CP2 caught up with Stalley to chit-chat about the re-release of "Lincoln Way Nights." The remastered CD – which began as a mixtape back in February and is now being released as a proper album – will be available in physical and digital formats Nov. 8, just days after his upcoming show at 10 p.m. this Saturday at Akron's Sleep Nightclub, 117 E. Market St.

By FELICIA C. HANEY

Staff Reporter

This Halloween, if you see someone dressed as Stalley in the club, chances are… It's really him! Massillon's own Maybach Music-signed hip-hop artist Stalley is on his way home. And, on the heels of the re-release of "Lincoln Way Nights," CP2 caught up with him to chit-chat about all that's unfolding. The remastered CD – which began as a mixtape back in February and is now being released as a proper album – will be available in physical and digital formats Nov. 8, just days after his upcoming show this Saturday at Akron's Sleep Nightclub.

But for those who can't wait, Stalley's already given us the goods in an exclusive interview where he discusses officially getting signed, his transition from sports to music and the keys to longevity. Representing with a bright yellow Akron T-shirt and his signature fitted with the crooked C for Cleveland, it's evident that Ohio is his home and he displays that proudly. Now that the clothes are in gear, it was time to find out "who is Stalley, the man behind the beard?"

A few months back you and Rick Ross started a Twitter frenzy where everyone was trying to figure out if you were signed. Is it finally official and how'd you come to be a part of MMG?

[Rick Ross] saw that my video was getting heavy rotation on MTV Jams so he called me up. He asked if I had any label situations and I said no. So he flew me down to Dallas the next day where he was on the I Am Music tour. He told me "I love your movement, I've been watching you for a while and I would like for you to be a part of the team." We had to work out some things with the lawyers first but it's official.

How does that feel?

It's surreal. It's unbelievable for me to be able to do something that I love and to be able to just do me. For him to take notice and help me get that across to the world on a bigger platform is just amazing.

Is it a beard thing [laughs]?

Nah. I started growing my beard when I started rapping so it's something like a measuring stick. Something that I can look at and see where I'm at with my career. When I'm going through hard times I can look in the mirror and see my beard and it's kinda breaking off and I'll be like "I gotta get my life together." Sometimes I look at my beard and it's healthy and full and shining and I know that I'm in a good place. So it's something that helps me.

So Massillon is not only breeding athletes but emcees as well?

In Massillon it's hard to say you want to do something musically because you're engulfed in sports. That's why I put on for Massillon the way I do to let people know that we're more than just football players. It's important to me to let people know that we've got great singers and musicians. We've got one of the best marching bands in the country. So the talent's there, we just don't get the exposure and I'm just trying to make that happen.

Do you currently have any initiatives in place to give back?

Right now I have a literacy program that I'm working on just to help kids with their writing, mainly poetry, short stories and creative writing. I haven't been able to get back to Massillon like I want to seeing as though the beginning of my career is so demanding but I have endless amounts of plans like building youth centers, building better libraries… I want to be a booster of education.

You played D-1 basketball. What school did you go to and why didn't you pursue it?

I was in school in Michigan and then I went to Long Island University in Brooklyn. Unfortunately I injured myself before I could really get into my career but it was a blessing and everything happens for a reason. Shortly after that I just decided to stay in
New York
and pursue music. I wish I would've done that earlier. [Laughs]

Coming from a small town, how was it adjusting to the music biz?

I just remain who I am. And good music is universal. Wherever you go it's going to be heard and people are going to respect it. Also, putting myself around good people helped. It's all about the company you keep.

I know that Mos Def was a mentor for you. Do you still maintain that relationship?

I'm a Blackstar head and a Mos Def head so for him to appreciate my music and tell me that I'm going in the right direction was enough of a boost for me. He's like a big brother to me. We're both busy with touring so we don't talk as much but the relationship is still there.

How different is it from city to city? Is it still an uphill battle or better now that you're signed?

I can say that there's pockets that are better for me. There's areas where I go and people know who I am and it's sold out. Other times the venue might be half capacity; but the energy is always the same. That's the best thing for me being able to go up there and win a crowd over. I did a show at Blossom with Ross where there was like 40,000 people and I've done shows with like 40 people.

There's been more of a spotlight shining on Ohio. Will this market really open up in your opinion?

It's opening up a lot. There's so many dope artists coming out of just Northeast Ohio alone who are now getting national recognition. It's just so beautiful to see that labels are starting to look at the smaller town artists in places like
Indiana
and
St. Louis
. There are a lot more
Massillon
's in the world than there are
New York

’s and
Chicago
’s and
L.A.
’s.

Do you think Ohio has a distinct sound?

I think we have a sound, we just haven’t found it yet. You can’t pinpoint where an Ohio artist is from. You have artists like Chip the Ripper that makes a certain type of record and a Cudi that makes a certain type of record and their from the same area. I do think we have a sound but being from the
Midwest
we get it from everywhere. Personally I grew up influenced by East Coast lyricism. I also love Bay Area trunk slappin’. I also love people like Andre 3000 and Scarface who also had a good mesh of bangin beats but they still were lyrical. I think that’s what the
Midwest
is. We’re lyricists, but its so much bigger, it’s the bass, it’s the funk and we’re the creators of that. Once we figure out how to incorporate all those sounds, then that’s our sound. I tried to do it with “Intelligent Trunk Music” and I’m going to keep building off that.

Do you create any of your own beats?

I don’t but I co-produce. I can’t punch on the boards but I usually give the producer that I’m working with direction and let him know how I want it to sound.

It’s not like we haven’t seen Ohio artists on the rise before. We all remember being excited about Bone at the Grammy’s. But what’s the key to staying relevant?

You’ve got to change with the times. Music changes so much now so you have to evolve; keep incorporating new sounds, keep your ear to the streets. A lot of people study music but they don’t pay attention to where it’s going to stay relevant, to stay around. Me growing up I would have never thought Bone wouldn’t be here right now. It’s all about staying consistent. And if you’re not going to change, perfect what you do so that you keep that loyal fan base. Eminem’s been doing it for years.

See Stalley at 10 p.m. this Saturday, Oct. 29 at Sleep Nightclub, 117 E. Market St. in Akron for the Halloween Costume Party. Advance tickets are available by calling
(330)
285.3148
. Pre-order the expanded “Lincoln Way Nights” at
Amazon.com/Lincoln-way-nights-stalley/dp/B005JLNAJS