

MinnesotaColdTV Captures Street Rap, Controversy



Minnesota, Minneapolis, Feb 3, 2021 (Issuewire.com) - It's a testament to the creativity of Twin Cities hip-hop that our best-known artists — Atmosphere, Brother Ali, Doomtree — are seen as viable alternatives to big-name rap stars. But what about the local rappers who are making runs at being the next Meek Mill, Future, or Chief Keef, hungry upstart MCs who gain attention by rapping over today's popular beats?

The second grouping is the concern of Santana Smith, a 24-year-old Minneapolis native better known as Zone. Besides working as an audio engineer at Like Water Studio in St. Paul, Zone runs MinnesotaColdTV, a YouTube channel specializing in music videos from Twin Cities street rappers. MinnesotaColdTV is a one-man operation, but its output seems like the work of a team. With multiple uploads every week, MinnesotaColdTV's YouTube subscriber count is approaching the 5,000 marks, while single videos of its most popular artist, St. Paul 20-year-old King Savage, score hundreds of thousands of views.

It's been a steady climb. Zone uploaded the first MinnesotaColdTV video in May 2013 after growing dissatisfied with the recognition he was getting as an audio engineer. Originally looking to hire someone to make videos for his own music, he found that local directors' prices didn't correspond to the quality of their work. "I see a lot of people jump out there and they just got a camera in their hand," Zone says. "All they care about is the money. They don't care about the shots. They don't care about the audience."

Zone saw an opportunity. "A good song could catch, but if people don't know what you look like and they can't buy into you, it'll never blow up," he explains. Zone names Db Tha Rasta and the duo Vo & Go as his first successful artists. More connections were made, and he's now cranking out 200 videos per year, which he says is "unheard of" for Twin Cities directors. His fees are reasonable (\$150 to \$250), but given that it takes just two hours to complete a shoot and sometimes only a day or two to edit

the footage, he's running an efficient business.

In 2015, aspiring rappers are flocking to work with Zone, and the quality of the music he's capturing is at an all-time high. The stars of MinnesotaColdTV today include King Savage, Tarxan, and Boss Sleep — all members of the group N.D.O. (No Dayz Off) — as well as Vo & Go, Tae Dinero, and others. Many of the artists draw elements from trap and drill rap, but there's no easy way to lump them all in together.

With word of his professionalism getting around, Zone has accumulated an impressive list of clients. "That nigga be puttin' some originality into his videos," says rapper Scrooge Money, who's done MinnesotaColdTV videos for two songs from his upcoming debut mixtape, *Bleed Da Block*. "He working. He knows what he doing."

The zone has enough rappers hiring him for videos that he's run into problems; not everyone on his channel is friendly with everyone else. MinnesotaColdTV's most popular video, the clip for King Savage and Boss Sleep's remix of Rowdy Rebel and Bobby Shmurda's "Computers," was controversial before it was even uploaded. During the March shoot, a St. Paul resident called the police on the large group of young men, some of whom were flashing gang signs, Zone says. "These dudes are out here 20-, 30-, 50-deep," Zone recalls. "It already looked like something was finna happen to us."

Arrests were made after police found two loaded handguns; eight men were eventually charged with the crime committed for benefit of a gang and second-degree riot. The situation grew worse when authorities dissected the content of Savage and Sleep's version of "Computers." On it, both rappers promise retaliation for an incident in which Savage was jumped and robbed by a group of east St. Paul gang members associated with Vo & Go. Zone says he doesn't gangbang and he hadn't even heard the song before filming began. But that didn't stop police from arresting him, temporarily taking his camera, and holding him for 36 hours under the assumption he was shooting the video for the benefit of a gang.

It wasn't the only time Zone found himself "caught up in the mix" of problematic situations while shooting videos. Some sessions have been shot up, while the police have closed down others.

"They don't want to see anybody rapping," Zone says of Twin Cities police. "They don't want to see anybody talking about the street life in the state of Minnesota, 'cause they want to pretend like it's a good state. I heard of an article where someone was saying Minnesota is the best state to raise a child, and I'm like, 'Hmm. They think it's fine and dandy up here.'"

Zone says the negative aspects of MinnesotaColdTV's reputation have kept him from working with some of the Twin Cities' long-established rappers. He's known guys like Toki Wright and Doontree's Sims for years, but he says that neither will work with him because of the incidents involving some of the rappers on his channel. (Wright declined to comment for this story; Sims tells City Pages he's unaware of any controversy surrounding MinnesotaColdTV and his lack of activity with Zone has been a matter of scheduling conflicts.)

Zone sees the tension as a battle worth fighting through. "I represent Minnesota and urban hip-hop, the voices of the people that can't be heard," he says. "I tell artists, 'You gotta stop repping these neighborhoods and start repping Minnesota. Then you will get everybody to listen to you.'"

King Savage, who's at work on his debut mixtape, *I Can't Fold*, says obstacles like the "Computers" situation have hardly slowed his rise. He takes pride in his consistency. He's done seven videos with MinnesotaColdTV since first connecting with Zone early this year. "You could put out a lot of songs, but at the end of the day, people want to see something," Savage explains. "You gotta be a rapper, and

then you gotta be an entertainer with it. People want to see a show.”

If he’s not the best rapper on MinnesotaColdTV, Savage is the most popular: His videos bring in 5,000 views a day as soon as they’re uploaded. With Zone’s clientele quickly growing in popularity, it’s hard to argue when he makes an optimistic declaration about the movement: “We’re up next.”

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