

Life

## Make it happen

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NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

**From his Isla Vista apartment, UCSB student Devin Lazerine publishes a hip-hop magazine that lets him chat up chart-busting rappers -- when he's not busy studying**



It's your typical Friday night in Isla Vista. But Devin Lazerine isn't your typical student.

For one thing, his apartment is white-glove immaculate and tastefully furnished, from his perky potted palm to his polka-dot IKEA place mats.

For another, the 21-year-old junior hasn't attended a single party since he arrived at UCSB several months ago.

It's not that he's antisocial. He's just too busy forging a media empire.

While his fellow students are reveling in the crowded streets outside, the wiry communication major is holed up in his third-story corner apartment, intently producing a glossy hip-hop magazine on his Apple laptop.

"I really don't have much of a social life," he says with a self-aware chuckle. "I barely have time to sleep, let alone party. Even when I'm in class, I'm thinking about the magazine. Every ounce of free time I have goes into this."

Rap-Up, a magazine written by and for young fans of hip-hop and R&B music, is packed with artist interviews, fashion layouts and ads by heavy-hitters like Reebok and MTV-2.

Mr. Lazerine, who claims to have 15,000 subscribers, started Rap-Up when he was 15 years old. After being launched and then dumped -- twice -- by cash-poor publishers, the undaunted entrepreneur is now publishing the mag himself.



The fourth issue, available at Barnes & Noble, the UCSB Bookstore and [www.rap-up.com](http://www.rap-up.com), goes on sale this week. Inside it, readers can discover Natalie's favorite ice cream flavor, what Olivia thinks of Michael Jackson, why Fat Joe is afraid of flying and what happened to Pitbull at the DMV.

While being editor-in-chief of Rap-Up affords him little time for keggers, the job imparts privileges his classmates would kill for.



Mr. Lazerine has interviewed P. Diddy, Beyoncé, Lil' Kim, Chingy and Shaggy. He's had dinner with Mariah Carey. He has a collection of chart-busting CDs and enviable gadgets -- GameCube, cell phone, Sidekick -- that publicists and advertisers send him for free. He's appeared on VH1 and the E! channel as an expert on big-name performers.

How does a white, Jewish kid from the San Fernando Valley suburbs -- with no family connections to the music industry -- become a hip-hop force to be reckoned with?

Reckless ambition.

Raised in Calabasas, Mr. Lazerine had a business sense at an early age. At 7, he ran a lemonade stand on his block. At 11, he made money buying and selling Beanie Babies.

"We did not encourage it," admits his mom, Renee Lazerine.

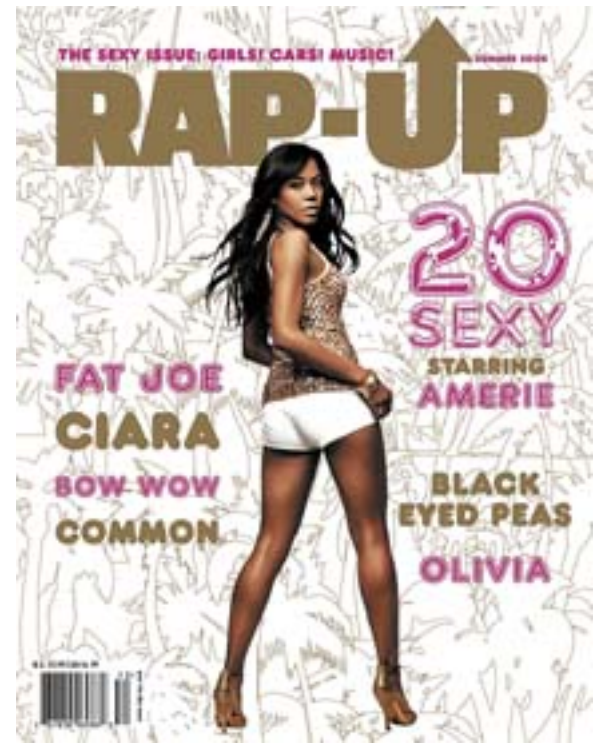
"I just wanted him to pay attention in school. I said, 'You can do that later!' But if Devin has a passion for something, he'll go after it regardless of how long it takes, and what he has to invest."

His passion for rap music was sparked when his cousin gave him a tape of Cypress Hill's infectious track "Insane in the Brain" at age 10.

"I fell in love with the beat, and the lyrics were very catchy. I didn't even understand them, but it was fun repeating it over and over. I started buying singles like crazy."

His obsession grew from there.

"The feeling I get from listening to (hip-hop) is indescribable. It's powerful, lively and dynamic," he says, but the message is as mesmerizing as the music.



"There's one unifying theme and that's the struggle to achieve something greater than what you already have."

For Mr. Lazerine, that struggle began with disastrous violin lessons in grade school: "I was horrible at it. I was kicked out of the class, I was so bad."

Undeterred from a career in the music business, he figured his best bet was a behind-the-scenes job like that of industry moguls Tommy Mottola and Clive Davis.

"They don't sing, they don't play instruments," Mr. Lazerine says, "yet they have so much of an impact on music, almost as much as the artist does."

One day, while bored after school, he created a Web site about hip-hop artists, with news, photos and audio tracks. On a whim, he called a publishing company to see if they'd be interested in a magazine with similar content. Within a week, the 15-year-old was headed to the Beverly Hills Hotel for a business meeting with the company's CEO.

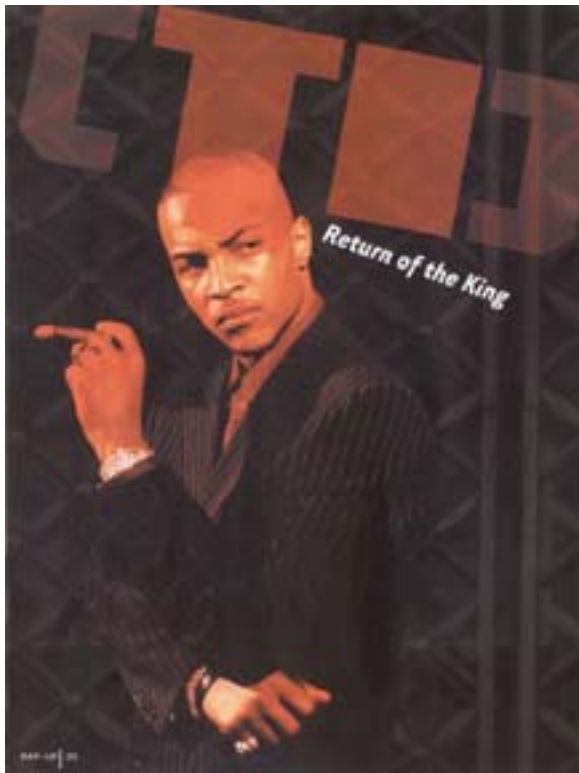
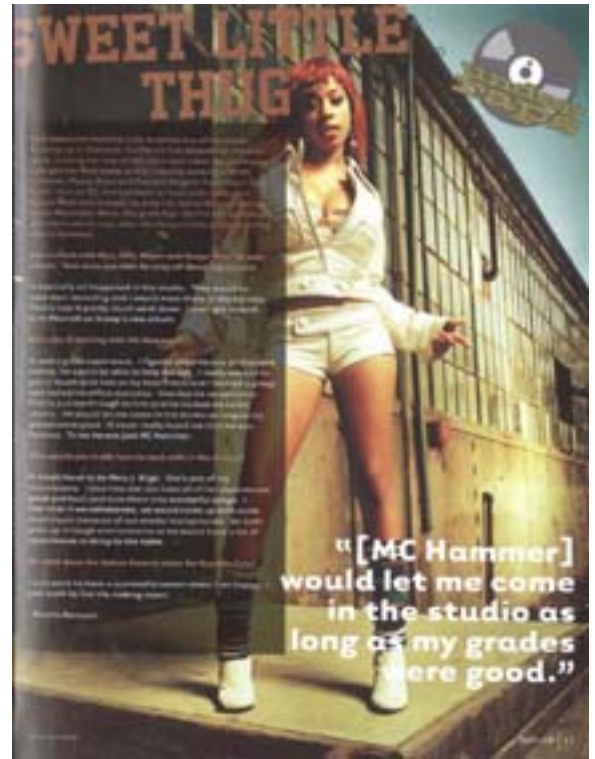
"I didn't know what to expect, so I brought my mom with me, which is really embarrassing," he recalls.

Unexcited by top-selling hip-hop magazines Vibe and The Source, Mr. Lazerine pitched an alternative for younger readers. The company agreed to publish it, if Mr. Lazerine could write the stories, so he began contacting rap stars. It was harder than he expected.

A request to interview Destiny's Child was nearly foiled when their manager called his home, and his mom let slip that he was still at school. Another time, he had to pass up a trip to St. Louis to interview Nelly because he had a pre-calculus test.

Mr. Lazerine kept at it, and eventually landed phone time with top performers -- which made him extremely nervous.

"You watch these people on MTV and then you're interviewing them," he said. "I didn't know how I should conduct myself, if I should let them know I'm a fan or act really professional."



But that was years ago. These days, publicists seek out Rap-Up, instead of the other way around. Money from advertisers pays the \$35,000 it costs to print the magazine. And Mr. Lazerine approaches interviews like a seasoned pro.

"I used to be like, 'I love this artist and I've got to play it real cool and maybe we can become friends and text message each other!' Now I look at it from a business standpoint, like, this is just something that needs to be done."

He hates wasting precious phone time with off-the-topic chitchat. That's why a recent conversation with "Goodies" singer Ciara tested his patience.

"She was actually asking me questions, like, 'What do you think should be my next single?' I was like, 'Ciara, we don't have time for this!' But," he adds, smirking, "I answered her anyway."

Mr. Lazerine doesn't produce Rap-Up on his own. His staff includes his brother Cameron, who attends UC Berkeley, an art director who lives in Tokyo, and a stable of volunteer writers from around the country.

Even with help, though, the magazine still sucks up huge chunks of time.

"The week of the deadline, it gets crazy," said Mr. Lazerine, who transferred last quarter from Moorpark College. "We go back and forth pulling all-nighters editing these things. (Last month), I was up for 40 hours straight."

He was proof-reading the pages before sending them off to the printer in Missouri. In addition, he had math homework, a paper due and an in-class quiz the next day. He didn't ace the quiz, but that's the sort of sacrifice he's willing to make.



"The magazine comes first," he says, explaining that it's the final product -- not the chance to meet idols or score free CDs -- that drives him. "Just to see this issue come back from the printer is, like, the most exciting thing ever. It's incredible. You started off with nothing, almost, and now you can hold it. It's tangible."

He hopes to one day own his own publishing house, record label and

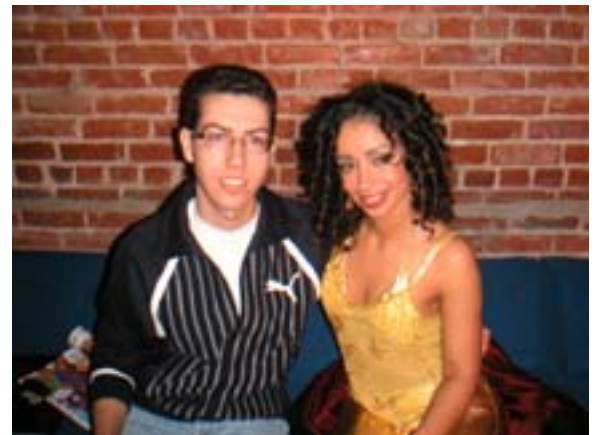
TV/film production company -- lofty ambitions, to be sure.

But Mr. Lazerine has a trick he uses to keep him focused on his goals.

Just how does he drown out his neighbors' distracting car horns and drunken hollers when headline dilemmas and layout conundrums demand his attention?

He cranks up his music, of course.

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**RAFAEL MALDONADO / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS**

*Many of Rap-Up magazine's big-name interviews and colorful layouts, right, come together in Devin Lazerine's immaculate Isla Vista apartment.*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEVIN LAZERINE

