

[MUSIC - PAPA MBYE, "ONLY RIGHT"]

(SINGING) Can make no promises, empty with solace in forsaken honest sins. Coastin' right over my body when the leaf fry.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recognize that song? It's one of Minneapolis artist, Papa Mbye's most famous tracks called, "Only Right". Papa Mbye grew up as a prolific cartoon artist and stepped into music a few years ago. He's received an impressive welcome. His tracks have more than 250,000 listeners on Spotify. If you're a *Minnesota Now* listener, you know, we love music. Papa Mbye is joining us now to talk about his music and what's inspiring him lately. Papa Mbye, welcome to the show. How are you?

PAPA MBYE: I'm doing very, very good. It's hot outside.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. It's going to get hotter, my friend. It's going to get much hotter. Say, your first EP was released last year. Are you happy with the reception of it?

PAPA MBYE: Oh, yeah. I'm happy that it's out in general, you know, music. I was kind of like, in my infant stage when it came to music when I made it. And it's taught me a lot. And it's brought me places where I never would have thought I'd have been, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about that now. I mentioned that you're a cartoonist. And you're a good cartoonist. What was the transition like from being a visual artist to a musician?

PAPA MBYE: Oh, I mean, it wasn't too hard because a lot of the visual art I was doing was rooted in collaboration, especially close to the pandemic. And with music, it's the same way. When COVID hit, I kind of just started like getting into making music and met some friends who were already very good at it.

And I kind of just followed their lead and I would just learn from watching them. I was like simultaneously learning and creating at the same time. And it turned into making an EP and getting connected with Against Giants and it becoming a career.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. Hey. Let's talk a little bit about some of the songs on the EP. Let's talk about "Passenger," specifically. First I want to listen to a little bit of it.

[MUSIC- PAPA MBYE, "PASSENGER"]

(SINGING) Waiting for the day go back. Antsy for a way to go. Taking all my change, it's all bad. Sad to say you never know. Take out. Take out your rocket now. Fake all, fake all.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of layers there. How did you put together that track?

PAPA MBYE: Well it was actually after the first EP, me and Zak Kahn who's one of my best friends and collaborators, we had a lot of conversations about in life, whether you're in the driver's seat or the passenger seat and what situation do you have to switch in and out of it. A few months later, we kind of just ended up making this song from like 3:00 AM to 9:00 AM, just kind of stream of conscious creation.

By the time it was like 9:00 AM, the song was done, basically. We went to sleep for a little bit and started working on it again.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. Hey. I'm thinking you're probably a person who's used to being in the driver's seat. Am I right?

PAPA MBYE: I mean, I feel like it's always switched. Because like, I myself, don't drive. I actually am kind of scared to get on the road. So it's interesting to take the driver's seat in life, but not literally drive. It almost makes me feel like it contradicts itself, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, exactly. Let's talk about who you're listening to. I understand you've been listening to the song "Lily" by the artist, Choker. I want to listen to a little bit of

[MUSIC - CHOKER, "LILY"]

(SINGING) Cry cause I don't know how to change it. All outside. All I got. All outside.

INTERVIEWER: What do you like about that track?

PAPA MBYE: I mean, I love the layers. I love the writing. It kind of has like the shape shifting structure to it. It's not like conventional song structure. And he's kind of just really, just taking you many different places within like the three minutes that the song is playing.

INTERVIEWER: How did you discover the song?

PAPA MBYE: I found Choker online maybe a few years ago just because friends were posting him. He kind of came out the gate with this album that he just dropped on Spotify, I think in 2018. And, yeah, a bunch of my friends had found him. And the thing is, a lot of people thought he sounded like Frank Ocean. And the tone of his voice kind of does sound like Frank. And I started listening to him. And I don't know, I kind of just, I fell in love with the music, especially the writing and the melodies.

INTERVIEWER: I want to listen to another song. It's called "As in a Mirror," By the artist Youssou N'dour.

[MUSIC - YOUSSEU N'DOUR, "AS IN A MIRROR"]

(SINGING) [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

INTERVIEWER: Papa Mbye, can you say that Youssou is one of your musical influences?

PAPA MBYE: Oh, yeah. I mean, I'm from the Gambia in Senegal. I'm actually an immigrant. I came to America when I was about two years old. And like a lot of the music I was listening to as a kid was music from those places. You know, Youssou N'Dour, Ndongo Lo.

That song in particular, I remember being a kid. And I would listen to the live performance because he used to do a concert called Bercy every year in Senegal. And every single DVD that would come out of that concert, I would always just wait for this song.

And I actually rediscovered it a few months ago because I was just singing the melody to my parents and my sisters trying to figure out what the song was. And I finally found it. And I love the sentiment of it just because it's in Wolof and he says [SPEAKING WOLOF] which kind of roughly translates to like, the way I live and what I gather in this life returns to me as a mirror. Yeah, I think it's just a really beautiful sentiment.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. It is beautiful. Other musical influences, what would you say?

PAPA MBYE: Like I said, Ndongo Lo, he is also Senegalese artist. He's probably one of my favorite artists ever. I also love, love, love, love Frank Ocean. I think he's amazing.

INTERVIEWER: No, I like I like him too.

PAPA MBYE: As of late, I've been listening to a lot of J Paul, been listening to a lot of Choker, been listening to a lot of Sylvan Esso. I think they're amazing. And honestly, my favorite artists are just like people come out of Minneapolis right now, the Minneapolis scene at this point, it's going to change music in the next few years.

INTERVIEWER: Think so?

PAPA MBYE: I know so for sure. There's literally no doubt in my mind.

INTERVIEWER: What's next for you? I'm curious.

PAPA MBYE: I mean, I got a new single followed by a new EP, hopefully, late summer or September.

INTERVIEWER: Good. And when that's dropped, I want you back on the program.

PAPA MBYE: All right, cool.

INTERVIEWER: I think we should go out to more "Passenger" is what I think. That's what I think.

PAPA MBYE: Let's do it.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Papa Mbye, thank you so much for your time.

PAPA MBYE: Thank you.

[MUSIC - PAPA MBYE, "PASSENGER"]

INTERVIEWER: That was musician and visual artist. Papa Mbye who's based in North Minneapolis. You can find his music online on YouTube and Spotify. You heard some of the music that inspires him from artists like Choker and Youssou N'dour. We have links to their music on our website, nprnews.org, *Minnesota Now* section. Check that out when you have an opportunity.