

A decade on from his breakthrough album, *Rolling Papers*, influential US rapper, songwriter and entrepreneur WIZ KHALIFA opens up on fame, fatherhood and finding balance

“I’M LEARNING AND CHANGING ALL THE TIME”

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Wiz Khalifa is a man who likes to keep moving. The multi-platinum Grammy and Golden Globe-nominated rapper – born Cameron Jibril Thomaz – is one of the most recognisable names in modern music yet continues to prove that there’s far more to him than hooks and verses alone. While many might have kicked back after a decade at the top of the game, a string of entrepreneurial moves, partnerships and investments – not to mention an upcoming new record – proves there’s plenty more to come.

As a man accustomed to spinning many plates, what does balance mean to him? “It’s all about being happy, experiencing new things, learning and changing,” he says, speaking to

Glass Man over the phone from the States. “I’ve been in the game for a long time, working not only on the things that I’ve already established, but on new goals and trying to get to new places in my music and business career. For this you have to have balance; you have to have some type of personal life that pulls you in another direction to keep you fresh on both sides. That’s what it really is to me – it’s just really trying to cover all bases and stay productive at the same time.”

This productivity has had to be put on ice with the arrival of the pandemic but while travel restrictions kept him close to home there was plenty that kept him motivated. “For me, it’s

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been the same as everybody else. I've had a lot of family time, planning for the future,” he says. “I've got an eight-year-old son and I've been able to spend a lot of time with him. I just kicked back at the crib, regrouped and got ready for what's coming up next.”

He's previously said that the arrival of his son in 2013 had a profound impact on him and this past year has given him plenty of time to reflect on the importance of family. “Being a father is my favourite thing – I find being with my kid helps me in all other areas of my life,” he says, adding how the responsibility of parenthood has taught him plenty about himself. “I think everybody should go through some type of change when they have a kid – we are all supposed to evolve. Our job is to nurture and teach our children, so I have that on my mind every day.”

It signals the growing maturity of a man who emerged in the late noughties rap boom – coming to prominence around the same time as the likes of Drake, Kid Cudi and J Cole. A series of mixtapes and the release of debut album *Show and Prove* in 2006 marked him out as one to watch and put him on the radar of music execs. After a two-year stint at Warner Bros Records he took back control of his music, independently releasing his second album, *Deal or No Deal*, and the now cult mixtape, *Kush & Orange Juice*, before signing to Atlantic in 2010 – a move that propelled his already prolific career to the next level.

Although its arrival might still be fresh in our minds, it's been a decade since the release of *Rolling Papers*. His first record on Atlantic, it succeeded in pairing the anthemic (take lead single *Black and Yellow*, for example) with the atmospheric, its slick production creating a vibe that resonated with a whole generation of rap fans. “For me, that was a really fun project, being that it was my first major label release, and I put a lot of energy into the project,” he says. “Even at the time, I don't think it was accepted or really understood for what it was. But that's the beauty of art, it grows over time. I feel like people were able to identify with it as a classic just because of the moments that we created together.”

In the years since *Rolling Papers*, Wiz released a further three albums and a movie soundtrack that has ensured his place in hip hop history. But he's certainly not ready to dwell too long on the past. “Part of the process for me is maintaining everything that you've got and building on top of that.

“It's really easy for artists or business people to look at the things they've done in the past,



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and that being enough for them. You give them compliments and they love that but they don’t really challenge themselves to move forward, or re-do those things or add to their legacy. I like switching things up, being authentic. Those are the main things that keep somebody like me going.”

Throughout his career an impressive roster of collaborators – including Snoop Dogg, Curren\$, Tinie Tempah, Ty Dolla \$ign, The Weeknd, 50 Cent, Tyga and Logic – have showcased this appetite for innovation. “I like to vibe with people and my favourite collaborations are when we’re able to build from the ground up,” he says. “A lot of the time, you don’t know what you are going to get until you get in the room with somebody. So it’s really fun to just experiment, to kind of just fall backwards and see where you land. Good things happen when people bring the best out of each other.”

This eye for collaboration is also apparent across his many entrepreneurial ventures. He runs record label and music management company Taylor Gang Entertainment with manager Will Dzombak, with artists such as Juicy J and Ty Dolla \$ign on its roster. In 2016 he partnered with medical marijuana dispenser



BOTTEGA VENETA

The Cookie Co on his own Khalifa Kush strain, while his Weed Farm mobile app has racked up millions of downloads since release. More recently he’s channelled his passion for mixed martial arts by investing in the Professional Fighters League. “The main thing is, I don’t treat them like side projects. I address them and approach them with the same passion and tenacity that I do with my music,” he asserts. “These are things that are a part of my lifestyle, that me and my team all collectively agree that if we put enough energy towards them, it will not only make a lot of money, but change people’s lives and employ a lot of other people.”

Next on the horizon, Wiz is recording a new record that he says will feature long-term collaborators as well as emerging new talents, with his intention to come up with a sound to take him into the next five or 10 years. He’s also keen to get back on stage. “I miss the connection with fans – just being on the internet is not enough,” he says. “I’m really excited to do physical shows, show people how to connect to the music and create some real moments that’s going to make the music last forever.”

If the success of his most memorable career moments has shown, this looks more than likely.

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