

KINDA LIKE

THIS YEAR IT SEEMED LIKE ALMOST EVERYONE HAD A LIST. SO WE LET HEADS VOTE ON THE 10TH SLOT. MEET THE FRESHMAN CLASS OF 2012.

INTERVIEWS MARIEL CONCEPCIÓN,
JESSE GISSEN, MARK LELINWALLA
IMAGES TRAVIS SHINN

In the past five years that *XXL* has been picking Freshman classes, never once has making the list been easy. This year included. Similar to 2011, the hype around Freshmen has continued to grow by leaps and bounds, surprising even us with its popularity. For this class, the buzz began earlier than ever, four months before the cover was even shot. And it seemed like everybody had a list. From subdued music fans to diehard rap junkies, from Twitter stalkers to industry heavies and featherweights, folks wanted their picks to be on the *XXL* Freshmen list. We listened, asked opinions, discussed and took notes.

With such a heavy interest in the lineup, we flipped it up for 2012 and decided to let the 10th spot in the class be voted on by the people. Fans could go to XXLMag.com and select one of 50 newer MCs for this year's Freshmen list. At the end of voting, the winning spot went to the artist that had the most votes from the nominees we hadn't selected yet. (For both the winner and first female Freshman MC, see page 62.)

On the last day of this past January, the 10 selectees came together for the photo shoot. Freestyles were spit, conversations were had and connections were made as *XXL*'s new class of MCs joined the ranks.



A BIG DEAL





FRENCH MONTANA

Gov't Name: Karim Kharbouch

Twitter: @FrenchMonTanA

Age: 28

Reppin': The Bronx

Notable Releases: Singles: "Shot Caller" (2011), "Choppa Choppa Down" (2011); Mixtapes: *Lock Out* with Waka Flocka Flame (2011), *Coke Boys 2* (2011), *Cocaine Mafia* with Juicy J and Project Pat (2011)

Currently Working On: His major label debut, *Excuse My French*, scheduled to drop July 17

Label: Bad Boy/Interscope

Aligned With: Diddy, Rick Ross, Waka Flocka Flame

Side Hustle: A clothing line and Montana Cigars, both set to launch this year; a deal with Pelle Pelle to work on a French Montana line of leathers; the latest artist to become a Ciroc Boy

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "ASAP Rocky. He didn't get picked? He didn't want to be a part of it? I'ma have to ask him about it."

Influenced By: "I'm influenced by The Coke Boys—Charlie Rock, Chinx Drugs and them—and Rick Ross and Puff. They motivate me."

As a Freshman in High School: "Young and wild."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "It will make everyone watch now. I think that it's a part of growing as an artist, a stepping stone for everything I'm trying to do this year. It's a big look. It's a big look to be called one of the hottest artists to come out."

(Continued on XXLMag.com)

STYLING: JESSICA BROWN; HAIR: JESSICA BROWN; MAKEUP: JESSICA BROWN; PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSICA BROWN; GROOMING: JESSICA BROWN; STYLING: JESSICA BROWN; HAIR: JESSICA BROWN; MAKEUP: JESSICA BROWN; PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSICA BROWN; GROOMING: JESSICA BROWN



MACHINE GUN KELLY

Gov't Name: Colson Baker

Twitter: @machinegunkelly

Age: 21

Reppin': Cleveland

Notable Releases: Singles: "Wild Boy" (2011), "Invincible" (2011); Guest appearances: DMX's "I Don't Dance" (2011); Mixtapes: *100 Words And Running* (2010), *Lace Up* (2010), *Rage Pack* (2011)

Label: EST 19XX/Bad Boy/Interscope

Currently Working On: *Half Naked & Almost Famous* EP/DVD, due in March, and his solo full-length debut, *Lace Up*, out summer 2012

Aligned With: Diddy, French Montana, Waka Flocka Flame, Tech N9ne, DMX

Side Hustle: Going on Tech N9ne's Hostile Takeover 2012 Tour, consisting of 90 shows in 99 days beginning in March, and then the Warped Tour, beginning in June

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "I don't know. I'm an EST boy, so I stick with my crew."

Influenced By: "DMX influenced my music because he gave me a soundtrack to run away to when shit wasn't right at the house. He made me feel like I could conquer the world and overcome any motherfucker threatening my success or my livelihood, no matter how big they were. I got nothing but love for the Dog. I met him at Saltmine Studios [in Mesa, Arizona]. He walked in when I was spitting one of his verses. It was the last verse on *It's Dark & Hell Is Hot*, 'N-Words Done Started Something.' He was like, 'I like your energy already though.' Me and him just clicked."

As a Freshman in High School: "A fuckin' loser with the biggest heart ever. That's why I am what I am. I was an outcast, misunderstood flat-out."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "My initial thought was who I'd be associated with and if it was sketchy, but when it comes down to it, that just makes you come out on top and be better than before. You just defied the associations and notions people had about your stereotypes. It gives me another chance to overcome. Because I was given this platform now, I feel like if I go down I can't ever be bitter about what I had. It's basically the last straw of being given a platform to prove yourself. I've finally been given a platform to prove myself."

(Continued on XXLMag.com)



FUTURE

Gov't Name: Nayvadius Cash

Twitter: @Ifuture

Age: 26

Reppin': Atlanta

Notable Releases: Singles: "Tony Montana" (2011), "Magic" (2011); Mixtapes: *1000* (2010), *Dirty Sprite* (2011), *True Story* (2011), *Streetz Calling* (2011), *Freebricks* with Gucci Mane (2011), *Astronaut Status* (2012)

Label: Epic Records

Currently Working On: His debut album, *Pluto*, scheduled to drop this April, and his as-yet-untitled sophomore album, due in the fourth quarter

Aligned With: L.A. Reid, Dungeon Family

Side Hustle: Founder and owner of Freebandz clothing line; AI Freebandz record label

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "I can't say, 'cause you know I always expect the unexpected."

Influenced by: "Too Short, Soulja Slim, Jay-Z, E-40 and OutKast—they've all influenced my style."

As a Freshman in High School: "Running wild [yet] trying to be observant, and just wanting to be a part of the in crowd. But, at the end of the day, I was always a trendsetter; I always stood out. Even being in a crowd of people I always stood out for some reason, and then I [realized] that's the way I'm gonna be. You know, you understand who you are and you grow and accept the person that you are, and you move on. As a freshman, you just trying to find yourself."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "It means the starting point of your career. Now you got more people listening, more opinions and more people that just wanna see what you have coming. Your career is in your hands and you can make it what you wanna make it by just working hard, and this is proof. Looking at the cover every day, it gives you a chance to go back and reflect where you come from and where you can go."

(Continued on XXL Mag.com)



ROSCOE DASH

Gov't Name: Jeffrey Johnson

Twitter: @Roscoedash

Age: 21

Reppin': Atlanta

Notable Releases: Singles: "All the Way Turnt Up" (2010), "Sidity" (2011), "Good Good Night" (2011); Guest appearances: Waka Flocka Flame's "No Hands" (2010), Big Sean's "Marvin Gaye & Chardonnay" (2011), DJ Drama's "Oh My" (2011), Maino's "Let It Fly" (2011); Mixtapes: *Can't Catch the Lambo* (2010), *Demolition 2020* (2010), *Dash Effect* (2011), *J.U.I.C.E. EP* (2011)

Label: Music Line Group/Geffen

Currently Working On: His solo debut, *J.U.I.C.E. Forever*, due late summer

Aligned With: Waka Flocka Flame, Wale, Big Sean, B.o.B.

Side Hustle: N/A

Surprised About Who Is Missing:

"I don't know. I think Frank Ocean should have been here. He should have been here last year and the year before that too. I know he does R&B, but I think he's a person that's overlooked for what he does."

Influenced By: "Andre 3000. That's an idol of mine. I just think he brings so much wisdom, so much class and style to the game. He stood for what he believed in and those are the characteristics of a superstar."

As a Freshman in High School:

"I was bad. I was in trouble all the time in school. I was just misunderstood."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL

Freshman: "It's an honor. Anytime you can be credited for something you've accomplished, it's always a great honor. I'm just happy to be part of it, really. It's great. It's a platform and a foundation to build [on] and make additions [to] until you're comfortable. My goal is to never get comfortable. I want to keep working, keep working, keep working. I feel that once you get comfortable, that's when you hit a decline. I want to keep going up, up, up 'til there's no space above."

(Continued on XXLMag.com)



KID INK

Gov't Name: Brian Collins

Twitter: @kid_ink

Age: 25

Reppin': Los Angeles

Notable Releases: Singles: "Run This" (2010), "Keep It Rollin'" (2010), "La La La" (2010), "Time of Your Life" (2012); Guest appearances: Red Café's "Slumdog Billionaire" (2011); Mixtapes: *Crash Landing* (2010), *Daydreamer* (2011), *Wheels Up* (2011)

Label: Tha Alumni Music Group

Currently Working On: *Up & Away* LP, coming in late spring 2012 (Tha Alumni Music Group)

Aligned With: DJ ill Will, Meek Mill, Jahlil Beats, Cardiak, Los, Machine Gun Kelly

Side Hustle: Producer; co-owns Tha Alumni Clothing line (sold on thaalumni.com) with business partner DJ ill Will

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "I did see Iggy [Azalea] come in. I wasn't really shocked; I had a feeling. I've been talking to some people about it on the streets and a lot of people felt like she was a strong contender. That let me know that the streets are definitely making the decisions right now."

Influenced By: "I was real big on East Coast music 'cause of my of father. My dad being from New York, he used to DJ and he would just play different kinds of stuff—Bad Boy, Puffy and MaSe, Fabolous, DMX."

As a Freshman in High School: "I was a pretty bad student. I could say, once you start paying attention to just the socialization, the grades and stuff just drop a lil' bit. I was definitely popular, but my grades weren't popular. I wasn't popular with the teachers or the deans."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "It's definitely a blessing and it's appreciated. It's a big move. XXL has the credibility to stamp and brand new artists in the hip-hop game, and from the past covers, I've seen so many artists that are some of my favorites and a lot of other people's favorites. I feel like there's only bigger things to come from here."

(Continued on XXLMag.com)

HOPSIN

Gov't Name: Marcus Hopson

Twitter: @hopsin

Age: 26

Reppin': Panorama City, California

Notable Releases: Single: "Sag My Pants" (2010); Guest appearance: Tech N9ne's "Am I a Psycho" (2011); Albums: *Gazing at the Moonlight* (2009), *Raw* (2010); Mixtapes: *Haywire with SwizZz* (2009)

Label: Funk Volume

Currently Working On: His *Knock Madness* album, due out in June

Aligned With: Tech N9ne

Side Hustle: Produces; directs and edits his own videos; co-owner (with Damien Ritter) of Funk Volume, a record label, marketing and production company founded in 2008

Surprised About Who Is Missing:

"I could have sworn [ASAP Rocky] was going to be here. Everybody I talked to said he was going to be here. I'm not fully in tune to a lot of rappers; it's not like I'm hating on them. I'm not sure, to be honest."

Influenced By: "The top of the list is Eminem. One thing I learned from Eminem is to have no boundaries. Big L was definitely a big influence. Canibus, Crooked I—they can all rap."

As a Freshman in High School: "I was a fuckin' funky-ass skater kid. I really didn't have any friends. I was a loner, really goofy and a class clown."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL

Freshman: "Sometimes I wonder if this rapper or that rapper knows about me—if Dr. Dre knows about me. I know whoever is in tune with hip-hop knows about this, so somehow they're going to hear about it. Even if they don't listen to my music, they'll be like, 'I heard about that guy; I like him,' or 'I don't like him.' It would be good to go to sleep at night knowing at least they know about me."

(Continued on *XXLMag.com*)

DANNY BROWN

Gov't Name: Daniel Dewan Sewell

Twitter: @xdannyxbrownx

Age: 30

Reppin': Detroit

Notable Releases: Singles: "Greatest Rapper Ever" (2010), "Monopoly" (2011), "Blunt After Blunt" (2011); Guest appearances: Mr. Muthafuckin' eXquire's "The Last Huzzah (Remix)" (2011); Mixtapes: *Hawaiian Snow* with Tony Yayo (2010), *The Hybrid* (2010), *XXX* (2011); Albums: *Black and Brown* with Black Milk (2011)

Label: Fool's Gold Records

Currently Working On: His as-yet-untitled solo debut album, slated for fall 2012 release

Aligned With: Tony Yayo, Black Milk, Main Attrakionz, ASAP Rocky, Das Racist

Side Hustle: Going on North American tour with Childish Gambino, kicking off in March 2012

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "ASAP Rocky and Schoolboy Q [should be here], but those are my friends though."

Influenced By: "Spice-1, Nas, Wu-Tang, and then in the end the U.K. guys—Dizzee Rascal and The Streets."

As a Freshman in High School: "I was awkward because it was a transition coming from the Eastside of Detroit to the Westside of Detroit, which is like two different worlds. The Eastside mentality was about being gangsta—instead of spending all their money on being fresh, they would go out and buy guns—while the Westside mentality was about getting fresh and rocking Iceberg and Coogi and shit. I had to get my shit up and that got me into trouble, 'cause competing with that I had to sell drugs."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "Anything that you're getting acknowledged for, it's great. Everybody put their work in, and to get acknowledged for something like this, where it's [10] different people, to me it's like the end-all of end-alls. It's pretty much like getting Rookie of the Year in sports. But if the people that I think should be there is not there either, it's like a bittersweet moment."

(Continued on *XXLMag.com*)



MACKLEMORE

Gov't Name: Ben Haggerty

Twitter: @macklemore

Age: 28

Reppin': Seattle

Notable Releases: Singles: "Otherside" (2009), "Wings" (2011), "My Oh My" (2011); Mixtapes: The VS. EP (2009), VS. Redux (2010)

Label: N/A

Currently Working On: His untitled debut full-length album, coming summer/fall 2012

Aligned With: Ryan Lewis

Side Hustle: Directs his own music videos

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "I thought ASAP Rocky would be here."

Influenced By: "My first rap tape was Digital Underground. I got into West Coast gangsta rap: Ice Cube, N.W.A, [Da Lench Mob's] *Guerillas in the Mist*, shit like that. I got into LL Cool J, A Tribe Called Quest, Diggable Planets, Wu-Tang, Mobb Deep, Fugees, a lot of East Coast stuff, and then some West Coast underground stuff. Hieroglyphics were a big influence."

As a Freshman In High School: "I went to Garfield High School in Seattle. A lot of great people went there: Quincy Jones, Bruce Lee, Jimmy Hendrix, Ish from Diggable Planets and Shabazz Palaces—a long list of musicians. When I was a freshman that was around when I started rapping—a lot of ciphers, a lot of smoking/drinking in school and getting in trouble, a lot of fighting and all that shit, acting like a knucklehead, thinking I was the white Tupac, running around with my wifebeater on, drinking Special Brew and getting arrested."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "It's something that I've always wanted to be a part of, ever since you guys started to do it a couple years ago. I think it's any up-and-coming rappers' dream to be on that cover and in that class of artists where you're recognized as one of the few that's made some noise. It's humbling and it's exciting and all in all I'm honored to be a part of it."

(Continued on XXLMag.com)



MACKLEMORE: JORDAN; SNEAKERS BY JORDAN; JEANS BY DIESEL; APPAREL BY AMERICAN APPAREL; HAIR BY ANDREW; MAKEUP BY ANDREW

SET DESIGNER: SHAWN PATRICK ANDERSON; BRIDGE ARTISTS: HEAD STYLIST: MIA QUINN; CURRN OF EVERY THING; MAKEUP ARTIST: JANICE KINJO/ANTHONY LOGISTICS; EPIPHANY ARTIST GROUP, INC.; MAKEUP ASSISTANT: JESSICA SMITH/S/EPHANY ARTIST GROUP, INC.; HAIR STYLIST: CYNTHIA ALVAREZ/EPHANY ARTIST GROUP, INC.; BARBERS: JAMES GOLDING AND JASON MCAULEY, BOTH FOR EPIPHANY ARTIST GROUP, INC.; SHIRT: AT INDUSTRIA STUDIOS, NYC; IGGY AZALEA STYLING: ALEXANDRA HERNANDEZ; ON IGGY AZALEA: DRESS BY SHAKUHACHI, SHOES BY GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI; STYLISTS: OWN JEWELRY



For the first time ever, we got you, the reader, involved. We picked our nine top Freshmen and then opened up the 10th spot to be voted online by the public. The numbers are in: Iggy Azalea wins the slot with the most votes for any artist not already selected by the XXL staff for this year's list.

IGGY AZALEA

Gov't Name: Amethyst (she won't say her last name)

Twitter: @iggyazalea

Age: 21

Reppin': Mullumbimby, Australia

Notable Releases: Mixtape: *Ignorant Art* (2011); Singles: "My World" (2011), "Pu\$\$y" (2011)

Label: Interscope Records

Currently Working On: Her debut album, *The New Classic*, slated for an early June release

Aligned With: ASAP Rocky, Interscope Records Chairman Jimmy Iovine and T.I.

Side Hustle: Far East Tresses (fareasttress.com), a weave company she co-owns with partner Peezy that was founded in 2009

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "Kirko Bangz. He's poppin' right now. I kept tabbing him on my list of who I expected [would be a Freshman this year]."

Influenced by: "I like Missy Elliott, because people don't expect rap to look like how I look, and when she came out people didn't expect rap to look like her. I really like Andre 3000 because he doesn't dress or sound like you expect a rapper to."

As a Freshman in High School: "Man, everyone hated me. They used to call me G-Unit 'cause I liked rap. I liked Tupac too, so I'd be like, 'Can I be The Outlawz instead of G-Unit?' [Rap wasn't very popular] in my town. During the Ja Rule era, it was really popular. You would go to parties and they would be playing that type of stuff. But then it just kind of disappeared and I was like, 'Oh, I love this shit! I don't know about you guys.' They were like, 'We wanna go to raves and we wanna go to festivals,' and I was like, 'I just don't wanna have glow sticks!'"

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 XXL Freshman: "It's amazing! Seriously, I feel like I've said it a billion times, but really, I grew up ordering this magazine and it would come like two months late 'cause I really am from a really small town. It feels so good. I'm so happy to be able to be a girl and represent for all the girls. To have a girl on the cover, I just think it's kind of a testament that we do have a place in this industry and we have a voice, do you know what I mean? Girls have a place in hip-hop." ♦

(Continued on XXLMag.com)

IMAGES: BRYAN MIRANDA

DON TRIP

Gov't Name: Christopher Wallace (really!)

Twitter: @MrDonTrip

Age: 26

Reppin': Memphis, TN

Notable Releases: Single: "Letter to My Son" (2009); Mixtapes: *Stepbrothers* with Starlito (2011), *Human Torch 3* (2011), *Terminator 2* (2011), *iHEARTStrippers* (2011)

Label: Epidemic/First Family/Interscope Records

Currently Working On: His debut album, *Help Is on the Way*, slated to be released this summer

Aligned With: Cool & Dre

Side Hustle: N/A

Surprised About Who Is Missing: "Starlito! I think he did a lot in L.A., [for] a couple of years now actually, that gained a lot of notoriety. *XXL* had him as a [Freshman] nominee. He's done a lot to be notarized."

Influenced By: "Andre 3000, Jay-Z and Tupac, because they never had to be anyone but themselves, and I almost felt like I knew them from their music 'cause their [lyrics] were so personal."

As a Freshman in High School: "Quiet, secluded. I'm not a people person. I been rapping since I was 11, but I've never been a people person. I never liked new people."

TRUTH: On Being a 2012 *XXL* Freshman: "I think it's good. It's always controversial. They got high expectations for the Freshmen, but I came in the game on a conscious verse so I got no problem with it. That's how I record—about what I'm going through. All my music is personal. I'm a rapper, so I gotta rap sometimes, but for the most part all my music is emotional, [about] my life. It's biographical—sometimes it's pain, sometimes it's joy, sometimes it's a bit of everything. I think it fits."

(Continued on *XXLMag.com*)

