



The Cool Kids from left: Mikey Rocks and Chuck English

THE COOL KIDS

Rap's next big thing has a penchant for good, clean fun and '80s nostalgia

By Laura Leebove • Photo by SKFO

It's hard not to crack a smile while listening to the Cool Kids — after all, when's the last time BMX bikes, boom boxes, and Fruity Pebbles were standard in hip-hop lexicon? Rappers Chuck English (Evan Ingersoll) and Mikey Rocks (Antoine Reed) might stray from the genre's stereotypes, but it's only because they're keeping it real. "We're basically just not being anybody else but ourselves," says 20-year-old Rocks. "A lot of times people are acting — they're not the same person they are outside their music." And in person, the guys seem every bit as innocent as their rhymes suggest.

It's November 2007, the Kids are on tour supporting M.I.A., and it's Thanksgiving weekend when the show stops in Detroit, not far from English's hometown of Mount Clemens, Michigan. Backstage at the Majestic Theater, we're in a dingy room sitting on a tattered, forest-green corduroy couch with English's parents and aunt standing nearby. The guys just finished their sound check, and through the green painted walls covered in scrawled obscenities, we can hear M.I.A. warming up to "Down River" from 2007's *Kala*.

In between sips of Late Harvest Autumn Ale, English, 23, explains that he started making hip-hop music because he kept his drum set at home when he left to go to school at the Illinois Institute of Art. "[Making beats] was all I wanted to do, and then I stopped really wanting to do school work," he says. "So I figured if I wasn't gonna do that then I had to be really good at making

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beats." Meanwhile, Rocks was at school at Columbia College in Chicago and says he was "lurkin'" on MySpace when he came across English's work in December 2005. Rocks says they met up at English's house one day and "that was all she wrote."

After winning over bloggers with slick, simple beats under rhymes about bringing back the '80s, the duo wanted to leave fans craving more before releasing *The Bake Sale EP* (Chocolate Industries) in March 2008. Their first full-length will drop later this year. "There's a lot of bands and a lot of rap groups and everybody has their CD and they push it in your face," English says. "When's the last time you heard of a group where people really anticipated what they had?"

The Cool Kids' '80s-inspired clothing has garnered almost as much attention as their music. Rocks, who performed in yellow skinny jeans and a blue Donald Duck sweatshirt, describes his style as "a combination of stuff that's cool and stuff that's not cool," noting that he couldn't care less about what's "in." English, sporting Air Jordans and a gray and teal Detroit Red Wings hat, says he doesn't like to look around at a party and see that everyone is dressed just like him, even if it means getting flak for certain clothing choices.

For reasons unknown to English and Rocks, the Cool Kids' following has expanded beyond typical hip-hop fans and into the indie-rock sphere. "How it happened is more or less I think that people in general can dig good music, regardless of what genre it is," says English. "If it's good, people will like it, if it sucks, people in the scene will like it, and if it really sucks, no one will like it. So it's kinda like the several degrees of suckage — and we try not to suck."

