling of almost like you're cheating on somebody, at first. "Hey, I need some beats." You know what I mean? It was weird at first, but then it really led to some unexpected growth and opportunities to really push myself.

Every producer has a different sound and thinks and creates differently, and approaches the beat differently. And every one of them requires a different skill set to navigate the soundscape that they've created, and the way that they see it. And not only just the beat as it's given, but then working with them back and forth, how they work and how they think about collaboration after the fact.

And so every producer I got to work with really was like, I kept expanding my toolkit. Every one of them, I learned a new language. I found a new way or a pattern, or a new way to intersect or interact with beats. And it was really fantastic. And so the culmination of that, and my goal was, once I broke free, was like, "I want to make an album that has every beat as a different Vermont producer." That was my new idea. Like, "I'm going to go from never making another beat with any other producer than JL," to, "I want to make an album that has nothing but other producers on it."

So the Sed One Strikes album, it's my solo album, sort of came to fruition out of that desire. It's being mixed and mastered right now. 12 tracks, 10 producers, seven features. Everyone you can imagine in the hip hop scene is on this. And including producers I never got to work with before. So super pumped on that album too.

Desmond Peeples: (41:14)

So you've got three albums in production.

Sed One: (41:15)

It's pretty much what's happening. That's pretty much what's happening. Well, Kinetic Fource is technically done. It just needs promoted. So it's done.

Desmond Peeples: (41:22)

And can you remind me when the release date for that is?

Sed One: (41:24)

We're looking, we're working with Man Bites Dog Records. I'm not sure when we're going to drop it, but I would expect it will be before spring.

Desmond Peeples: (41:32)

Man Bites Dog Records is based...

Sed One: (41:35)

I don't even know where they're based out of.

Desmond Peeples: (41:36)

That's one of my favorite old movies, Man Bites Dog.

Sed One: (41:39)

It's Rico James, Rico James works with them and they love the record and they wanted to put it out there. So we're sort of following that. It hasn't been signed, sealed, and delivered yet, but it's a cool little record label. And they do a lot of independent artists, and it's always interesting to team up with someone like that, other than just releasing it independently.

But yeah, no two projects going, and a couple EPs that I've been cooking. The pandemic was just crazy. Everyone just went into the studio and cooked. I have more music than I could ever release. It's a real problem. And it's probably kind of one of the best problems you could have.

[Music playing: If one day you decide

If on that day yo

If on that day

If one day you decide

If on that day yo

If on that

If one day you decide that

You're gonna say good bye

You should pack up all your things

You don't need to tell me why

Everybody got they reasons

Every season will return

When the time is right

You'll write it down eventually you'll learn

Getting burned is just a part of it

That's how you're gonna find

The strength that's deep inside of you

Reminding you to climb

Over every obstacle

You're the only one that can
They put them there for you
Don't you understand the plan

Standing up no matter what]

Desmond Peeples: (42:52)

That's our show, folks. To learn more about Boomslang and where to find their music, check out the show notes at vermontartscouncil.org/podcast

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