[Music]

Liesl Riddle:
Welcome to GWSB Proud, a podcast all about why are you proud of GWSB? My name is Liesl Riddle and I am the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs here at George Washington University School of Business. And I have the great pleasure of sitting down with GW alumni, faculty, staff and students to hear why they are GWSB Proud.

Well welcome to the podcast today. I am so excited to bring to the podcast studio here today Michael Ferrier, our man who wears many hats around campus: famous musician, Posse Foundation Scholar, and our undergraduate student in organizational sciences. How are you Michael?

Michael Ferrier:

I'm doing okay, how are you?

Riddle:

I'm doing good, I'm doing good. Well first and foremost, I want to jump in here and have you tell our listeners a little bit about that great bumper song that you created for the GWSB Proud podcast. You know, tell us a little bit about why you chose the lyrics that you did, what they sort of mean and signify to you? Because I know our listeners only get to hear little pieces of it at the beginning and the end.

Ferrier:

For sure, yeah, I mean so when you had asked me for it originally I was like, okay great, I have a good idea, we're going to make something cool. I didn't want it to sound like super corny, or but not too like you know, hip-hop, and too you know, aggressive, that it would be kind of weird for you know, a business school podcast. But you know, it's intelligently named “G-Dub” and it really just goes, “g-dub, what it mean to me. Capital” – because we're in the capital – “go and make that history. I've got a couple of scholars to the left of me. Buff and blue so you know, they need not check for weed.” So it's kind of like a shout out to the “G-Dub” song, the “Raise High” song, “dun dun dah dah”, and I was sitting there and it took me like way too many weeks to make the song, because I was waiting for the right thing to hit me, and it's probably the corniest thing I've ever written, but you know, you can take it to the bank. I want it to feel like you know, this is the kind of song that you can kind of just bop to and have a good time too, but also kind of tells you “We're cruising down Penn, oh by George how I've made so many friends.” I took “oh by George” from the actual fight song. I just thought it would be kind of cute. They had the “Hail to the buff, hail to the blue, shaking in their boots when the team comes through,” shout out to our basketball team. Yeah I don't know, just felt fun, a fun little boppity bop.

Riddle:

It is! No, I think, it works very well, and it definitely gives you the feeling of being proud, you know, of being at GW, as we all are. And we're certainly proud of you, campus musician extraordinaire, by our student newspaper the Hatchet, “best on-campus musician” in 2018, you appear all over the D.C. area, tell us a little bit though about how did you get started as a musician?

Ferrier:

My dad, you know, I grew up, he's been playing piano since he was a child, my mom was always singing in church in the choir, and so I've always been around music you know. We had a full studio when I was a kid, in the basement, and I used to come around, I didn't know anything about what any of it did but I just remember how it felt you know. When I think about music in general, I always revert back to that memory, and so you know, when I was eight I begged my mom for a guitar and she got me one surprisingly, and I took lessons for maybe two years, but my brother had played drums since he was eight and he wasn't the best, let's be real. I love you bro. But when we were, when he was, when I was 10 and he was 12, I was like, “hey yo, that looks cooler.” And he was always playing my guitar, so we traded and ever since then he became a phenomenal guitarist and I became a drummer, but I've always been interested in just making music that feels good. I've been around my whole life, so I was 10, playing drums in church until I finally got my first Apple Macintosh computer second hand off of craigslist, shout out to my father. And I downloaded the Logic and ever since then I've been producing music, audio engineering, singing my behind off, and just enjoying it. It makes me feel sane, in the hustle and bustle of GW, in DC, so just what keeps me centered. And that's really how I got started.

Riddle:

How is the organizational sciences that you're sort of majoring in, and your passion and gift for music, how do you see those going together?

Ferrier:

Yeah so I tried a couple majors here, I came in pre-med, none of that worked for me. I even tried the lovely Business School, I couldn't even get in. Stats and econ, let's talk about it. But you know, when I found Org Sci, which I was told to study for, a couple people important to me told me I should probably look at it, funny, and I finally got into it, and it was so easy. Not in the sense that the work was easy, but it clicked with me, and it clicked with me because when you're in the recording studio, when you're doing music, there's a dynamic right, people don't think about you know, what it means to bring a piece of art out of somebody on the other side of the booth. Org Sci talks a lot about group dynamics and leadership, right, and how to see where another person is coming from, from a different perspective, and those kind of things have always been something I love. Customer service is my thing, my jam, I love it, and that's what you're providing someone in the booth. You're helping them produce something more than just a song, but getting their thoughts out there. So Org Sci is based in systems engineering, and it's what I call it, I call it fake business as a joke, but what it really is is an intersection between business and psychology, leadership, again organizational development, leadership development. And what I really want to do and where I want to take it, is starting a consulting company for independent artists. A lot of artists like myself never learn how to write a business plan or even see their music as a business, but when you think about the marketing involved, you think about staying true to core values and missions, that's a part of the music that you make, and so what I want to do is take those independent artists, who don't have the time or the energy to google everything and find out “how does music business work?” And teach them how to do that. And sometimes do it for them, and eventually manage them, and you know, onwards and upwards from there. But Org Sci has definitely changed the way that I see what I do every day, yes.

Riddle:

So you've been a musician for so long, when you came to campus, this is a new city for you, a new space for you socially, how did you get sort of your musical career off the ground here?

Ferrier:

Hah, I know exactly, it was – I made a mixtape. It was the first mixtape I've ever released, I released songs on soundcloud up until then, but I got to college and my roommate, Alpha Balde, Business School student, was in the room with me and we were just kind of chilling, and I was like, “yo I have these songs.” And I put them together, and I recorded all the vocals on an iPhone headphone microphone into Garageband...

Liesl:

Wow!

Ferrier:

...yeah, and then cleaned them up and edited them on my computer in Logic. And that's how I did my first thing, and I put it all over Snapchat, and all over Soundcloud and Instagram, and people liked it. It was not my best work by any means, I was trying to rap and I'm not a rapper, but people liked where I was going and they liked the direction of it, and ever since then I just, I try to make music that people can connect with, and knowing me, I'm not a popular guy, but I know a ton of people. Jordan West, Dr. Jordan West calls me the “Mayor of GW” because I won't, if I see you in the street I'll say, “hey how you doing?” If I have a song coming out, “hey did you hear my new song?” If I have a show, “hey you should come see me play, me and my boys are gonna do a great show, have a good time,” you know. And that's really how it became what it did, you know, and then I started working in the recording studio and now people who are other musicians know me as someone that can help them produce what they have in their head.

Riddle:

So we have this recording studio on campus for artists that are here as students, tell us a little bit more about that...

Ferrier:

Yeah, honestly it's been there for a really long time and a lot of people don't know that. If you're familiar with someone named Cautious Clay, he's popping off now, he actually has recorded songs in that studio from his time at GW. It's on the Vern, in West Hall, and it is my little escape from the Foggy Bottom bubble where I go down, there's no cell service, but there's a lot of money and equipment in that room for me to do what I love to do. It's a space where students in UW can come and do their podcast. It's a space where bands can come in and play as loudly as they want, hopefully not, because please don't bust the microphones, but they, you know, they can get something that they can show all their friends. I've had so many students who aren't necessarily musicians come in and you know, play and have fun, and I've met really cool people and really cool musicians that I've collaborated with now through that space. It also allows me to one, have a little pocket change, thank you, it's a work-study job, guys please apply we need help. But also it allows us to, it's allowed me to solidify a piece of the GW experience, or the education I wanted to receive when I got to GW, without having to apply for a class or consortium classes at American, there's no audio engineering program here, which was much to my dismay, but we have access to Lynda, Linkedin learning, which has taught me how to use Pro Tools, and then I get to sit down there and practice all night for as long as I want, and make good music, and learn.

Riddle:

Well since our listeners may not know what the Vern means, this is our Mount Vernon Campus. How do you get there when you're on the Foggy Bottom Campus here, the main campus, how do you get out to the Mount Vernon Campus?

Ferrier:

Take the Vex, the Vern Express, and there's been many a time where I've had the odd five o'clock session, and I've had to leave pretty early because the traffic will get you if you're not careful. It takes a little bit of planning, but it's free, takes about 15 minutes to get there, and during the day they leave every five minutes, so it's pretty accessible. The Vern, the Mount Vernon campus, it's a beautiful place, and there's a lot of really cool things that are happening down there that people just haven't really warmed up to yet, just because it seems far, but once you get there there's a wonderful culture there for students and musicians alike to kind of take some space away if you want to go write some music, or do some work, actually, so you can free up time to write some music, the Vern is a great place

Riddle:

That's great, well and it's more than that too, I've heard we also have the Student Music Coalition, the SMC what's that all about?

Ferrier:

So the SMC is a, it's a student organization where students you know, they pay a deposit or dues, and then they receive a code to the lock box, which gives you access to five rooms, sorry, five rooms of practice rooms, with full drums in there, a PA system, microphones and a couple of rooms of piano, so you can go in there with your band and practice. But there's several GW Law school students that have bands who actually come and use the space, it's very affordable, you get your deposit back at the end of semester, and they also conduct jam sessions. So a bunch of students can come in and have fun. I’ve met a ton of guys, and ladies, who just are fun to play with, and you go and you just jam out for a bit and then go back to your day. Sometimes during finals when all the rooms are booked I go in there, and I just like there's a nice comfy couch, so it does the job and it's a really good space. I'm hoping the school sees the value in it, and helps them push even further in what they're trying to do as an organization.

Riddle:

Well there's so many music venues on campus and off campus and you've played a lot of them, can you tell us about some of those?

Ferrier:

Yeah my favorite by far is always going to be Songbyrd, not only because I played there, but one of my favorite artists performed there, and it was one of the best concerts I've ever had, I've ever seen. Songbyrd Record Cafe, great place, great staff, great engineers, and I actually when I think my sophomore year, I like my junior year, I released a mixtape with a friend of mine, Alfonzo Bonds or AJ Peoples, we sold out the entire cafe area to release our mixtape and it was a marvelous night. I've also done Tropicalia which is a great spot, GW students know it well because it also turns into kind of a club dance place some nights. I've done DC9, it's another great one with The Colonies, a band of graduated GW students, and we filled that one up as well. So it was a really good time, I've also done a Lerner, not Lerner sorry, Lisner Auditorium, for battle of the acapellas, and I’ve played, I've sang in Smith, I sang the National Anthem a couple of times in Smith...

Riddle:

In the Smith Center?

Ferrier:

Yea, the Smith Center where they play the basketball games. Funny story, last time I sang it I actually forgot the words of the National Anthem, it was a great moment of time, but we're, we've bounced back. Yeah those are some of the cool places that I performed, and the SMC was dope because they a lot of times let us use their equipment. Especially one time we did, we had a show and we wanted to hype up the show, so we actually performed right outside of Gelman. Events and Venues was not the most happy about it, because we didn't have a permit, but they were gracious enough to let us finish out our set, and just kind of rock out. That wouldn't have been possible without the SMC letting us use their equipment. And then you also have Search of Records, which is a group formed, I want to say in 2010 by a group of GW students, who help artists on campus without any kind of record contract or anything like that, book shows and venues because they have a relationship with a lot of the venues in DC, and they are largely responsible for me becoming what I have musically. I would have never done my first show had it not been for Search of Records saying, “hey, you sound great, come to a show,” same with my good friend AJ peoples. I brought him up at my show during Tropicalia and ever since we've been just running shows since our Sophomore year. So, I don't know it's a great community of people who want to support each other, and make more music, and have fun, you know.

Riddle:

So our listeners, many of them are prospective students or even current students on campus, can you give them some hints about where are the cool places to go to listen and enjoy music around campus?

Ferrier:

For sure, on campus there's a ton of acapella groups, a lot of them perform in Lisner, but also in Betts, done a couple, I've also performed in Betts. But Betts is a good spot to catch plays, theater stuff, and music, which a lot of times incorporate, cabaret is one of the more fun ones to do where they sing and do theater. I'm also a veteran of cabaret. Outside of campus you're looking at you know, Songbyrd, always a great place because they have a ton of great artists rolling through. The Park On 14th is a great place…

Riddle:

That's where we actually hold our graduation gala for undergrad and graduate students, yeah that's right!

Ferrier:

Really great spot and the chef there is a Trinidadian woman. Amazing, the jerk wings, fire. But that's beside the point, they're really dope. There's also 14th Street, Adams Morgan, great places to go, lots of fun, Madams Organ is a great place for live music. But then there's also stuff on like U Street, Blagden Alley, some jazz clubs that are pretty fun, so it's a long list I could print one out for you one of these days. But it's a fun city and there's a lot of free stuff to do too, if you want to catch music, the Kennedy Center is a gem, especially with the new addition that they opened up, it is a gem. Lupe Fiasco did something last semester there, which was, I didn't get a chance to go, but I saw the videos and, wow pretty cool. Echo Stage as well, that's a pretty standard one.

Riddle:

Yeah the Kennedy Center is actually one that I think, I don't know how many different guests that we've had here on the podcast have mentioned in one way or the other, since it's just steps away from here. I think it just goes to show how many of us really take advantage of all the great programming that is over there.

Ferrier:

I gotta get over there more.

Riddle:

What other student organizations are you involved with on campus? You have some important leadership roles?

Ferrier:

Yeah last year I was the president of the Black Student Union, which was a great exercise in time management, first and foremost. But no, it was a really great way for me to put into practice a lot of what I learned about leadership theory, and about working with groups, especially in a sense where you really care about the group that you are a part of. Student leadership as a concept is difficult in ways, because a lot of students don't realize that the student part is still a part of the leadership. GW is a place where you could quickly very very much get bogged down by the clubs and the e-boards, because you know, we're in DC, politics are a thing, you know, accolades, internships, we want to do as much as we can. But what I've learned is that when you care about something that's what you should put your time into. So aside from music and the ways that I lead in music, being President of the Black Student Union, was a way that I could empower other students, I hope, to you know, step up and also lead, without being in a position. Leadership, to me is not a position, it's a verb, you know, anyone could be a leader, there's no, there's no right way, or well, there's no requirements I'll say, for you to be a leader besides a willingness to understand and see people's perspectives, and do what you can for others. So that was my experience as BSU’s President and I’ve left it in the hands of Owen Manning, who was a fantastic man, and he's killing the game right now, and I'm very proud of him and all of the e-board that has been chosen.

Riddle:

So, well you and Owen have something in common, you're both Posse Scholars, can you tell our listeners a little bit about the Posse Foundation and the Posse Scholar Program?

Ferrier:

For sure yeah, the Posse Foundation, without getting into the whole elevator pitch, the biggest thing about the Posse Foundation is that it selects leaders and it selects people who are willing and able to make a big difference when they come to campus. That is the point of Posse, is to come to a campus and expand the way that we think and view these conversations that can be difficult. We do eight months of pre-collegiate training to show us how to have better conversations, how to have more multicultural conversations, and how to have conversations that don't alienate groups who don't think like you. It's about bringing together people and bringing diversity and not just by color, race and gender, but by perspective. You know, there's a multitude of Posses, there's the DC Posse, but we're from Atlanta, the Atlanta Posse, my Posse is Posse One, and they select ten of us to come to a campus on a scholarship to work hard, to make a change, and it's a beautiful program, it's given me more than I could ever ask for, including the illustrious Liesl Riddle. But yeah it's all love.

Riddle:

Well it was my pleasure to be the one of the faculty advisors for the Posse program, but it's been also fun to watch, since you all were the first Posse cohort on campus to now realize we have four cohorts, and you are getting ready to graduate this May!

Ferrier:

That’s true, it’s almost over.

Riddle:

So it's almost over, it's almost over, and it's right around the corner. We're so grateful that you came in here in the podcast room to share a little bit about why you wrote the song and the music culture on our campus, before we go though, I bet our listeners really would like to hear more about how they can hear more from Michael Ferrier and his music. Where can they listen to more?

Ferrier:

I am on Instagram, ha ha, as the, t-h-e, plantain papi, p-a-p-i, it's a joke on Drake so don't @ me, please. That's where I post a lot of some of the newer stuff I'm working on, just some singing videos. I've been really busy so I haven't put a lot on my Spotify. I am on all streaming platforms, Spotify, Apple Music, and Tidal, you just find me under ferrier, f-e-r-r-i-e-r and you will see my smiling face. I have one song out now it's called “Black Is”, but I'm working on doing all the stuff that I had on soundcloud previously and putting it on the platform as well.

Riddle:

Wonderful

Ferrier:

I just have to replay it all because they have samples in it and we like staying legal.

Riddle:

That would be a great idea. Well thank you so much for joining me in the podcast studio today Michael.

Ferrier:

Thank you for having me, it's really fun.

[Music]

Riddle:

That's all for this episode. Thanks for listening today. Shout out for music credit to Plantain Papi, also known as Michael Ferrier, GW class of 2020. See you next time to learn more ways we are GWSB Proud.

[Music]