Emerging 17-year-old singer Cole LC has come a mighty long way — and he’s pulled it off in a staggeringly short space of time. With music piquing his interest at the young age of 13, his first musical obsessions came from two completely different directions that would end up intersecting in a surprising way. At school, he would spend as much of his free time studying battle rap platform *Don’t Flop*, finding a hero in fellow Yorkshireman Dialect (“He was one of the only rappers rapping with a Leeds accent so it felt close to home,” he explains). He became a big fan and followed his career closely. Meanwhile, the Leeds native was also taking singing lessons with local legend Cleve Freckleton. By chance, Freckleton noticed Dialect’s picture on Cole’s phone, and in a hugely unlikely turn of events, it turned out his music teacher wasn’t as out of touch as he’d thought and was, in fact, Dialect’s father.

From that chance interaction, Cole was introduced to the rapper he’d been following for so long and the pair hit it off instantly. Meeting other rap elders, Cole was inducted into the local scene. It wasn’t just Dialect’s career moves he’d been paying close attention to and soon he was following in Dialect’s footsteps, going down the busking route, even buying the same portable speaker and performing at the same spots around the local town centre in Leeds. Everything that happened after that, he says, “took off from the busking.” However, local attention and praise was only going to take him so far. “If I go into the middle of Leeds now,” he says, “and ask people if they rate me, they’re going to say, ‘yeah!” As a true Generation Z artist, Cole saw the opportunity present to capitalise on the growing grassroots support and worked on taking his freestyles online. Filling his Instagram with covers and off-the-cuff performances recorded in his bedroom, it was not long before followers wanted more. These videos would also capture the attention of online music platforms, who recognised the potential of the young singer.

Two years ago, Yorkshire-based YouTube channel First Media TV approached Cole LC to perform as part of their *Blue Room* series, and the results were epic. They swiftly booked him for a second performance and both videos quickly circulated far and wide. Fans of the freestyles would flock back to his Instagram account, where they lapped up the outpour of content from Cole. This demand and excitement steadily flowed outside of Leeds and it wasn’t long before the major labels started knocking at his door. A meeting with Columbia Records soon followed and, before long, the rest of the industry was sitting up and taking notice of the young artist merging soulful melodies with a rap and drill aesthetic.

The pace of the growing interest might have proved quite daunting, but for Cole it was another aspect of the music industry he took in his stride, “I don’t think it really sunk in at the time. I got approached by Columbia first because they’d seen an Insta video. I went for one meeting there and I thought that’d just be it. They didn’t contact me for a couple of weeks and then all of a sudden there were loads of emails from every label. It was going nuts — and it was all just from my *Blue Room* session. I’ve found that it’s a big industry, but a small world. So I was going into all these meetings, but I didn’t know how sick it actually was that I was getting all these meetings. I was just turning up, trying to be that smiley, nice kid. I don’t think I realised the opportunity that I got, but I was super, super lucky to have those options.”

Fusing the worlds of R&B, rap and alternative pop into a fluid, melodious sound, Cole LC’s influences range from his Caribbean heritage and an eclectic array of musical heroes. He lists his biggest inspirations as Mike Skinner, Potter Payper, Mahalia, Lil Baby and Ed Sheeran. “I want to be unpredictable, but consistent,” he says, and it’s clear he’s working hard to learn as many lessons from his heroes as possible. He draws as much as he can from those figures, expressing his admiration for Lil Baby and Sheeran’s work-rate, Skinner’s presence on and off stage, and Mahalia’s humility, progression and lack of compromise.

Comparisons to Ed Sheeran have been forthcoming, but he doesn’t let it bother him: “I think people bring up the comparison because of the way he started with SBTV, but if I was doing the melodic rap kind of stuff and I wasn’t white, I don’t think the comparison would be there as much. I don’t mind though; I could be compared to him all day! I take it as a compliment.” Now that he has his first high-profile collaboration under his belt — his debut single “Rollin” with UK drill star Double Lz — it’s only a matter of time before Cole LC achieves major league chart success. However, in spite of it all, he remains humble and focused: “I just want to smash it the best I can and show people it hasn’t been for nothing.”

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