

WatchTheDuck

Longtime friends Eddie Smith III, Jesse Rankins and Jonathan Wells were at a crossroads. It was 2010 and the Alabama natives were accomplished DJs, producers and musicians living in Houston. Yes, they were making a comfortable living making music, but something was lacking.

“We were happy to be doing music, but it became work,” Eddie says today. “We had to get back to loving what we were doing. It almost made everybody not want to make music.”

The trio decided to make drastic changes in their lives, their comfort level, their location and their music. They left the stability of Houston for the unknown of Atlanta. The friends also dedicated themselves to creating the type of music that would make them happy.

Eddie, Jesse and Jonathan had a phrase that had long before become a mantra of sorts: WatchTheDuck. “Everybody sees the duck traveling smoothly on top of the water,” Eddie says. “But nobody sees it kicking hard as hell under it, struggling to stay afloat. We would always say ‘WatchTheDuck’ whenever we were in certain industry scenarios, when everyone’s your friend and is trying to be of importance. We say it to each other to kind of lighten each other’s mood.”

Embracing WatchTheDuck as both a mantra and a lifestyle, the three unplugged from the music industry scene and adopted a new mindset. They also began creating music that reflected their disparate musical influences: rap, soul, electronic, dance, trap, booty, dubstep. The results – with Jesse focusing on vocals, Eddie bass and Jonathan keyboard – were revolutionary.

“Finally,” Jesse says, “we felt like we could just make music.” “We really got back into our own world, being who we wanted to be, making the music we want to make, not necessarily feeling any pressure from the music industry, not needing to feel accepted by such and such because they’re such and such at the label,” Eddie adds. “It developed into a lifestyle, our doing our own thing. We started making the music we wanted to make and play the way we want to play. There are no rules.”

WatchTheDuck led to a newfound freedom and happiness. Heck, they even slept better. No longer was the crew chasing things. As they honed their sound and hosted house parties, a lifestyle brand emerged. Their adopted hometown of East Atlanta became the epicenter for likeminded friends and neighbors who wanted to be a part of the WatchTheDuck mentality and ethos.

“It’s hitting a note with people who have been searching for the same thing we’ve been searching for,” Eddie says. “Like minds are coming together. The only rule is be yourself. It’s more than the three of us now.”

Notably, there’s TheDuck himself. He’s a part of the group and the movement, a curious entity and adventurous individual who appears at WatchTheDuck events and may truly be the

most interesting man in the world. The brand also encompasses a scene that includes artists, DJs, producers and dancers, including the Dragon House Crew. “They make music visible,” Eddie says. “They make you see what you’re playing. We’re all about making it visible, which is why we’re not just on stage DJing two tracks. We’re literally reworking and replaying everything.”

WatchTheDuck’s sensibility was perfectly depicted in the festive, free-flowing video for its single “Poppin’ Off.” “The video really does capture the vibe of the scene,” Eddie says. “The VIP is the dance floor. That’s how you prove your importance. You’ve got to bring something to the table. It’s not about how much. It’s about how unique.”

That uniqueness is not only embraced, but encouraged. “When we’re performing, we see a lot of young fun, a lot of dope energy, people letting loose,” Jonathan says. “That’s not seen at every party and club that you go to. We breed that environment with our music. We want to make sure that our music has the same energy that our parties have.”

That all-encompassing energy permeates WatchTheDuck’s RUB-A-DUB mixtape. Over propulsive beats and wobbling basslines, classic tunes from Beyonce, SWV, Adina Howard and others get dramatic reworkings. Much of WatchTheDuck’s magic comes from combining the best elements of widely different forms of music.

“With every genre comes a set of rules,” Eddie says. “Electronic music, dance music and dub step have their rules and it took us a minute to learn that, that they have rules just as much as R&B has rules, hip-hop has rules. We just don’t believe in them. We believe in learning the rules and how to make something properly, but we don’t believe in sticking with it.”

As WatchTheDuck works on its forthcoming EP and album, Eddie, Jesse and Jonathan relish the movement they have been able to establish. They grew up in Alabama playing in symphonic band and later marching band. Although the three didn’t make plans to attend college together, they ended up doing so. That’s where they became a group, a collective of DJs and producers who also played instruments.

So when the WatchTheDuck crew performs today, they combine all that history, setting up shop among the people, performing and creating music with other members of their community.

“It gives us an opportunity to do what we can do and what we always wanted to do, which is push the musical envelope, push the boundaries and be ourselves doing it,” Jesse says. “We’re very serious, but when we get down, we want to have fun. To me, it represents freedom.”

Members of WatchTheDuck’s rapidly expanding movement agree. And so does **TheDuck**.

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