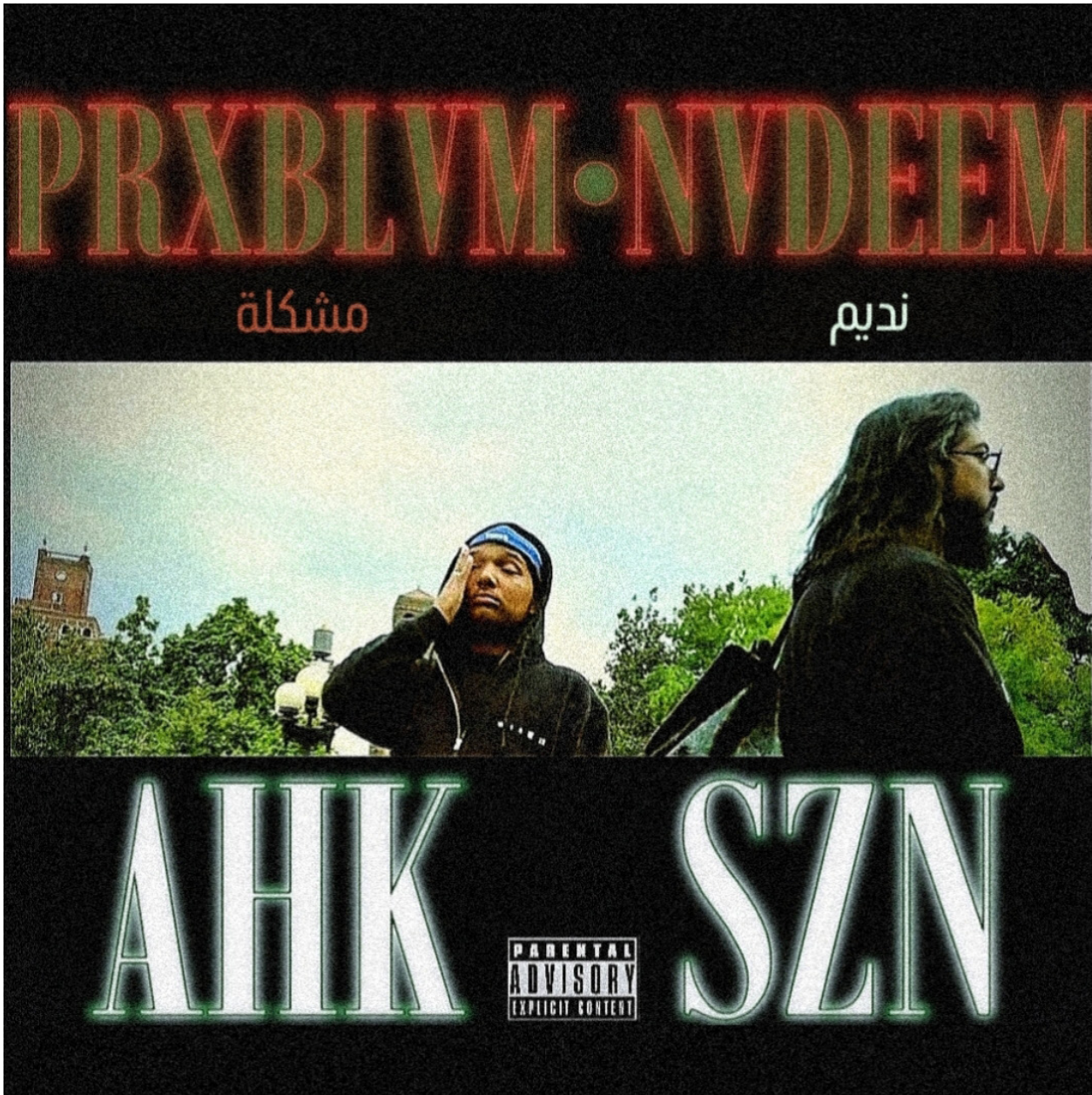


DèCosta Runts

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When it comes to music acts from Detroit, artists like Babyface Ray, Skilla Baby, or 42 Dugg are probably the first to come to mind. But just as Detroit's street hip-hop scene has been receiving recognition on a national scale as of late, the city's underground scene has also garnered its own attention.



Nvdeem

If you've been even remotely tapped into the Motor City's local hip-hop/punk scene, you'd be lying to say you haven't heard of the artist Nvdeem. Born in Dearborn, MI, this natural-born lyricist has been a prominent figure in Detroit's music underworld for a long while. Over the past 6 years, Nvdeem has blown audiences away with compelling lyrics, intense delivery & high-octane performances. Being a founding member of the local collective "Weirdoz Gang", art, soul, and punk have been key ingredients in the MC's artistry. In his latest musical efforts, Nvdeem has paired up with one of Michigan's most hungry up-and-coming producers who goes by the moniker Prxblvm, or PRX for short. This young producer has worked with well-known Detroit acts from Babytron, RMC Mike, and Wavy Gang, to more underground Michigan Artists like Lokye, Wrld Tour Mafia, and G.G.B. (GhettoGothBoi\$). Being the son of a contemporary Detroit jazz musician, PRX began learning music at the tender age of 10 years old. He started with the trombone and soon after was taught bass guitar by his father, along with fundamental principles of music theory.

PRX's sonic identity would begin to take shape while studying GARAGE BAND, LOGIC PRO, and a variety of analog samplers, leading to the signature sound he is known for today. This brings us to the common denominator between both PRX and NVDEEM. Their highly anticipated musical collaboration *AHK SZN*, has just been released on all streaming platforms. While PRX has been busy this year releasing multiple collab projects including *CHEMTRAILS* w/64Bithustla, *DRVGSTXR* w/Lokye, *PROBLEM* w/RJ Slide, this tape happens to be Nvdeem's first body of work since 2022's *DEADMAN*, a collab project with local producer G \$wank.



Prxblym

Now, if you are a fan of Nvdeem, you will certainly agree that *AHK SZN* was worth the wait. Consisting of nine tracks, we get a focused, visceral, well nuanced experience through the monochromatic lens of our main protagonist, Nvdeem. Rather than his more turned-up, screamo vocal inflections heard in previous work, here, there is a much more subdued, laid back, and at times, despondent vocal delivery. The Opening song *ANGELZ*, throws us into our main protagonist's world. We are hit with a barrage of introspective lyrics taking the audience on his daily encounters as if his urban landscape of Detroit is akin to Dante's 6th Circle of Hell. He drops into the chorus, echoing the phrase "I can hear my angels, I can hear my..." several times over a whirlpool of cavernous strings, reverberating until a surge of sub-bass floods our ears to cut the rising tension.

There are multiple moments where our MC uses the phrase "ahk" or "ahki". Being of half-Lebanese & half-Pakistani descent, "ahk" is referring to his friend.... his homie... or his brother. On the song titled *Rise*, Nvdeem repeats the lyrics "My ahki do what he do, and I do what I need.." as if saying that just because he loves the ones closest to him, it doesn't necessarily mean he's willing to stick his neck out for them whenever they need him. People taking his loyalty for granted is the same reason he must be guarded for self preservation.

Themes like this are common in *AHK SZN*. References to unsavory characters and deceit are at every corner with quotes like “Allah, please protect me, I see many snakes”, asking his Lord to secure his holy place away from infidels. We, as the audience, can smell evil afoot as our protagonist lives with an overall sense of dread, believing that any day might possibly be his last. A great deal of trauma and pain is felt from the MC’s words throughout the project. With today’s political climate, there is no denying that current activity in the Middle East is shaking everyone to their core. Like a modern day Dante, he is writing poems about his motherland and his people, what he sees when he walks outside and what he sees when he closes his eyes. His songs represent another circle of the hell that he has been subjected to throughout his life. To touch on his fears of betrayal, cultural racism or cosmic abandonment, Nvdeem uses these instrumentals not only as therapy, but also to “fight the good fight”.

Sonically, Prxbvm gives Nvdeem a suitable canvas to express his past trauma. On the production side of things, all of the songs reinforce each other by being darker and colder than the last. On the track titled *Baguettes*, Prxbvm’s production includes an overflowing, dreamy set of arpeggio synths layered on top of each other, giving a brooding backdrop to help bring the listener into Nvdeem’s morbid, yet vigilant vantage point.

This project feels like it is coated in a dirty, grimy film, and would fit perfectly in the atmospheres and body-aching mid-up tempos of a “ghetto-Cronenberg-esque” low budget sci-fi thriller. The Ambient textures on the track *Albi* proposes that this cut was recorded during a sandstorm on some sort of distant desert planet. One of the most exhilarating moments of the project is at the end of the first act with the song *Crow*, where we get our lead protagonist skipping over a set of bone-crushing drums and reversed stylized drones, opening with the words “Fuck all that chatting shit irrelevant, Mafioso talk no alibi please don’t intervene”. This lyric proclaims his dominance over any opposition that may come between him and his ahks, stating that they will be impaled on the gates of his kingdom or be vanquished. Whilst Prxbvm was ubiquitous in the overall architecture of the album, co-production credits from his allied team of talented sound designers include Erl, Fwembill, Kase Junior, & Z47, all of whom had a hand in some way to bring *AHK SZN*’s lush sonics to life. The tape’s cinematic aura comes from the work of Stan Li, a contemporary Los Angeles film composer who also lends an experimental sound palette to the song *Juice Box*. A bright cast of accompanying artists also come correct, with features from Kitty Kvsh, Neta, Axl Urameshi and Larrair.

In the end, *AHK SZN* is an experience unlike anything I’ve heard in 2024. Nvdeem’s anti-hero qualities make him the perfect vigilante to bring justice to his people and loved ones, but on the flip side, his methods may at times also cause mayhem. The album has an overall sense of radicalness, not in the sense of being overtly violent, but in the thematics and sound-craft that give credence to the idea that Nvdeem has blossomed out of his screamo/rage chrysalis and into a more post-punk butterfly. “I’ve been flirting with death ever since I was a kid... I’ve been with my Ahki, I’ve been trying to get baguettes.” Nvdeem projects his feelings not only on his relationship with death, but on his relationship with his brothers. More than anything he wants to eat with the people he trusts, yet his worst fear comes from within his own circle.

Similar to the ancient saying “keep your friends close but your enemies closer”, the loyalty that brings and holds a brotherhood together can also be weaponized and used as a tool of betrayal. In most cases, he knows who his enemies are, and with that, will give the proper respect from the opposing side, but being a victim of duplicity seems to be a recurring dilemma that our protagonist must consider when calling someone his brother, his ahki. The album brings this juxtaposition down to a common “street” perspective, making *AHK SZN* one of the most engaging collaborative album this year.

-DèCosta Runts



*Album artwork by @eli4stacks

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