

## A RAPPER MATURES

### Bow Wow lets his music show that he's not a kid anymore

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No, you don't have to call him Mr. Wow.

But you shouldn't call him Lil' Bow Wow either.

It's just Bow Wow these days, thank you very much.

This hip hop sensation's no young pup anymore. At the ripe old age of 20, he's already released five albums, appeared on the Grammys, and acted in a handful of movies.

The Columbus native, whose real name is Shad Moss, appears to have succeeded where so many young sensations fail - making the transition from cute kid rapper to the real deal.

"It's definitely not an easy thing to do, but I think that it's all about how you do it," he told *The Blade* in a telephone interview.

On tour for his most recent musical release, "The Price of Fame," Bow Wow was scheduled to perform in Toledo last month in the SeaGate Convention Centre, but the plans were canceled twice and no future Toledo shows are scheduled.

The young rapper got his name (with the Lil') from rapper Snoop Dogg in the early '90s when they met at a concert after Bow Wow had gotten on stage during intermission and started rapping.

He was 6.

His debut album in 2000, "Beware of Dog," sold more than 3 million copies, thanks to the popularity of hits like "Bounce with Me" and "Bow Wow (That's My Name)." Two years later, his starring role on film in the basketball movie *Like Mike* (about a teenaged orphan who plays in the NBA) grossed more than \$50 million in the United States.

#### MULTIMEDIA

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At the ripe old age of 20, Bow Wow's already released five albums, appeared on the Grammys, and acted in a handful of movies.

As the rapper got older, he didn't want the world and his fans to keep thinking of him as being forever 13.

"People viewed me as that cute little kid. And I just really wanted to find a way by the time I hit 16 to let people know I was maturing and becoming a man," he said.

But Bow Wow didn't want to force it. He didn't want people to suddenly start reading about him hanging out in clubs, smoking, drinking, or doing whatever adults do just to make people understand that he's grown up.

"I kind of stayed away from that and kind of wanted to come up with it in a different way, and my way was through my music," he said. "I feel like one thing that you can't deny is good music."

By the time he was 16, he had dropped the "Lil" and started producing music he considers edgier and more mature.

"It really has to do with me and where I'm at with my life," he said. "I'm able to express myself differently now. My fans have grown up with me."

It must be working. Bow Wow's new album reached Number 6 on the Billboard 200 chart and produced hits such as "Shortie Like Mine" and "I'm a Flirt."

Despite achieving fame at a young age and appearing in movies like *Johnson Family Vacation* and *Roll Bounce*, Bow Wow said he surrounds himself with people who keep him humble.

"I remember where I come from and at the same time I remember who I was before all this even happened," he said. "My mother worked three jobs. I know my father but he really wasn't around. I definitely can't say I came from a hard-core background or anything like that, but I didn't come from no wealthy one. Far from it."

His new album comes at a time when exactly what rap stars say in their songs has come under renewed fire. When former radio host Don Imus made racist and sexist comments in April about the Rutgers women's basketball team, some argued that numerous hip hop artists get away with worse.

Bow Wow said certain words that are quick to offend (such as the n-word) have been in use so long that they've become common and accepted in the urban community.

"I'm not saying to use it, because it is a word, like I said, that can very easily offend people, but at the same time it's hard for a lot of artists - and not only artists but for a lot of people - not to use it because it's so common," he said.

Hip-hop is real, he said, and it reflects what many fans feel and go through.

"I think that the critics can't take what's real," he said. "They don't want to hear what goes on in the 'hood. They don't want to hear what goes on in these areas that they have no idea about or are scared to go to."

Bow Wow said parents need to take a certain amount of responsibility if they don't want their kids listening to that music, and there are better alternatives than banning words.

"When it comes to the whole language thing, you have a choice," he said. "Either you buy it or you don't. Or you listen to it or you don't."

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