



Zimbabwean rapper Alpha Centauri lights up

With several genre-blending singles set to launch this year, the Nanaimo-based hip-hop artist reflects on the revelations that helped propel his craft.

BY DAVID OWEN RAMA • NANAIMO • MARCH 21, 2023



The hip-hop songwriter brings positive energy and his

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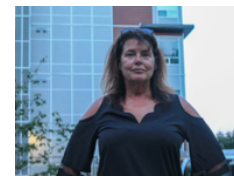
native Shona language to his latest single, I'll Fly. **Photo courtesy of Alpha Centauri**

After six years establishing himself in Canada, Zimbabwean rapper Alpha Centauri has forged creative relationships in Nanaimo that have helped him take his craft to the next level.

Collaborating with local event promoter and music producer Wes Smith, Alpha Centauri has formulated a long-term plan to put out several new singles over the course of 2023, eventually leading up to a full-length studio release scheduled for March 2024.

Born Sean Chigumba in Harare, Zimbabwe to professional parents, Alpha Centauri was strongly encouraged by his family to pursue a career in law. "I come from a privileged background," he explains over the phone from his home in North Nanaimo. "My mother is a lawyer and my father is an engineer, so I was expected to seek out a professional career as well."

A passionate music lover since he was a child and heavily influenced by western R&B music and Zimbabwean Sungura artists like **Alick Macheso**, popular music that dominated the country's airwaves, he was inspired to put together a team of dancers with some of his friends under the moniker Blaze Skwad, a crew



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rappers while developing his skills in the art form.

He completed his studies in 2014 then returned to his home in Zimbabwe, where he began practicing law. This was a challenging time for the young lawyer as his heart remained anchored in his love of music.

But a personal revelation would propel him into the next stage of his life.

“I was going through a rough time in my life, and I was upset. I was looking up at the stars asking for answers from the universe, and it never answered me back. Then as I was walking back in the house, I caught my reflection in the window, and at that moment I realized that I actually possessed all of the answers I needed for all of the questions I have about life. So, I named myself after a star to remind me that I have the answers, and all I had to do was look within.”

Inspired by this personal epiphany, Alpha Centauri began considering a life elsewhere in the world. “I knew that it was quite common for many Zimbabweans to leave their country and establish new lives in other parts of the world and with this in mind I set my sights on the possibility of immigrating to Canada.”

Canada felt like it could be a good fit because

the country offered work permits to foreign students which would provide the young rapper with the opportunity to broaden his education while going through the process of seeking permanent residence in the country.

“I wanted to find somewhere where I could really start over and put my roots in the ground, to maybe find an opportunity for my siblings to be able to come to school in a different place,” he says.

Moving to Nanaimo in 2016, Alpha Centauri began studying business and marketing at Vancouver Island University (VIU). It was during this time that he continued to develop his rhyming skills, eventually recording many of his own soulful rap songs on a 12-year-old laptop.

As a student at VIU he began attending open mic nights at the student union pub where to his great pleasure he immediately met other young Zimbabwean hip-hop fans congregating there to flex their rhyming and DJ skills in freestyle rap battles.

It was at one of these pre-pandemic open mic nights that local music producer Smith caught the young rapper’s performance.

“I was at the annual Hip Hop Forum at the VIU pub,” Smith recalls. “Alpha Centauri performed a

song with fellow student Swisher called *Away*, and that's what it did, it blew me away. So I went up and introduced myself."

Following that meet up, Smith began booking Alpha Centauri and some of his crew on a few local shows he was presenting. The young rappers opened for several West Coast artists such as Moka Only, *Sirreal*, Illvis Freshly and Caleb Hart.

Smith and Alpha Centauri continued to stay in touch and by 2019 the young artist approached Smith with a fistful of new songs.

Smith was quite impressed with the new material and suggested the songs would benefit from a live backing band. The producer then spent a period of time sourcing and recruiting the right musicians to bring life to the proposed recording sessions.



The Nanaimo-based rapper honed his skills as a student in South Africa and then Vancouver Island University.

Photo courtesy of Alpha Centauri

Limited by the new pandemic restrictions, Smith kept his search focused primarily on the West Coast music scene recruiting Vancouver reggae band RebeLstoke, along with other local session musicians including trumpet player David Bamford, DJ All Good, as well as **Aurah Ariko**, an Edmonton-based singer who was actually a high school friend of Alpha Centauri from Zimbabwe.

Twenty songs came out of those initial recording sessions showcasing a variety of musical influences like funk and R&B, melded with popular African genres such as Congolese rumba, Afrobeat and Sungura stylings.

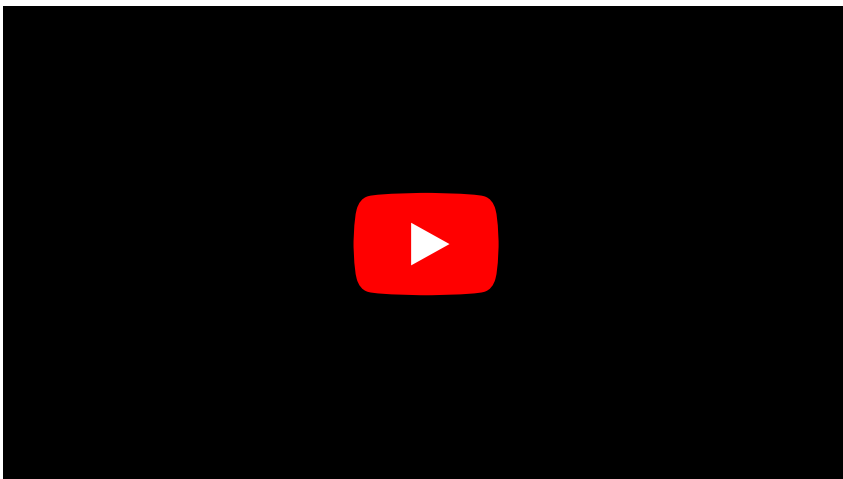
Both Smith and Alpha Centauri describe the recording sessions as very smooth and prolific with each of them bringing a different

perspective to the creation that they found highly complementary.

Alpha Centauri brings a bilingual flow to this new music rapping in both English and his native Shona language.

“The Shona language is so versatile,” he explains. “If you really know how to use it well you can incorporate it into rap in such a way that it can be mixed in and out with people barely noticing the transition.”

As an attempt to stand out in a media-saturated world, Alpha Centauri and his producer have devised a plan to slowly release eight singles over the course of 2023 leading up to a full-length studio release slated for March 2024.



The first single of this series, *I'll Fly*, blends Alpha Centauri's poetry with live instrumentation from Vancouver-based

RebeLstoke. It's now available for purchase, with samples of forthcoming singles from these sessions available to stream at Alpha Centauri's [website](#).

His single *Away* was recently placed as the theme for the Canadian film *Evelyne*, starring Zimbabwean-Canadian actress Rumbie Mustofa, and directed by Vancouver based filmmaker Carl Bessai.

On a mission to connect with young hip-hop fans, Alpha Centauri hopes the life lessons that have guided him to this point in time might bring inspiration to those who struggle just as he has.

"I want to put the medicine in the music. So my music has a lot of depth to it. It has multiple layers, you know? Nothing that I say is by accident, and nothing is frivolous."



Author



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