

THE SOLE OF CBUS

The sneaker scene is alive and kickin' thanks to Sole Classics.

BY DAVID LEWIS



“Me and my Adidas do the illest things.”

Run-DMC’s “My Adidas,” an homage to their love for the sneaker brand, created an urban fashion craze in the mid-eighties and set the stage for the sneaker explosion. Each member of the hip-hop pioneers wore a three-stripped Adidas tracksuit with gold “dookie rope” chains dangling from their necks and black fedoras on their heads. But what tipped the fashion scales were the unlaced white Adidas shell toe Superstars that would “Walk through concert doors [...] and roam all over coliseum floors.”

It was no coincidence that the same year “My Adidas” was released, Dionte Johnson was born in Columbus, Ohio. He is the owner/operator of the only niche retail sneaker boutique in Columbus: Sole Classics. And he is at the forefront of the hot sneaker scene in Columbus.

“I walk down the street, and bop to the beat.”

Hipsters, students, and hip hop heads bob to the beat down High Street and walk into Sole Classics to check out the latest. Located in the Short North, Sole Classics has the Run-DMC-style Adidas track suits, Vans, Nikes, Adidas, hoodies, G-Shocks and other “fly wear.” Artistically curated, every inch of the two-room fashion gallery is meticulously crafted to reflect the Short North arts scene. (The newly-opened second store in Dublin pays tribute to the area’s Irish attitude with a pub vibe.) “We want the stores to embody the neighborhood we are in—Short North more urban, Dublin more Irish,” Johnson says.

“I like to sport ‘em that’s why I bought ‘em.”

Johnson bought Sole Classics (originally opened in 2006) from the previous owners ten years ago and has been in its current location since 2014. As a former Ohio State fullback, Dionte had a cup of coffee in the NFL, but when that plan fell through, he put his Business Marketing degree to work. “I was looking for the next challenge [...] and heard about Sole Classics being available,” Johnson says, wearing his signature black hoodie and jeans. “Growing up in Columbus and going to high school [in the nineties] I worked in retail at Big Daddy’s, the first to carry urban street fashion stuff—and I was hooked.”

“And now I just standin’ here shooting the gift.”

What Big Daddy’s (now closed) taught Johnson was the importance of community—about creating a space where people come for the experience, to hang out, shoot the shit and share their love for sneakers. It’s the barber shop minus all the hair on the ground. “You can go buy your shoes from anywhere, but with a store like ours, you get to sit down spend two hours talking and maybe buy something, or maybe not,” Johnson says as he sits behind the self-designed wood cash wrap desk that is the centerpiece of his Dublin store. “The person who comes in and knows exactly what they want gets treated the same as the person who stops by to say, ‘What’s up?’ ”

“Now the Adidas I possess for one man is rare. Myself homeboy got fifty pair.”

The Columbus sneaker scene has grown exponentially, with more options than ever. Sole Classics is a retail shop that is linked to the sneaker companies. But up High Street, less than a mile away is Premium Kicks, a consignment sneaker store. “There is plenty of room [in Columbus] for sneaker shops to coexist,” Johnson says. “Yes, we’re in competition, but theirs is always a place for a consignment shop to do their thing. We are a little more beholden to the sneaker companies, whereas they have a little more freedom.”

What is also helping the sneaker scene thrive is the innovative chances sneaker companies are taking (see the re-release of the Air Jordan 4 and the new Nike line of kicks called Have a Nike Day), combined with online media. When new kicks get released it’s a feeding frenzy. “Once upon a time you had to go into a store to hear about the release date; to find out what was dropping that weekend,” Johnson says. “Now, with the internet, it doesn’t matter whether you’re in rural Ohio or in New York City, you’re going to know about the product at the same time. It has expanded the sneaker community exponentially. Tons of people now know about a sneaker they would normally not.”

Does he see the internet ruining the brick-and-mortar, mom and pop shops, more than it already has? “Retail will settle back down,” he says. “Convenience is what people are into—paper towels delivered to your front door—but nothing can replace human contact. Life is about what you’re experiencing, and it’s not usually sitting behind a computer.”

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“We took the beat from the street and put it on TV.”

When I ask Dionte who his biggest influences were when he first started out in the sneaker/fashion world, he cites his favorite nineties’ shows and actors: *Martin*, Will Smith, and even *Seinfeld* (with those dope white running shoes and jeans—not!). “I was heavily influenced by what I saw on TV because they were setting the trend. It was how I saw what other people were experimenting with.”

“My Adidas only bring good news.”

Run-DMC is from Hollis, Queens, and Dionte from Columbus. Big difference. But nobody can deny they both have a love for the squeaks of their sneaks. Their collective “sole” has brought communities together and left an indelible footprint. ■

Sole Classics is located in the Short North at 846 N High St. and in Dublin at 6391 Sawmill Rd. Visit soleclassics.com for all the latest sneaker looks.

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