

# Ben takes a walk on his wild side

With *Le Tigre*, a debut album that's been two years in the making, rapper Ben Caesar is all about earning his stripes, writes  
**HELEN HERIMBI**

**A**TIGER doesn't ask questions," he says, sipping on a tall health smoothie consisting of beetroot, cucumber and other things that belong on a plate. "When a tiger is in the room, everyone knows."

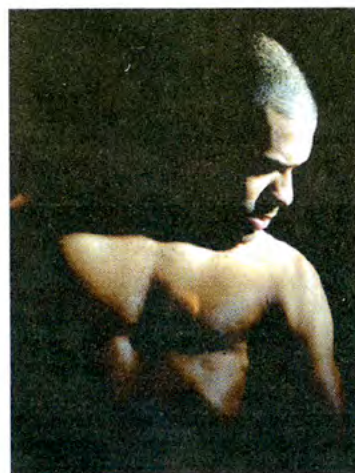
Ben Caesar is ready for you to hear him roar.

When we sit down at a popular Long Street breakfast joint, Caesar is confident about *Le Tigre*, which is due out "mid-year" he tells me. A hip-hop offering on a bed of electronic and dubstep beats, this rapper says: "I'm at a point in my career where I'm really coming out and when we (*Le Tigre* producer Ross Gabriel) started with the album two years ago, it was at a time when I was kind of getting this pull from tigers.

"I know it sounds weird," he nods his head, "but I believe everyone identifies with animals. Now tigers aren't specifically the animals I always identify with, but during this time, I was just drawn to them. In retrospect, what a tiger represents is a force, something powerful and yet so graceful. It has this contrast and the more I played with that concept, the more I was attracted to it.

"So even in the production, we decided to explore the contrast of this ferocity and gracefulness," he says, "get those hard rhymes, mix it up with something melodic and then some graceful breaks in the tracks."

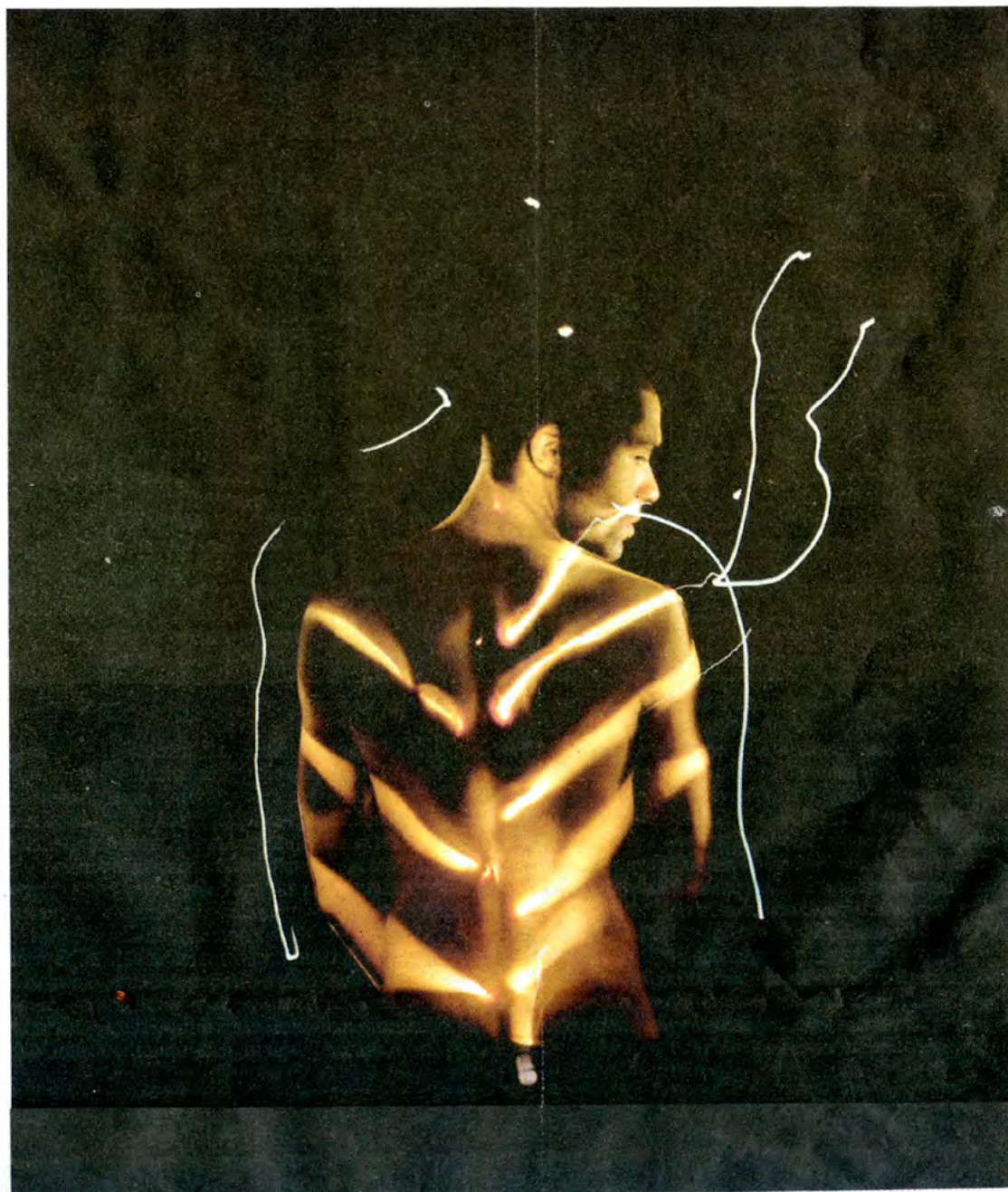
By the time his food arrives – a plate of greens with bread underneath, as far as I can tell – I have discovered that this 25-year-old was raised by a feminist-activist mother



who "took me to these feminism NGO meetings so I'm in touch with women's issues and how the media portrays them so, yes, it's funny that my mom is an activist and I'm in what is sometimes a misogynistic genre," he laughs.

Caesar was born on the Caribbean island of Dominica and has been living in Cape Town for a number of years. He says his birthplace is actually where he got to re-ignite the passion he had for hip-hop because, "you know how it is when you're in your mid-teens, I was in high school, living in SA and trying to figure out who I was, get an identity as a teenager.

"So my mom thought it was best I go back to the Caribbean to get in touch with my roots. While there, I started really writing rhymes and the next thing I knew I had books



full of rhymes, so that was kind of my therapy."

Most of the songs I've heard on *Le Tigre* deal with self-esteem, identity and being confident in your own skin. Like on *Get Wild*, where he tells women: *You're taming your tiger but you should let it out*. Well, alright now. He explains: "On that song especially, it's about women letting go of their inhibitions and

the restrictions society puts on them. This is my breakout album and I want people to feel that breakout, too, and take these messages with them on their journeys."

Caesar, who left training as a chef "because my recipe book – you know, the book you're supposed to write your recipes in – had more songs than recipes", has said releasing his album independently

and the fact that he just came off the Madame Zingara tour has factored into the late release of what seems like an anticipated album.

But he's confident earning his stripes will get him the recognition he deserves. Only time will tell.

● To preview some of Ben Caesar's music, visit [facebook.com/bencaesarpage](http://facebook.com/bencaesarpage)