

## The Culture from the Ground Up

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September 21, 2020

Detroit still stays a mecca for creators, musicians, and visual artists alike. It has been this way for years, but techno aside, many of the contemporary Detroit subcultures, their figureheads, and broader cultural contributions go unrecognized, and their histories unnoticed.

At this moment Detroit is going through a resurgence of hip-hop music in mainstream culture. The Detroit sound is currently getting its recognition with artists such as Sada Baby, T Grizzly, Drego & Beno, 42 Dugg, Cask Kid etc. While these artists' presence in music is often in line with the more aggressive feelings present within Detroit, there has also concurrently existed an underground scene of hip-hop that is more interested in basking in the vast array of cultural influences scattered through the city.

For this piece, we will briefly touch on one particular Detroit based artist that has made a huge impact on music and culture in Detroit, and built his career from the ground up. His name is Sheefy McFly.

From 2009 and up through our current situation, there have been a slew of underground hip hop artists in Detroit that are innovating and creating in their own lane, with little professional guidance; Sheefy McFly was one of the artists at the forefront of this Renaissance. Sheefy McFly is a rapper/producer and visual artist from the East Side of Detroit. He went to College for Creative Studies for a brief period of time where he started to cultivate his sound, fan base and persona. This passion grew as he parted ways from the school and decided to devote his energy to creative endeavors around the city. He began throwing a showcase called *The Air Up There (TAUT)*, in Midtown at Bob's Classic Kicks. Bob's is a local street wear sneaker shop that is a staple in Midtown Detroit.

*The Air Up There* had a consistent crowd and energy that ended up being very impactful to many of the careers of those working in Detroit at the time. Some of the most notable and pioneering being Danny Brown, Boldy James, Count Mack, Nolin the Ninja, Early Mac, and many more.

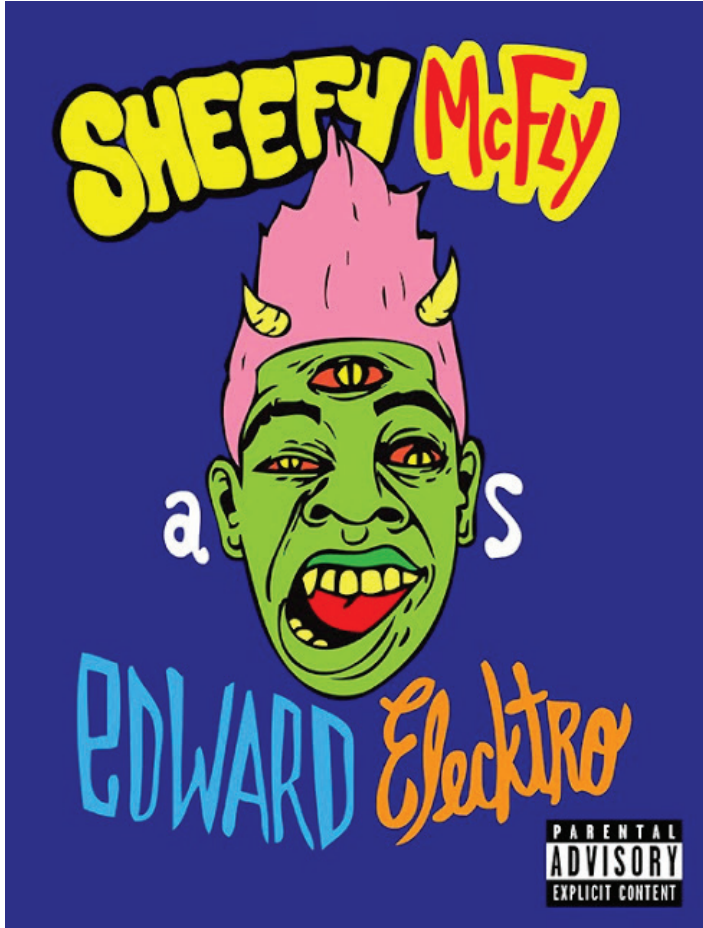
Sheefy dropped numerous projects and was hosting parties and art shows every month, dropping fresh new EP's like wildfire that would be printed and available on CDs at his events and stores in Metro Detroit. Sheefy was making fun, explicit, grimy, smoker music. He was creating his lifestyle with women, art tattoos and mp3s. In 2011, Sheefy dropped *Hot Boxin*.



Album Art for Sheefy McFly's HOTBOX. Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

The Release was exclusive. He printed the CD and it was sold at *TAUT*, which got a lot of people in Detroit very excited. With his leading single *Eating Sushi, Slapping Hoes*, he began to build and take leaps towards Detroit stardom. During this time, Sheefy was beginning to collaborate with artist like Dope Head, Lokye, Mic Phelps, Count Mack and many more. With his individual pop art style placed on every CD that he dropped, people were viewing these CDs as collectors items, and this was his way to expand and get his art out into the world.

Years passed and the shows got bigger and smaller and bigger again. He even created an alternative persona called Edward Elecktro.



Art for Sheefy McFly as Edward Elecktro. Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

With this new persona, Sheef would begin making and Djing Ghet-totech music. This music is primarily fast and repetitive which makes it great for dancing all night at the after hours spots. He opened up a lane where he would begin to get much bigger shows like Dally in the Alley, a large Detroit festival in the Fall.



Sheefy McFly performing at Dally in the Alley. Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

Around this same time, in 2015 he got a Residency at Red Bull House of Art, and this exhibition helped him climb his way up the ladder to being a staple artist in Detroit. <sup>1</sup>



Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

With the experience as a Red Bull resident artist, he was able to start getting bigger art commissions, which eventually got him deep into the world of murals. He became a part of Murals in the Market, an organization in Eastern Market that is part of the city-wide Urban Beautification Project.

The Urban Beautification project showcased artists from Detroit and around the world in order to put art out into the communities.



Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

With this support, he used his momentum to start doing murals all over the city. At one point, painting commissioned murals even got him wrongfully arrested; Sheefy was arrested for vandalism in 2019 when he was doing a mural for City Walls, which is another beautification project focused on stopping illegal graffiti and replacing it with beautiful murals from great artists.<sup>2</sup> Him getting arrested has now been the talk of the art scene in Detroit; many papers and news broadcasts interviewed him to hear his story. This started a large controversy and the publicity from the case catapulted his career. He is now doing collaborations with 1XRUN and selling out in a day.<sup>3</sup>



Sheefy Abstract Air Max OG. Image Courtesy of 1xRUN.com

2020 has been quite a year for him, having art shows in LA at Shadowbox Gallery, achieving a residency with BET as a black visual artist and making music with DJ EARL and Chuck English.



Image Courtesy of SheefyMcFly.com

The underground takes a strong effort to build notoriety. Careers don't happen overnight. They take passion, skills and dedication. If you believe in your dream hard enough and keep working for it, you can impact the culture and empower others to do better.

From the ground up we rise.

1. "Sheefy: Artist Profile - Red Bull House Of Art," video file, 2:42, Vimeo, posted by Shane Law, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/130506480>.
2. Ryan Patrick Hooper, "Sheefy McFly arrested by Detroit police — while working on mural for the city," Detroit Free Press, June 22, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/arts/2019/06/22/sheefy-mcfly-arrested-detroit-police-street-art/1538157001/>
3. "AIR MAX DAY," 1xRUN, <https://www.1xrun.com/collections/air-max-day/&s=Sheefy&c=Sheefy-AMD20&src=&/?fbclid=IwAR-2lLW5PtIXdL574GkaUYNof2-wAg2oQVnXVcBkUAtccE6ezHLwaSWA4jJY>

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