

Your COMMUNITY VOICE KANATA STITTSVILLE

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Local rapper preps for Bluesfest

BY REBECCA ATKINSON

Within three weeks of starting his studies at Carleton University, RJ Vanneste found a music studio on campus. The All Saints High School grad was studying to become a teacher, but the thought of being in a studio was much more appealing to him than studying for his classes. Soon enough, he was spending most of his time producing and mixing original music in the studio.

"I'm not proud of this, but I skipped some exams, failed some courses," says RJ. "But I

was finding something that made me happy. School didn't make me happy. I was there to be safe, but it's not what I wanted to do. What I wanted was to do music."

And now, that's exactly what he's doing. RJ dropped out of Carleton during his second year of his teaching studies and switched to Algonquin College's Music Industry Arts program.

"So far since I've been at Algonquin, I've had the opportunity to use the studio there and take my creativity to the next level."

Now, a few months away from graduating,

the young rapper is looking forward to his biggest gig yet: performing at RBC Bluesfest on July 10.

"I'm definitely pretty stoked," he says. His initial interest in music wasn't simply ignited in university as a way of avoiding his school responsibilities, but rather it was something that was in him from a young age. RJ's mother, Ann Marie, a teacher at All Saints, says her son's musical talent blossomed when he was a kid playing piano, but he buried his musical abilities as he grew up.

PLEASE SEE BLUESFEST, PAGE 7

>> **BLUESFEST, FROM PAGE 1**

He was involved in student council, dramatic arts and the school improv team, but took behind-the-scenes roles when it came to anything musical, such as background tech work and sound engineering.

"The whole idea of him doing sound and tech stuff was always in his blood," says Ann Marie.

She wasn't thrilled when RJ decided to leave university, but as they both recall, she got over the initial upset fairly soon after he made his decision.

"My kids do what the world says they're supposed to do," says Ann Marie.

"He was going to be a great teacher. But that's not his passion."

The whole concept of university is something that Ann Marie herself admits isn't necessarily the one-stop shop it used to be for students seeking jobs these days, either.

"So many students get their degree, then don't know what they want to do," says Ann Marie.

"It sends a message. Yes, university is what the world says to do... but college isn't what it used to be, back in my day."

RJ prides himself in being different from the way he sees high schools and universities showing students what they should do with their lives, treading waters that aren't often navigated these days.

"Everyone else has been doing this for years: go to school, get a job, then go work for something that's already set up," says RJ.

"No one's really fostering kids to do something different."

And while it took Ann Marie some time to come to terms with RJ's decision, she is ultimately supportive of her son's decision to pursue a career as a rapper and sound producer.



Submitted photo

RJ Vanneste, known onstage as Roland Prince, prides himself in being different from the way he sees high schools and universities showing students what they should do with their lives, treading waters that aren't so often navigated.

She mentions that there are many other places RJ could go with his music, but for now he's bound to stay put.

"To be 20 and living your dream in Kanata, there's lots of opportunity to do things elsewhere, but he's committed to getting Ottawa on the map."

Bluesfest will be an op-

portunity for RJ to do exactly this, and he's been preparing for this moment since last year, when one of his acquaintance's was accepted to play at the same festival last summer.

himselves to prepare, build his portfolio, perform as much as he could and develop himself as an artist in hopes of being accepted for 2018. One of the things he did was change his stage name from Drama Kid, to Roland Prince. The reason was because Drama Kid was likened

of his own creativity.

When he came up with the name, he did a Google search to find a late musician by the same name – who died on RJ's birthday two years ago.

"That's beyond a cool coincidence," says RJ. "I chose that name out of the blue, then found this guy died on my birthday. I liked that connection."

RJ is proud to have his name now attached to his music as Roland Prince.

"Some musicians say whatever they want because it sounds good. But with all my music, my name is attached to it, I have to be as authentically 'me' as possible.

"I'll never really look for what to write next, I can just write about what I go through and experience, that's my motivation for writing rather than looking for it.

"Changing from a rapper to an artist, to a musician."

"Everyone else has been doing this for years: go to school, get a job, then go work for something that's already set up. No one's really fostering kids to do something different."

RJ VANNESTE, local rapper

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RJ had missed the deadline, but dedicated

to a character RJ played, where he was able to say what he wanted, but not take full ownership over it because his name was not attached to his performances.

The name Roland Prince came both from RJ's first name, Roland, and some

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