Cleveland's son and Anthony Hamilton protége Antoine Dunn flies soul-o

Local legend in the making drops debut album

By FELICIA C. HANEY

Staff Reporter

While doing some soul searching, artist Antoine Dunn found that the truth of the matter is he didn’t have to look too far outside his city or his self to make his dream of becoming the next big thing out of Cleveland more than just rapid eye movement. In fact, his unique sound would rapidly move all eyes on him and even land him a spot on Grammy-nominated singer Anthony Hamilton’s tour two years running. And, as if that wasn’t enough to brag about, he’s gone and out “dunn” himself with a debut solo album that dropped this Tuesday.

Hamilton, having his own connection to Cleveland courtesy of his wife who’s from here, has made a few friends in the Northeast Ohio area throughout the years. Lucky for Dunn, one of those friends is from the label he’s signed to – the independent Akron-based Elite Music Group, Inc. – who thought Dunn and Hamilton made a perfect pair. “Anthony’s friends with someone from my label who knew I listened to him coming up and thought it would be a good idea to put us together. They gave him my music and he happened to love me,” Dunn said of how the union came to be. It opened the door for Dunn and now he’s just wrapped as the opening act of the “Back to Love” Tour with Hamilton and British beauty Estelle. “After all the dedication and hard work, for someone like Anthony Hamilton to extend this opportunity to me twice is nothing short of amazing,” Dunn said of the experience. And to extend his gratitude he showed up and showed out as the epitome of a dynamic, classy R&B singer, crooning with sincerity and power in a sharp white suit with a hat to match backed by a four-piece band. It was old school soul at its finest revamped by a 24-year-old kid from Cleveland.

So how’d this youngin’ get so much soul? “I grew up on my parents’ record collection,” he said. “Everything from Esther Philips to The Dramatics. I wrote my first songs in middle school when I started dating. My first song was titled ‘I’ll Be There.’ My older brother was studying to be an opera singer and had a Yamaha PSR keyboard. I’d sneak in his room to play it. I also had a Gateway computer with a 60-second recording feature. I’d make up little one-minute songs and that’s how I also started producing.”

Dunn said of the old school yet new school slant of his sound, “Just like people like ice cream,

they should be willing to try new flavors. My music is fresh, yet familiar.” He cites all-around music greats Stevie Wonder and the late, great Donny Hathaway as his biggest influences. You can hear remnants of that old school sound in his Top 20 debut single “Can’t Forget” and the follow-up single/video “Miss My Love,” currently residing at No. 15 on the Urban AC chart.

Dunn, who considers himself to be spiritual as well as a self-proclaimed storyteller, revealed that he writes all of his material and 99 percent of the stories told in his music are his own. The depth of that old school is also apparent in “I Am,” a dedication to the memory of his mother who passed away not long ago after a battle with breast cancer. Unfortunately she never got the chance to hear her heartfelt dedication, but it’s no coincidence that “Truth of the Matter” is being released during Breast Cancer Awareness Month in her loving honor.

This Tuesday the music world received long awaited 12-song debut CD “Truth of the Matter” – of unusually high quality and breadth on Elite Music Group, Inc. That’s due to the seasoned co-production of soul music veteran
Edwin “Tony” Nicholas
(Gerald Levert, Barry White) as well as Dunn’s own passion, style and talent.

The artist is all about music’s power to bring people together. “Holistically, so much keeps us separated – sexual preferences, economics, neighborhoods. My goal is to help break down barriers. At a concert when everyone is vibing on the music, no one cares whether the person sitting next to them has the exact same beliefs that they do. As an artist, I want to do things that reveal me as unlimited in my creativity and with the purpose of unity. My ultimate goal is to take my music to a global level like Alicia Keys or John Mayer.”

But is has to start with support from home, so Cleveland please pick up a copy of “Truth of the Matter” on iTunes and show some love to a home grown talent just trying to see the fruits of his labor. For more information on Antoine Dunn, his music and tour dates, visit www.antoinedunn.com or follow him @antoinedunn

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