

# KEEPING IT FRESH

BY DAVID LI

Growing up as a fan of hip hop and rap, Duane D.O. Gibson dreamed of one day making his mark on the industry.

Today, Gibson has managed to find his unique niche and is respected by his peers for being a savvy businessman and a talented rapper.

Looking back, the 38-year-old Woodbridge resident remembers the first album he purchased was from the popular rap duo of Will Smith and Jeff Townes from West Philadelphia—better known as DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince.

Inspired by their talents and success, he would often freestyle—a style of improvisation rap with or without instrumental beats—for hours at a time during his youth.

As one of the only students of colour at his school, he recalls freestyling later became a way to address racism.

"I learned that I didn't have to fight back with my words or my fists, but to develop an outlet and that was the best way to overcome adversity," says Gibson, who was born in Watrous, Sask. and moved to Stratford, Ont. as a child.

Gibson says a rap battle competition in Detroit more than 15 years ago opened his eyes to his own talents and potential.

With approximately 100 rappers taking part in the competition during the summer of 2000, Gibson, who had relocated to Toronto to attend York University, surprised his friends and himself by making it to the semifinals.

The impressive showing against more experienced rappers made him appreciate his potential as a rapper and his ability to captivate an audience.

Wanting to make the most of his newly realized talents and give back to a cause close to his heart, he started to give motivational speeches about anti-bullying to youngsters.

And he decided to do something unique to separate himself from others in the industry.

In July 2003, Gibson set the world record for longest freestyle rap at over eight hours.

"I did it at Dark Knights car show, which was held at the Markham Fairgrounds. Because it was a car show, there were so many people coming in and out, which always kept it fresh," recalled Gibson, who goes by the nickname D.O., which represents Defy the Odds.

"I'd look for people wearing sports jerseys so I could freestyle about different athletes and their teams, and I had various DJs help me out too which always kept the beats fresh."

Setting the world record for longest rap has been the first of many notable accomplishments for Gibson over the years.

Having also learned the ins and outs of the music business, he started up a management and consulting company focused on hip hop called Northstarr Entertainment.

Through his company, Gibson has become a person Canadian artists turn for assistance for everything from management support to writing applications for government grants.

He has put out several albums and released music videos that have found their way onto various charts in Canada and the United States. In addition, he has travelled the world and shared the stage with rap industry heavyweights such as Wiz Kalifa, Lil Jon and Snoop Dogg.

A highlight of his career came earlier this year during the NBA All-Star weekend in Toronto, when he had a chance to freestyle for Snoop Dogg.

"It was cool getting a chance to freestyle topics that he supplied and perform in front of him. Of course it wasn't too difficult when the topics he gave me were basketball, Toronto and himself. I'm used to going to schools and having students throw out some tough ones like environmental conditions in Argentina.... So this was a layup."

The married father of two says his ability to find his niche in the industry has been due to persistence, hard work and dedication—and a lot of support.

One of his biggest supporters over the years has been Wesley Williams, better known as Maestro Fresh-Wes.

"It's kind of cool to be able to call him a friend and in a lot of ways he's been a mentor to me as well," says Gibson of the man commonly referred to as the godfather of Canadian hip hop.

Williams, who first met Gibson during an urban music conference in 2001, is quick to point out the qualities that have led to his success.

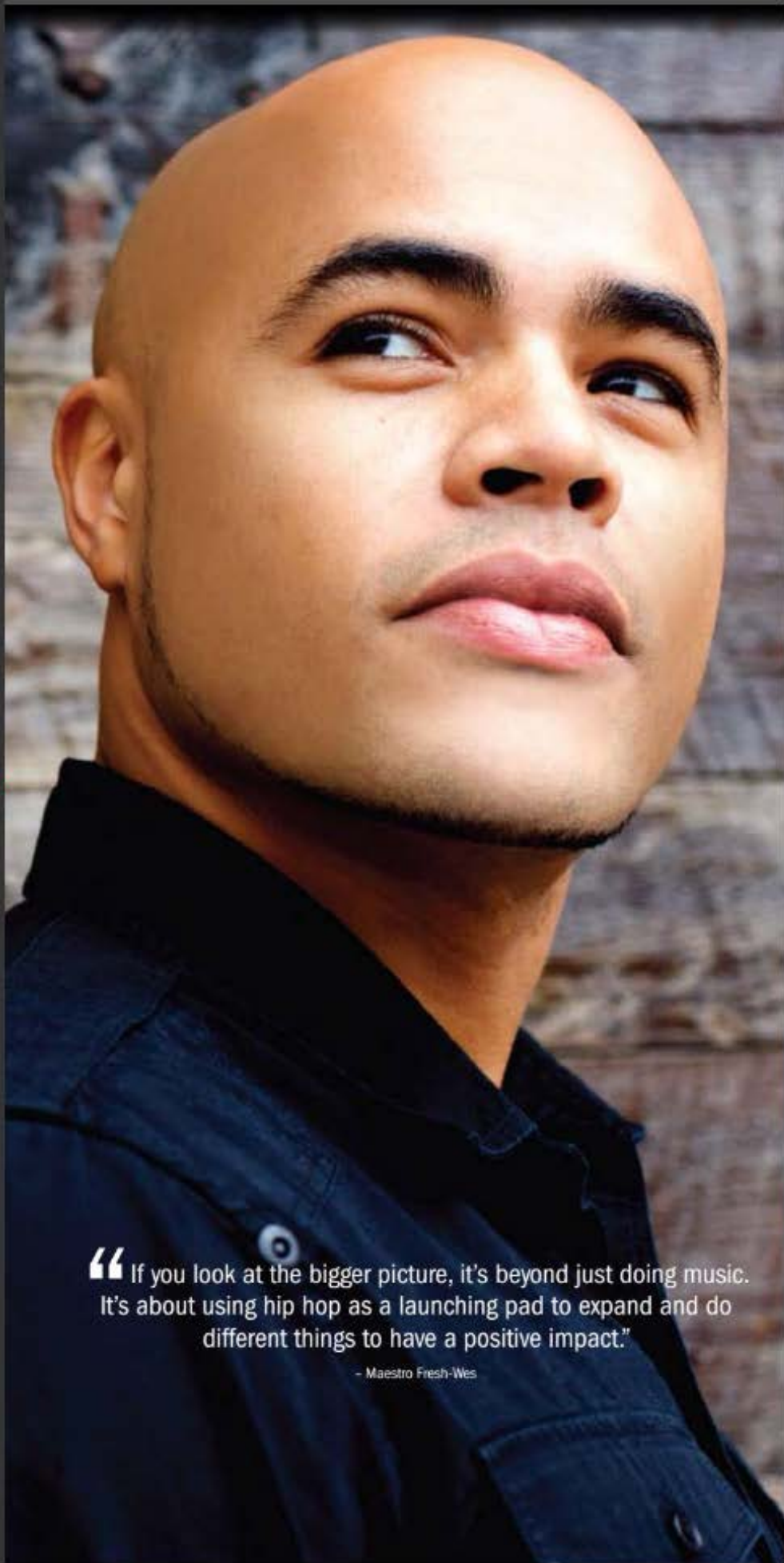
"D.O. is a dude who is always enthusiastic to learn and grow. He's passionate about music. We have a lot in common. He's like a sponge trying to learn as much as he could," says Williams, who broke through in 1989 with the mega hit *Let Your Backbone Slide*.

"D.O.'s found a unique lane to be an asset to the hip hop scene from doing grants to travelling to Croatia to do a show with Snoop."

While Williams has taught Gibson a lot about the music and entertainment, he has also learned from Gibson, who continues to speak to students about bullying and has gone on to publish a book in 2012 about his experiences as a motivational speaker.

"It's just not about me inspiring him but it's about him inspiring me also," says Williams, who has performed alongside Gibson and collaborated with him on a 2015 single *Never Gets Old*.

"If you look at the bigger picture, it's beyond just doing music. It's about using hip hop as a launching pad to expand and do different things to have a positive impact—and that's where D.O.'s found his niche and he's making his mark."



## D.O. GIBSON ON...

### ...ADVICE FOR AN 8-YEAR-OLD D.O.

When I was eight, I was living in Stratford, Ont.. No Bieber then. I would have told myself to keep dreaming and setting my goals high. In my visits to schools, I see too many youth that don't set their goals high enough.

### ...LIVING IN WOODBRIDGE

I lived in Vaughan for 12 years now, first in Maple and the last six years in Woodbridge. My in-laws moved up here so we followed suit. I love it up here. I love the people.

### ...HIS 5-YEAR PLAN

I just want to be still in it. I look up to Maestro who is 10 years older than me. I see him doing big performances, speaking with youth, being a father. That's what I want to keep on doing.

“If you look at the bigger picture, it's beyond just doing music. It's about using hip hop as a launching pad to expand and do different things to have a positive impact.”

- Maestro Fresh-Wes

