

We asked Basik Lee ...

When did you start playing music?

I've always sung and danced since I can remember, but I got to play with pianos and trumpets in elementary school. After that I was hooked, and I was drawn to anything that allowed me to mess with music—whether it was a Casio keyboard or me recording myself on my stereo. I just kept going!

Tell us about where you grew up and what it was like.

I was born in Newark, New Jersey, and we lived there until my family moved to Irvington, New Jersey when I was 9. It was a pretty rough neighborhood but there was an incredible amount of different kinds of music and cultures around! I got to hear soul, funk, reggae, calypso, salsa, house, and of course hip hop, which was really just blowing up then. It was incredible to be around it! Queen Latifah, Redman, Naughty by Nature, and Whitney Houston all grew up in my neighborhood!

Tell us about your family.

My mother sang to me as a child and my brother sang, rapped, and also was a breakdancer. I would sing with my high school gospel choir and rap with my friends after school. I always loved music but it was something I considered a hobby. It wasn't until I went away for college that my love for music took over!

Who is your favorite musician?

My favorite musician is Nina Simone. I love the depth of her work and its importance for our culture. She was writing songs attacking a system at a time when it seemed dangerous. She spoke up through her music about the atrocities being committed against a people who just wanted to be seen as equal. Her music is just so powerful to me and has always been an inspiration!



Nina Simone