



Q&A: Chris 'Godzilla' Taylor is raising the profile of Madison hip-hop



FEBRUARY 10, 2014 8:30 AM • [LINDSAY CHRISTIANS | THE CAPITAL TIMES | LCHRISTIANS@MADISON.COM](#)

Where Chris "Godzilla" Taylor comes from, when there's a problem, you address it head-on.

"I'm from a culture where we speak very, very bluntly to each other," said Taylor, 39, dean of students at the Madison Media Institute and a Madison Arts Commissioner. "We don't hold back in what we say.

"That's not always the best policy around a board table. That's growth I need to deal with — finding more tact in getting to solutions."

Taylor's influence in Madison arts culture has been growing since he moved here from Milwaukee in 2012, after three years as associate dean at MMI. He'd been commuting since February 2008, taking, then teaching, classes at the Institute.

The father of four daughters (including one born last year), Taylor earned three degrees in four years — an associate of arts in recording and music technology and a bachelor's in entertainment media business, both from MMI, and a master's degree in entertainment business from Full Sail University.

Now, Taylor is the face of the Madison Media Institute, responsible for attracting, retaining and engaging students and helping the school to grow. The school, which has campuses in Madison and Minneapolis, offers degree programs in areas like web design, music production, game design and video and audio production.

More than most institutions of higher ed, MMI is closely connected to popular culture, which makes Taylor a powerful asset to the Madison Arts Commission as well. This month the Media Institute, with feedback from MAC, plans to release a survey to promoters and concert attendees to "see what the popular opinion is of hip-hop, and what we can do help the culture thrive as a whole," Taylor said.

"What do people think about hip-hop's relevance in the city of Madison?" Taylor said, explaining the survey's focus. "If you're a promoter, what barriers do you have for putting hip-hop on? What's your perception of the patrons?"

As Godzilla (the name came from his days as a professional wrestler in battles with "King Kong"), Taylor still records for himself in his free time. He cut "Regular People Rap" in

mid-2013, an album with tongue-in-cheek tracks like "So What I Live with My Mama (I Got My Own Room)," "I Hate Ridin' the Bus" and "I Made It Rain with \$20."

As a musician, producer, teacher and administrator, Taylor regularly puts in 60-hour weeks in the office. But he doesn't want to do anything less than 100 percent.

"I speak directly because of the amount of time I have to deal with the topic," he said. "I don't have an hour to discuss something. What's the fix?"

You moved to Madison in 2012. What in your background led you to the Madison Media Institute?

I've been recording for 20 years, since I was 14 years old. I was a professional recording engineer. In 2002 was when I really got started recording every day for a living.

Prior to 2002, I was doing it really as a hobby. But when [Coo Coo Cal dropped his "My Projects" record](#) and that took off, I started touring around the country doing radio commercials, recording every day in the studio. That got me out of a regular nine to five and into full-time recording engineer status.

What made you decide to go back to school at 34?

I was tired of rap music. Rap music got really stale for me. A lot of people come into the studio and they haven't sold a record, they haven't done very much and they're all superstars.

Music is emotion. When you compose, when you write lyrics, it's emotion. The same things people use to make people angry when you listen to songs, or get people really riled up and agitated, you can take that same energy and make people laugh or smile.

I think music has taken a turn, especially in urban (music), that isn't as fun. I made my whole career in gangsta rap. I make records for fun, for me, because they please me.

I'm seeking to complete the next record, "Back on Crack," without any curse words. It will be suggestive but it won't have f-bombs in it. My dad really wants to hear a clean record from me.

But I'm not looking to make records for a record deal anymore. Those times have come and gone.

From your perspective, how has the Madison arts scene developed over the past years?

What I see that's different now is there's a strong desire by the arts community to see hip-hop have equal rights. That was something that wasn't happening in 2008.

It was "Oh, hip-hop shows close, the clubs close, it's no big deal." Now the arts community is really behind hip-hop, saying we know you guys need some place to exercise your right to create art and share art.

The arts community, if no one else, is definitely supportive of hip-hop. It's a two-tiered discussion for Madison and I think it boils down to education. What I don't see is a

concerted effort from the hip-hop community to engage the media for coverage. At the same time, I don't see artists learning how to earn money off of their art.

That has to happen through education. My strength is leadership and buy-in — here's our action, here's our direction. If this isn't moving, we've got to cut it off.

I would like to see the arts community think more nationally.

What are you goals going forward?

My goals going forward are first and foremost growth for the school. I'm trying to do some really interesting things to help the school grow on a national level — to take this from a regional to a national level. Sowing good seeds there will give us a good harvest later on.

The school, the opportunity they have afforded me has been life-changing. I walked away from a business that I had built up and said, "I am going to invest my time in school." And it paid off because I gave it 100 percent.

What about for yourself?

My personal goal is to always improve who I am. I don't want to ever become complacent in who I am. When you say, "I've made it, I'm this or I'm that," you're probably in a really dangerous — someone's poised to take your position if you take your foot off the gas.

Now I got to develop myself as a person.