

The Big Lux Interview: An uncommon violinist with a few stories to tell



Big Lux is the stage name of Kevin Lowther. He is a hip-hop artist, violinist, lyricist, composer, educator and most recently, a film director for his own music videos.

“Lux,” as he is known by friends and colleagues, grew up in Westerly, where he studied violin with a private instructor for 10 years. At the time, though he played with the RI Philharmonic Youth Orchestra in Providence, there was no formal orchestra program in his school. So he adapted his musical talents to learn the saxophone and played in school bands, but the violin remained his primary instrument and first love.

As a young man, Lux dreamed of a career in music. Yet as he watched other musicians struggle to survive, he was unsure how to make his life work. He decided to join the Army and attend West Point Academy right out of high school. “I wanted to do something productive and felt like I needed some discipline, and also wanted to do something for others.”

Four years later, Lux graduated from West Point and became a second lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers. He served first in Germany and then in Iraq. In Baghdad he saw brutal combat for 15 months, which involved knocking down doors and searching for bombs. His platoon of 25 people was awarded Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals for their service overseas.



There was no music program at West Point, but Lux's violin traveled with him everywhere he went. He didn't get to do a lot of playing in Iraq, but that all changed when he got to his assignment in Korea.

"People in Korea love music," says Lux. "They are interested and curious. I did a lot of street performing there. I was looking for something unique to do, and started to hear music by Nuttin' but Strings and Black Violin, and started to integrate my violin playing into hip-hop music." Lux also cites Jay-Z, Outkast and early Kanye West as musical influences.

"I started to connect with other musicians and found more gigs. I played festivals and did some touring - and I did all of that while still in the Army. During the day I was writing plans for military exercises for the South Korea and US joint missions, and at night I would go out into the streets and play."

Korea is also where the moniker "Big Lux" was born. He had originally dubbed himself "Lux Luther" — a reference to the evil villain in the Superman story, and the antithesis to the "nice guy" image many traditional violinists portray. "But the problem was, there's no L in the Korean alphabet, two in a row is tough," Lux explains. "So my promoter renamed me to 'Big Lux.'" Being a sizeable guy, the name stuck.

After further assignments in Afghanistan and 13 years of military service, Lux came back to the US to pursue an MBA at the University of Miami. He then worked simultaneously in real estate development and in the Army Reserves, while continuing to pursue music. Lux fit right in to Miami's music scene, getting busy quickly performing in clubs and for corporate events, and he also became involved with some non-profits and schools. But the responsibility of his three jobs started to take its toll.



In summer 2018, Lux took a leap of faith and made the decision to return to Rhode Island and focus on his music full time. He has since participated in TEDx Providence and has performed for packed audiences all over the Ocean State. Things were going pretty well for him - right up until this past March.

Like most all performing artists worldwide, Lux was not unaffected by the pandemic. He saw many performances cancelled and was unable to recover the lost work. However, 2020 did not stop Lux from creating. He released his EP *Major*, working with Grammy nominated producer Phil Beaudreau, and a music video for his composition "Red March," which he refers to as his protest anthem. Though every track on this release is a gem, of particular interest is the track "Chasing Bombs," which features the song's original composer and vocalist Laura Dowding.

"Laura is also a Westerly native. She wrote the piano part and the hook for a Marine friend. I heard it years ago and thought it would make a great hip-hop song," says Lux. "But since then she has evolved her style, took down all versions of the song, and had no recording of it." Lux thought the song was lost forever, but then he found a copy of it on an old hard drive and was able to recreate it.

Over the summer, Lux co-created a pirate music festival that took place at Sandy Point, Conn, in which musicians performed and people listened entirely on boats in the ocean. Working with (and in many cases against) law enforcement and local officials, he hopes this festival will happen again in 2021. Lux was also one of very few musicians to close out 2020 with New Year's Eve gig - this year at Mohegan Sun's Novelle Lounge, a venue that hosted hip-hop luminary Ice Cube before the shutdown.

Lux currently serves in the Army Reserves and teaches remotely at Community Music Works in Providence. He is working on a new album, and directing a new video aimed at town and local officials to address the systemic racism present in his small town.

Learn more about Big Lux at bigluxviolin.com and be sure to check out his EP "Major" on all streaming platforms.