



Hour photo/ERIK TRAUTMANN

Musical artist and Norwalk native Omar Wilson has put out his first album.

Norwalk singer focuses on the positive

By JILL BODACH
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NORWALK — Listening to the lyrics of Omar Rahsaan Wilson's song "Find a Way," you can almost picture a young, confused Omar walking the streets of his neighborhood trying to fit in with the other teens on the block, doing things he wasn't proud of but not really sure of another way:

"Pops was a hustler ... Mom stayed home with us. I took to the streets way too young, y'all, There's no one I can trust. I see the pain in people's faces, at different times and different

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Omar Rahsaan Wilson
Local musician

places."

Then if you change tracks to "Shinin,'" you can see an older Omar, walking the same streets but with his head bowed down this time, whispering a silent prayer to himself as he walks by the dealers' corners he used

to stand on with the people he used to roll with:

"I came from the bottom to the top. Raised by the n— that ran the block. The streets they are so cold. They say don't let it steal your soul. I used the gift I was given to make a livin.' I sing for those who are locked in prison."

Wilson's past — the neighborhood he grew up in, the people he hung out with, the mistakes he made — are all a part of Wilson, the artist who has turned these influences into music that he hopes will affect

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Singer focuses on the positive

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his environment as much as his environment has affected him.

Wilson, 25, grew up at St. Paul's Terrace, a Housing and Urban Development complex on Martin Luther King Drive. Wilson discovered rap music when he was 15 and began writing his own songs.

His songs are about what he knows, which gives him and his music credibility. He attended Norwalk High School for 1 1/2 years before being sent to J.M. Wright Regional Vocational-Technical School in Stamford. He became a father at 17 when his daughter, Asia, was born.

During that time, Wilson got in trouble and watched people around him doing drugs, getting shot and going to jail.

"I've been homeless. I've been hungry," Wilson said. "When people listen to my music, they know that I understand what they're going through because I've been there. I sing about what I know."

Wilson is not a conventional rapper. He doesn't fit into the modern rap, gangster rap or urban underground categories. Wilson focuses on the positive rather than berating society for the negatives, and he doesn't glorify violence, sex or crime.

"I think people appreciate it when you write songs about things they can relate to, and there is a lot more to

life then that," Wilson said. "Yes, I rap about the perils of life on the streets, but I also rap about relationships, friendship, emotions, learning to love yourself."

Wilson's lyrics are different. They don't sound like they're being fired out of a machine gun or attempting to pummel their message into their listeners. Wilson is mellow and gets a point across through the strength of his voice, not the heavy sound of his beats. His songs progress at a moderate rhythm, giving the listener a chance to appreciate what they are hearing.

Another point that differentiates Wilson from the Jay-Z, Jah-Rule, DMX of the world. He brings the influences of R&B, hip-hop and jazz together in his music to create a hybrid style that doesn't quite sound like anything else out there. He calls it B&R: blues and rap.

"I feel confident that my style is different, and I think people of all ages will attest to that," Wilson said. "I play at clubs like Club Speed in the city and get a good response there, and then I sing in a gospel festival and have a 77-year-old woman thank me for my music. You can't beat that."

His newest EP "Product of my Environment" is a snapshot of the life Wilson has led and all that has influenced it. Wilson describes himself as a product of his environment, and it's hard to tell which has influenced which more, but he is hoping

that whatever mark his music leaves will be a positive one.

"No matter where kids are or what kind of lives they lead, they are all affected by music," Wilson said. "I hate the deterioration of the youth in our society, and I hope that maybe if they see me, see where I came from, then maybe they'll believe that life can offer you a lot if you're willing to focus and work hard for it."

Wilson has worked hard for his recognition and he has been rewarded for it. He was nominated for Artist of the Year in 2004 for the Underground Music Awards and this year will receive the Unsigned Artist of the Year award.

Wilson's song "Find a Way" will also be recorded on iPods coming out this November. In the meantime, Wilson will continue to play clubs throughout New York and Connecticut, waiting for his break to come.

But no matter who signs up or what stations play his music, Wilson will always know who he is and where he came from. As he says in his song "Mr. Survival":

"I'm a warrior, the heart and soul, Life made me a man. I've been sent to help you through the day when skies are gray. I cannot be stopped no how, no way."

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