

# ART UNBOUND EPISODE 33 TRANSCRIPT



## DJ AMBUSH

This is Art Unbound, the official podcast for the Portland Art Museum and Northwest Film Center. My name is DJ Ambush and I'm the Operations and Content Manager at 96.7 The Numberz FM, a community-based radio station here in Portland with the focus on representing Black music and culture. Back in the Fall 2019, we partner with the Portland Art Museum for their exhibition, Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal. We set up live broadcasts in the galleries and knew right away that this was a solid partnership. When the pandemic hit last March, the Numberz and the Art Museum applied for grant together from the Regional Arts and Culture Council. And thanks to the funding provided by that grant, we were able to work together again, pooling our resources. This episode you're about to hear as a result of our partnership coming to life in the Portland Art Museum galleries. I sat down to interview and completely nerd out with Portland-based cultural phenom Kenny Fresh, who runs a record label called Fresh Selects. Links to everything Kenny and I talk about can be found in this episode's description, as well as at [portlandartmuseum.org/podcast](http://portlandartmuseum.org/podcast), where you can also find a full episode transcript. How are you today, sir?

## KENNY FRESH

I'm good. Today, I'm good.

## DJ AMBUSH

Okay.

## KENNY FRESH

It's been a crazy year to say the least. But yeah, today I'm good.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah. Right.

## KENNY FRESH

This is just part of our reality now.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right.

## KENNY FRESH

So. So today, I'm good.

## DJ AMBUSH

Okay. So before I ask how any of this has affected what it is that you do, tell the people what it is that you do.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yes. So that question used to be hard for me to answer, because I had years while I was still figuring it out. But now it's very concrete. I run a record label.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

nice

### **KENNY FRESH**

I own and run a record label, I put out records, I put out music. All of this craziness going on really hasn't affected- I've been very fortunate. It hasn't affected what I do specifically and personally all that much. Compared to, you know, someone like yourself, who's more of a- or, you know, doing live DJ events.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah

### **KENNY FRESH**

You know, my business, my label Fresh Selects, was never very event oriented, or our artists aren't dependent on touring or, you know, some labels, especially like rock labels, will not put out an album unless the artist can tour around it. Because that's just part of, you know, their campaign, their model.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Right

### **KENNY FRESH**

I've always been a- not an internet label, but my music, my relationship with music, a lot of it has been through online. So, you know, a lot of that hasn't changed for me.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

So explain that. Because just, you know, the traditional record label model, touring would be your responsibility, you know, some of the more outward facing things, in-stores, things that are directly being affected by COVID would be your responsibility, how- what's the model that you're operating under, where that doesn't directly affect your bottom line?

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yes, so so Fresh Selects started as a music blog back in 2008. And at first I was just kind of reporting on artists that had, you know, it was kind of the era whereas before streaming, it's kind of the iTunes era where people would put out like the first single for free or they put out a mixtape for free in hopes that you would buy the album on iTunes.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Yes.

### **KENNY FRESH**

So a lot of my posts at the time were just like, here's the free single from so-and-so, here's the free mixtape, and then linking to it. And then as I kind of started to get an audience and I knew some artists already, I would get like exclusives where they would let me premiere the single or premiere the mixtape,

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Okay

## KENNY FRESH

And then I started to create original, you know, mixtapes with artists or kind of help an artist finish a project or connect them to a designer if they needed artwork for it or things like that. So that- so the label grew from that. So just like then I would just release something for free on the website. Now, I'm releasing it on Spotify and you know, Apple Music, and iTunes and all these things, and Bandcamp and a lot of the audience that I've built up is through you know, online music fans. So you know, we press physical copies, not always, but our kind of you know, vinyl is really expensive so our artists or our projects that kind of warranted or a lot of times we'll put out an album and then the response will be so good that I'm like okay, we could do vinyl and we won't you know lose \$3,000 on it.

## DJ AMBUSH

So with regard to physicals, are you also doing cassettes?

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, I started doing cassettes because that's all I could afford. I started the label just you know, on a credit card, and really, I always wanted to start a label, but I just didn't think I could, it just seemed like something you needed to, you know, be born with money or sell drugs to make money, like that's most of the record labels, you know, like Raucous Records came from, you know, a kid whose dad was like the CEO of Fox News. Then you have like, Death Row where they got their money, however they got their money, right. There's always like one or two ways to start a label. And I didn't have- neither of those were the route for me or an option for me. So I just didn't think you know, just seemed like a pipe dream. But then when Bandcamp came around, I started to realize that it's actually really affordable to start a label and to put out physical releases. And I have friends who were putting out cassettes just that they would dub themselves. And then I looked into the cost of actually manufacturing cassettes, it was only a few hundred dollars. So I was like okay, I could put that much on a credit card, and you know, get it started. So that's really when it clicked for me. And when I started the labels the second I realized that I could. Yeah, so a lot of the the label is mostly a digital presence.

## DJ AMBUSH

Okay, distribution.

## KENNY FRESH

We don't have an office, we don't have an event series. You know, it's really like, yeah, it's a it's an online thing, for the most part.

Of all the platforms, we named a couple just now. And I know from a consumer standpoint, I mess with Tidal heavy because they give the biggest payout to artists. From a consulting standpoint, do you have a preference?

I personally use both Spotify and Apple Music. Spotify I think is best for discovery. Their playlists are really crucial for that. And that has become a big part of releasing music, is trying to get on those playlists, doing everything you can to put yourself in a position where you're likely to get chosen for those. Apple Music is solid, it's just easier for a lot of people to use on their phone. So it's kind of access. But Apple Music, for the most part, I feel like people are listening to stuff that they already know.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah

## KENNY FRESH

Where Spotify, I think they're finding out a lot of new music. And that's really been an exciting change. And it's been really interesting seeing the effect that Spotify has had on music and how it's released both in good and bad ways. Because there's a lot of people especially like, lo fi, hip hop or like beat tapes, those playlists do really well. But it's a lot of passive listening, where people just put it on and they're doing homework or whatever.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

**KENNY FRESH**

So there's artists

**DJ AMBUSH**

Beats to study to

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah, exactly. And there's even- there's a few artists from here in Portland that have songs that have millions of plays, and they have very little fans or name recognition, you know, but there's good money in that. But you know, they can't really play shows or put out an album necessarily. And it's just kind of like, if they're not on those playlists, they're not really connecting. So that's, you know, one of the downsides of it, but there's a lot of benefits to it, too. But for- I mean, as far as the most advantageous for the label, and if I could choose one platform to make it bigger and make it the norm, it would definitely be Bandcamp.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Okay.

**KENNY FRESH**

Because Bandcamp by far offers the best split. They're not a streaming site. They're more so for buying a download, but also for physical copies. But Tidal is definitely the best for streaming. But their audience is just so small.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah

**KENNY FRESH**

It's just not the same.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

**KENNY FRESH**

But so if Tidal, if everyone was on Tidal, that'd be great. You know, my label would make more money. But if everyone was buying through Bandcamp, I'd be living great. So but it's important to be well versed in all of them, you know. So I don't really prioritize one over the other too much. But Spotify and Bandcamp are kind of like the main focus for the most part.

**DJ AMBUSH**

And I'm glad that Bandcamp is experiencing the resurgence that it is right now.

**KENNY FRESH**

Definitely.

**DJ AMBUSH**

I remember when it first started. It was like, I don't know what they're doing over there.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah

## DJ AMBUSH

It seemed like another- just another place I had to have an account for

## KENNY FRESH

totally

## DJ AMBUSH

to make sure people could find music.

## KENNY FRESH

And it was kind of amateurish, it was kind of like a lot of you know, like, back in the days it would be like Soundclick, or like, certain websites when someone would send me a link to like a ReverbNation. You know I'm like, Okay, this isn't really- you're not really aware of what works and what doesn't work. But I think Bandcamp, they were able to shake that pretty quickly. And then to me, it's kind of crazy that like, bigger artists don't use it. You know, like for people who do- because a lot of people do still buy music on iTunes, they'll like buy the mp3s. Not as much as 5-10 years ago. Still a decent amount. And if they were getting those sales through Bandcamp, they'd be making good money.

## DJ AMBUSH

Even subscriptions. Just subscriptions on Bandcamp.

## KENNY FRESH

yeah.

## DJ AMBUSH

I love the ability to support a artist. Just you know, buying a monthly subscription. And they're not thinking about it. \$5 \$7 Whatever they're charging me- cool. It's just coming out each month. Not even thinking. I love the ability to do that. And then to be able to engage even further. And when I feel like it, buying whatever, you know, songs, singles, albums, from different artists that I don't have subscriptions for like, yeah, definitely, definitely having a much better relationship with Bandcamp the second time around.

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, and it's the best way to directly support an artist, like, if you were to buy a release on my label right now i'd get an email that would tell me your email address and tell me you know, if you bought certain songs, which songs you bought, and it's just and then I receive the money within 24 hours.

## DJ AMBUSH

Dope.

## KENNY FRESH

Spotify, it's like three to four months before you get paid. There's no real way to know exactly like, Oh, I got 100,000 plays on this song, you can only kind of estimate what that actually pays out to. And then by the time you get it in three or four months, you kind of- that number is no longer what it says. So it's always just kind of smoke and mirrors. Just kind of like whatever comes is whatever you got paid whatever they say, whatever they say. Bandcamp, it's like, you know, if you bought it for \$10, Bandcamp's like we're gonna take \$1, PayPal takes \$1, and here's your eight. And it says that simple. Yeah. So if everyone was buying it that way, I'd be making, you know, I'd be making 80% 80 cents on the dollar.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

Whereas Spotify, you know, it's like, everyone, everyone knows, you know, fractions of a penny. And even iTunes, I think is like, maybe 60-70%, you know, out of a download

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

So it's a vast difference.

## DJ AMBUSH

Spotify is holding on to that data

## KENNY FRESH

That's the thing is, is Spotify is- they're a tech company, and they're a data company. And music is kind of a thing that, a method. You know, Bandcamp is a music company.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yes.

## KENNY FRESH

Spotify is a tech company that that deals in music, and especially now they're putting a lot of their budget towards podcasting. You know, they're not really, which I'm not against, but it just kind of shows where their focus is and what their bottom line is.

## DJ AMBUSH

Oh, yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

You know?

## DJ AMBUSH

Absolutely.

## KENNY FRESH

If something crazy would happen and music was just to become unpopular, they would just, you know, go forward.

## DJ AMBUSH

They would pivot. Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

Can't we just be like, Alright, we're not a company anymore. Ya know, like, it's so that you can you tell the difference in intent. You know?

## DJ AMBUSH

Let's talk about some of the artists you've worked with. Better yet, what was the first artist relationship that you had that you were like, Okay, so this is what it means to operate in this space. And yeah, this works for me.

## KENNY FRESH

So the first artist relationship I had was I was working for an artist, Waajeed. He's from Detroit.

## DJ AMBUSH

Okay.

## KENNY FRESH

He's part of a group, Platinum Pied Pipers. Yeah. And he had a label called Bling47, where he put out his own releases. And he also put out some of the earliest instrumental releases from J Dilla. Who was like, still is like my all time favorite, you know, so that was huge to me, and I was a huge fan of Waajeed's. So we got in touch through online, they reached out to me and offered me an internship, just working remotely, I was living in my mom's basement, you know, and doing- and they were in Brooklyn at the time. So he was, you know, kind of my mentor. And him being a producer, he was really collaborative and worked with a lot of artists. So I would kind of meet the different singers and rappers. He was a DJ, as well, so other DJs. And, and he just, he was just really well respected. And, you know, it's one of those people that like, if you knew him, it was kind of like an inner thing. So it's Oh, you know, about Waajeed? It kind of like, is a certain kind of status or knowledge of independent music, you know? So that was really a big, you know, step into music, and that was when I was 17. So that was huge for me. And so through him, I met a lot of artists and that's why when I started Fresh Selects as a blog, one of my earliest posts was an unreleased Platinum Pied Pipers, PPP song with J Dilla. It was like a year or two after he had passed, when, you know, there's no more J Dilla verses in existence.

## DJ AMBUSH

It's not happening.

## KENNY FRESH

Because one of the last ones that he recorded and it wasn't released, so that like, that was probably, you know, week two of having a website. So that was like big news and got us some traction early on. So then through the website, I met a bunch of artists like Devonwho was a producer from here. And then he was in a group with Knxwledge, who has since gone on to be really big. And has produced for Kendrick Lamar and Action Bronson and all these people. And then in that same group was the artist, Mndsgn.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

And so Mndsgn was one of those people I was talking about earlier, who was putting out his own releases on cassette on Bandcamp. And I was buying them and he would only press like 25-50 copies, it would sell out in like a day. And so you know, I think I was able to get one and they put a second one, and I missed it. I was like, Damn, man, he's just selling fast. That's when I started looking into how much it costs to manufacture. I'm like, Oh, we could, you know, make like, 300 tapes for like, \$500 or maybe a little bit more. So I could like, I don't, you know, I was dead broke at the time, but I was like, uh, put that on a credit card. And then I only need to sell this many to make it back like

## DJ AMBUSH

And you were shipping them out yourself?

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah. So. So Mndsgn was the first artist that- was the first release on the label, was the first artists that was kind of like, it just seemed like a good fit, because he already had an audience. They were already like radidly supporting him. But he didn't really have structure. And he wouldn't, he didn't really have plans for his releases, he would finish it, put it up, go a day, just send a tweet and be like, you know, knew- and it was working for him, but he had never really been on any blogs. And I think at the time hadn't really had any music.

## DJ AMBUSH

What year was this?

## KENNY FRESH

2013. So he signs to Stones Throw like I think the year after- maybe two year later, so he was like, right, kind of on a peak or a pinnacle moment. And and I knew that about him and him and Knxwledge were always super tight. And Knxwledge had just signed to Stones Throw, and I just put out a cassette with them. So I was like, okay, I thought Stones Throw was kind of sleeping on Mndsgn. I was like that's crazy. They didn't sign him like, well, if they're not going to then I'm going to and it turns out, they were just kind of like waiting. And they were, you know, they came to him maybe a year later.

Okay

So it was it was a good moment. And I had my own audience from the website. And, you know, I kept the same name and everything. So it wasn't like so much a new venture as it was an evolution. Yeah, so our first- I remember my goal, we made 300 cassettes, and I was like, it'd be really dope if we could sell out of all of these in the first month. And, like, day 30 we sold, you know, the last five

## DJ AMBUSH

What was the strategy into accomplishing that?

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, it was really just social media push.

## DJ AMBUSH

Okay.

## KENNY FRESH

And we- he had also created- he had a mix series called Frugal Earth. And it was kind of just like, the lens- like he just kind of loops and blends and pretty, you know, I don't know it's kind of a pretty loose collage kind of DJ mix. He put out one on Soundcloud and did really well. And then he was making another one. While we were working on the album, he was like, yeah, I'm gonna put up Volume Two and I'm gonna put it on cassette. And I was like, oh man, that's gonna like like I was hoping to be your next release.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right.

## KENNY FRESH

And I was like, Well how much money do you think you'll make off of that? And he told me and I was like I'm gonna pay you that amount of money and then we'll can we include this mix as a as a free bonus item when you buy the album on Bandcamp? And so that's what we did so because our- he'd actually ended up putting out the album- We were working on an album and then he put out this one called Breatharian, like super quick. He was like hey man, I need I need to like make my rent money for this month. I'm gonna put out you know, this is just collection of beats called Breatharian I'm gonna put it out and I was like alright, like I can't say no like it's like I do it and then you put it out and then I heard it and I was like, damn I kind of like this better than the album we're working on so so are release together actually turned out to be a reissue of that out because he didn't do cassettes. It was digital only. So I was like how about we put that on cassettes, give me two bonus tracks. And then he was doing a DJ mix I was like alright, that'll be a bonus item.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right

**KENNY FRESH**

So it's all this for like \$10 You know,

**DJ AMBUSH**

That's dope.

**KENNY FRESH**

And we made a music video for one of the songs which he had never had a video at the time. But it was mostly just a social push. Like we didn't do an in-store. We didn't do a release party. Those are all things that because I was working remotely, he was in- he's from Philly, but at the time, he was already in LA. But I didn't have the money to fly out there and, or like set up a venue. I just didn't really have all the connects. So we just kind of did it how we could you know, very grassroots and DIY

**DJ AMBUSH**

That's why I asked you what year that was because we interviewed him on voltage radio, I think. We had a show called- Man I can't remember the name of show. Me and illustrator Morris Five, we had a show out there in Philly in Morris was telling me, he was like, yo, these dudes are nice.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Production-wise, they're nice and like I never heard of them. I don't know what you're talking about.

Yeah.

And then when I was in there for the session, I was like Oh, no, this is crazy. They're both mad humble and chill. And a lot of producers are like that, you know what I'm saying? But it's something to just watch them just like zone out and a discussion about the creative process.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

And then you hear it. And this is like, but no, I heard you explain it. But still, how'd you get here?

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah, this is crazy. They were really. I mean, it was that kind of post-Dilla

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah

**KENNY FRESH**

Post-not post-Madlib. Madlib is still relevant to this day, which is like after Dilla passed, there was kind of this, this next movement.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

### KENNY FRESH

And I feel like they and Flying Lotus and other producers

### DJ AMBUSH

Absolutely

### KENNY FRESH

were going one way with it. And that was cool. I liked some of that stuff. But I wasn't 100% onboard as much as a lot of my peers were. Then Knxwledge and Mndsgn, the direction they were taking it was just something I related more to.

### DJ AMBUSH

It was a little more grittier. Definitely.

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah. And a little bit more vibier and less kind of where I think, like, I felt a little bit more jazz and soul in it. And less electronic. You know?

### DJ AMBUSH

Is that where you lean more towards, as far as the artists that you work with on your label?

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah, just my personal tastes. I really- I really love all music. So I look for artists who kind of exist on the boundaries or on the edges or the intersections of different genres.

### DJ AMBUSH

Ok.

### KENNY FRESH

You know, like, I put out all different types of music. So I've put out jazz music, but it's jazz music by people who listen to hip hop.

### DJ AMBUSH

Gotcha.

### KENNY FRESH

And then we'll put out the jazz album, then we'll have hip hop producers remix it from the stems. And I put out rock bands, but they- they use samplers and they listen to, you know, Knxwledge and stuff like that, too. So I really like the intersections of things that a lot of that is influenced by, you know, really kind of some of the pivotal music I was listening to in high school - people like Dilla, Questlove, D'Angelo that whole Soulquarians movement.

### DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

### KENNY FRESH

So all the music, I was super into them. But I've always been very nerdy about music. So it's never just enough to be into the artists I liked. I always wanted to go into the artists that they liked. So D'Angelo will talk about Marvin Gaye, or they would, you know, have a song that mentioned Fela Kuti, so I would get into that, or they sampled Herbie Hancock, so I would listen to that, you know? So a lot of my music exploration and context, and, you know, knowledge has come from artists like that and artists from that era. So now, the music I put out is kind of reflections of that. There's kind of different seeds. And a lot of music I put out can be very eclectic, and some people might only like

some of the stuff I put out.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Which is great.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah, which is how I prefer it. Because I don't- I've never really wanted to be a one lane label, because I've just never, I've just never been that type of listener.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Right.

**KENNY FRESH**

You know, I might get into moods where I'm only listening to old Wu Tang from, you know, the early years for this week. But then the next week, I'm listening to, you know, Miles Davis all week, so I just go into zones, but I think I would get really bored if I was just the hip hop label or just a beat label or any one thing, you know? It might be smarter, business wise, but it's just, it's just not

**DJ AMBUSH**

I think, I think oh world. Sure.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Smarter. I think it's smarter, especially with that larger label mindset.

**KENNY FRESH**

Right

**DJ AMBUSH**

Especially when you're talking about the way that they choose to do marketing. You know? I think in that way,

**KENNY FRESH**

You're just talking to the same audience every time.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah. And then, you know, they lock in and they got that formula and they're being lazy about it and boom, boom, boom, you're getting the same thing.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

My first experience with dealing with the label that wasn't afraid to stretch those boundaries was definitely Stones Throw.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

And I was so used to what they were putting out from a hip hop and just beat standpoint, that when they released Chin Chin's album.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Right.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

I was like, "No, but what is this?"

### **KENNY FRESH**

But that was a Def Jux.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Was it Def Jux?

### **KENNY FRESH**

But they were the same thing. Yeah. Especially Def Jux. They were only like Aesop Rock, Cannibal Ox, LP.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Right.

### **KENNY FRESH**

And then there's like this funk Brooklyn band. Yeah, I really liked that Chin Chin album.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

That Chin Chin album was crazy.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah. It was really dope.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Right. So I'm working at the record store at the time. And we're getting all the promos, so yeah, right. We were definitely getting all the Def Jux stuff.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

And I was like the artwork looked really, really dope. So I just took it home.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Had the bright lettering and the yellow background.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

So then like, it sat in the crib for a couple of months, and I was like, Alright, do some cleaning. Let me just see what this Chin Chin stuff is. Blew my mind.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

## DJ AMBUSH

Immediately. And I was like, why is this in Def Jux? What's happening? Right? You know, it's crazy. So it's a really it's a really solid model. I think it's smart. I think it's really smart.

## KENNY FRESH

And I think like Def Jux that have spent so many years being a hip hop label that that release was kind of a departure for them.

## DJ AMBUSH

Like super backpack.

## KENNY FRESH

And Stones Throw kind of went the same way. For the first few years, it was like only it- was Lootpack, and then Madlib solo and then the guys who were featured on Lootpack, it was very- like it was a crew for the most part.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah

## KENNY FRESH

I don't think it was until maybe Madlib mixed Quasimoto where it's like, oh, this is a weird thing. And then he mixed Yesterdays New Quintet. But it was still like Madlib. It was through one artist that they ended up- and then they would do like, The Funky 16 Corners like reissue stuff. But so growing up being a fan of labels like both of them, and kind of studying the game, I had a very, I was like, Okay, I want to establish my base, but I want to do it quicker. And I don't want to- I don't want to be a rap label that pivots. I want to be an eclectic label from day one.

## DJ AMBUSH

So in an effort to establish that, that model from day one, did you have like a quota or like a sheet or a list or like I want this type of artists this week, I want to shop and find this type of artists next week? I want to fill this box?

## KENNY FRESH

Not so much as outreach. I've never come from a place of like, Oh, I need to get a jazz artist, let me find one. But I would, I would consider those things in a process of elimination, where if a rapper or rap project would come to me, like I just put out three rap projects, then maybe I would pass on it unless it really really, you know, spoke to me, but it happened pretty organically. And at first. Actually, my idea for the label was to be a reissue label for things that were only available digitally. I was gonna put them on cassette and give them kind of a proper treatment, you know, like one of my favorite, or just an idea that really inspired me in- because I'm big into film and in movies, the Criterion Collection, just how they're like you know, they'll restore movies from the 60s or international movies that never really had distribution in the US you know, like a Godard you know, movie from France or, you know, all these famous directors from Japan and stuff like that, or stuff that never really got its due or since been forgotten. Then they always have incredible design and packaging. And they also just have a brand so I might even have never heard of the director of the movie or might be a subject that doesn't really interest me, but if it's Criterion, it's probably worthwhile

## DJ AMBUSH

Exactly.

## KENNY FRESH

You should at least give it a chance.

## DJ AMBUSH

Exactly.

## KENNY FRESH

So that was always my goal. I wanted Fresh Selects to be like that brand that you're like, I don't even really listen to jazz music, but it's Fresh Selects. They never, you know, steered me wrong before. So that was my idea. And again, it was kind of a- I've always had pretty realistic goals. I just didn't think I had enough money to like, put out original projects. But I'm like, if you've already made it, I can make it better and give it like, some physicality and put it on cassette.

## DJ AMBUSH

Gotcha.

## KENNY FRESH

So that's like, so Mndsgn's project was that. The second project we put out was this artist Low Leaf, who in her, her by herself is eclectic. She's a singer, she makes beats, she plays the harp. So it's like, Alice Coltrane meets MIA meets Georgia Anne Muldrow. It's just like- she's five genres by herself. So if she was the only artist I put out, I'd be a multi-genre label. So that really appealed to me. But I was talking to her and she actually came- she- it was her idea. She was like, you know, I had like, I think premiered a music video for her on the site. And you know, that worked well. And so she was like, yeah, I'm working on an album. And I think she was actually living with Mndsgn at the time. They were roommates with a few other artists. And she was like, his name is Ringo. She's like yeah, I really you know, I saw what you did with Ringo's album. I really liked that like, would you would you be down to put on my album? I was like, Oh, yeah, like why didn't I think of that? Like oh, I could just put out an album. She doesn't need to put it out first and then I re put it out.

## DJ AMBUSH

You could just put it out

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, I could just put it out. So my second release was Low Leaf so that already like Mndsgn and Low Leaf - even though they're friends, they live together, still is just the very eclectic between the two of them. Then my next release after that was a pretty like traditional R&B/soul kind of throwback record this artist Coltrane. And so from the beginning, and there's a clear through line. Like you could play those three artists on the same radio show, but not if it's a hip hop station, or a jazz station, you know, but if it's like, what do you guys do? Or just- and so that's always interesting because I always wanted to be in the elevated spaces. Like I was saying about Waajeed. Not everyone knows him. But if you know him, you're like, Oh, yeah, like, if you know Waajeed that means, you know, Detroit techno music, you probably know some Dilla stuff, you probably know Beat City stuff, and it kind of like is just kind of a, I don't know, it's a certain barometer, or kind of a bar to clear. And so if this music could be played in the same place, it's gonna be a really cool place.

## DJ AMBUSH

Exactly

## KENNY FRESH

You're not gonna hear it and just some corny club or, you know, not to be too pretentious or elitist about it, but just naturally, just pushing boundaries and kind of eliminating some of those unnecessary parameters of what - you know - how things are formatted.

## DJ AMBUSH

It's a good- it's a good place to be, it's a great intention to have with wanting to curate people's experience and deliver music in that way. Like, I think about it, I compared it to the DJ experience when you know, people come to the booth

and they're like, yo, can you play this? Can you play this? Can you play that? And I'm like, these are literally songs that you have memorized, because you hear them all day on the radio, or you play them all day.

**KENNY FRESH**

You probably listened to that song on your way here.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Exactly.

**KENNY FRESH**

Why do you need to hear that?

**DJ AMBUSH**

Why do you want me to play this again? So you can- so you can listen to this song that you had memorized in a room full of people that probably heard it a million times? Like, we're not here for that, let's not do that. Let's- chill out.

**KENNY FRESH**

There is something to that, though. Especially now, there's certain songs that come out like Man, I wish I could, like be out when this song is playing

**DJ AMBUSH**

Oh, definitely!

**KENNY FRESH**

There is a communal experience. It is funny when people request the number one song out right now. And a lot of times, like, I'm gonna play that, but it's 9:30 I'm not playing it now. Like, that's gonna be like, 11:30 or midnight. Peak of the night, you know? But I do think, kind of circling back to some of our conversation earlier. I do think Spotify and the streaming era has done a lot to also blur those lines of genres a bit. And I think it's-

**DJ AMBUSH**

In a good way.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah, in a great way. I think digital, just the music going digital. And really, I look at it as music is free now. When I was in high school, I had to not eat lunch so I could use my lunch money to buy a CD. That'd be like \$17.99 if it wasn't, you know, new and on sale, you know, at Best Buy or the record store. And so I was really picky about what I was buying. And I would, you know, try to listen to it online. Or I try to, you know, dig through record stores and try to find- I had a list of albums in my mind that I was looking for and I was waiting to find them used, you know, you can get a used CD for like, \$8 but so like, music discovery was expensive, and it took time. Now,

**DJ AMBUSH**

It's like an algorithm.

**KENNY FRESH**

I really started to first notice it with Tyler the Creator, when he first came out, it was probably what like 2011? 2012? With Odd Future and all that. But when he would, you know talk about his influences on Twitter, it's like, Oh, he's- you could tell he was like listening to MF DOOM on YouTube. And then the next thing that came up was like cortex because you know he got sampled by him and then from there he hears about the Italian you know, film score group Goblin and all this really obscure stuff and these are like \$100 Records if you were to you know, cuz they're long out of print and stuff in my all he just listened to him on YouTube like, and his taste was so eclectic and he became so iconic

and such a cult figure for people of his age and younger. That has really influenced his- his fans are pretty eclectic tastes, you know? And they'll listen to you know, a Mac DeMarco next to Earl Sweatshirt.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

**KENNY FRESH**

Next to Solange or whatever, you know. Which is really cool because even you know, I was in high school. I mean, damn it has been, you know, 20 years, I guess. But still, to an old man like me, it doesn't seem like that long ago. But I would kind of you know, some of my friends would kind of make fun of me for listening to Erykah Badu or D'Angelo, it was kind of seen as being like, feminine or just, you know, they were like hip hop heads, they only want to listen to Mos Def and Talib Kweli. And, you know, these things and I listened to all that stuff, too. But I don't know, it's just like, like, this music just spoke to me in a different way and for a different mood and, and I was always into female artists more, you know, more sad music, love songs, all types of stuff, not just like, rapping about rapping and yeah, battling, you know

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

**KENNY FRESH**

But I feel like, you know, younger generations, they're- it's just natural. I think more kids than not are listening to different genres, different types of songs, and not just-

**DJ AMBUSH**

I mean, it's about accessibility, right?

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah

**DJ AMBUSH**

What we were growing up listening to was dictated to a greater, greater degree, either by the radio or the amount of money you had to spend on releases yourself, period.

**KENNY FRESH**

Totally

**DJ AMBUSH**

Like you said, at this point, music is free. So if you have a subscription service, you can listen to anything if you're on YouTube.

**KENNY FRESH**

If- I probably heard the name Herbie Hancock for five years before I got a chance to listen to an album. Today, I could, you know,

**DJ AMBUSH**

five seconds.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah, just like just takes a quick search.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah

## KENNY FRESH

There's still a lot of people who still won't branch out, but I can just see the difference, like those gaps are smaller than ever, you know.

## DJ AMBUSH

Because so much music is at our fingertips, do you find it challenging being a label right now?

## KENNY FRESH

Totally. That's, that's the kind of the double edged sword of it is that it's easier to access music than ever, it's easier to make and release music than ever, which is a great thing, but also an overwhelming thing. Like, I have a playlist that I update every week called Tight Songs. That's what I started as my radio show on X-Ray, I did it for like two or three years on X-Ray. And then it was just taking away too much time from the label. So I started just making a playlist on Spotify and Apple Music. And you know, it's all new music that came out in the last few weeks or a few months. And it just kind of this curated thing. And it's really a way for me to- gives me a reason and a method and a format to sort through all the music that's coming out. Because there's just, there's just so much, and who has the time? Like there's probably six hours worth of music that I like that came out yesterday, on Friday. And so if I don't go through that, there's gonna be another 6-10 hours of music that came out this Friday. And I'm putting out an hour of music that came out on this album on a Friday too. So it's hard to get people's attention. And so, you know, I could put out a release that people really like, but, but it was really good. I like it. And then Meanwhile, there's five of the things that came out that they like, too, so- and I get paid every time they listen to it.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right.

## KENNY FRESH

Where in the iTunes or physical model you if they like it enough to pay \$15 - \$20 for it, you made \$15- \$20. And if they never listened to it again, you still got your \$20 out of them. But now, if they only listened to it once, you got maybe a penny if they listened to the whole album, you know, and if they never go back to it, even if they really loved it that one time you got a penny from them.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

So you know, so I do a lot to try to extend the life of music, we'll do slower rollouts. Lately, what I've been doing, like I put out a remix project. Well, remixes are one thing, too, where it's the album came out. So that album is done, I have nothing else to put out from it. But then what I could do, and especially to kind of bridge some of the gaps, because I'm aware that it could be a big ask for certain members of the- of my audience to listen to this album- might be a bit far from what they're used to. And so I could take that and have artists that I'd know they like and have them do a remix of it and kind of bring it into the world. But then putting out the remix is something that gives me post album content to kind of extend the life of that. But we put out a jazz album that had, I think seven or eight songs on it. And we got each song remixed by two different producers. So we got kind of a 16 kind of called a double album, but in the digital age what does a double album even mean, you know? But um, but that's why the 16 track album has to really stand by all 16 of them. I'm really strict about the tracklist. Like, you know, we probably had a few remixes that came back that were just cool. But we- they weren't good enough to make it on the, you know, final album. But so I have these 16 tracks, and I'm like, even if we put out three singles, it's still 13 songs to ask for someone to listen to. So what I did is I split it up, I was always treating the album like a double album anyways. So I took side B and put that out as an

EP first. So that was like seven, eight songs. And then we put out another single from Side A and then we put out the full thing where it has all 16 together. And I think that made it a lot easier for people to have the time to listen to it. It's not a big ask for you know, the six song record was maybe 15-20 minutes long, you know, it's not too much to ask that

### DJ AMBUSH

The good thing about that is the play is 15-20 minutes long. It's over before people realize it and then you want it right back.

### KENNY FRESH

Exactly. That's always- like replayability is something I always focus on and strive for. And that's why, you know, a lot of labels, especially labels that are used to the CD/vinyl era end up having to acclimate to streaming, they really don't like streaming. Me? I've never really had that privilege. I started when streaming was already kind of the norm. So streaming has been good for me, because what I've found is that if a record connects with people,

### DJ AMBUSH

Mm hmm.

### KENNY FRESH

They seem to listen to it constantly.

### DJ AMBUSH

Oh, yeah.

### KENNY FRESH

And like I said, I get paid every time they listen to it. So like, there's probably there's multiple albums where even if they would if they would have bought it for 20, I probably made more than the \$20 than if they would have just bought the vinyl then.

### DJ AMBUSH

Gotcha

### KENNY FRESH

Because they listened to it for five years now. And I get paid every month, or even if it's just one song that they put on their playlist, and they just listened to it constantly. So that's what I've seen is that really, you know, before it used to be all about first week numbers and stuff like that, and it still is for people who are more so go off of Billboard charts which I've, you know, never have, but our releases, they don't really have like a dive, they kind of...

### DJ AMBUSH

Plateau?

### KENNY FRESH

...plateau. Exactly. They plateau and they stay consistent for years like my, my most successful records still pay out pretty close to what they did in their first month or two to this day, and it's been five years,

### DJ AMBUSH

That's huge

### KENNY FRESH

and there's no sign of that, you know, it might wane a few percent every year, but that you know, that's a couple dollars, it's a pretty negligible difference.

## DJ AMBUSH

That definitely says something about wilding the music, it says something about the release strategy. Like you said that- I like that that phrase like, the slow rollout.

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah.

## DJ AMBUSH

You know, we're so used to hearing the exact opposite of rush-rush-rush, gotta get it out. The slow roll-out, extending the release of the project. A great example of an album that will always be in rotation for me is D'Angelo's Black Messiah. I might take that break. But then there's a- I'm cooking right now. I need to have it on like,

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah.

## DJ AMBUSH

Those mood setting projects. Absolutely. And then, like, you mentioned the Soulquarians earlier. That's the whole vibe. That's a whole mood. That's a whole like, universe of music between all of those artists that put you in a certain place that are like, yeah, this is the mood I need to be in right now.

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, and that's, that's another theory I have is there's two different types of releases that I'm interested in, or artists that especially appeal to me, is there's artists who kind of own a zone, and you could put it- D'Angelo Voodoo is one vibe throughout. You put it on when you're in that zone. Maybe you've got a partner over maybe you're cooking, but it's that zone. Sade is- they own a zone. But then there's others maybe like Slum Village: Fantastic, Vol. 2 - it's one of my favorite albums, but there's all different types of vibes, you know, there's cool laid back vibes. But there's also Raise it Up and there's, you know, and so, those Fantastic, Vol. 2 is kind of universal in that, if, you know, there's breakup songs, there's love songs, there's hype songs, there's chill songs. So there's a song from there for every mood I'm in. So there's this kind of constantly room for it in my life. But also, I could put it on and listen to it from beginning to end and it doesn't feel like a compilation or it's on shuffle. So those two types of projects are what really appealed to me where it's like, this is a chill jazz album. And it's, there's nothing in- you could sleep to it, because there's no one sharp song that's gonna wake you up, because it kills the vibe, or you could have someone over and you're talking and there's not like, there's one moment where there's really harsh, you know, trombone solo, that you can't talk over anymore. So I look for really consistent things or things that are really eclectic, but and then for those who try to be mindful and try to make them cohesive in their randomness, and that's what's Soulquarians were so good about where they would have, you know, little interludes in between that would bridge if they're going from a slow song to a fast song, they would have a little beat in between, starts off slow and then goes

## DJ AMBUSH

Yup. Switch it up.

## KENNY FRESH

As a DJ, you know, is what it's all about. So I really try to program or sequence my albums, you know, with the releases on my label, I'm super hands on with, there's certain parts of creating records that I won't get involved with. I don't tell artists what type of songs to make or what to write about, or I'll never be like, you should change this line or I don't get into the weeds with that stuff.

## DJ AMBUSH

But you know where it belongs.

### KENNY FRESH

I'm like finish the song or get the song to a place you feel like it's finished, then I might give feedback like oh, you should extend the outro or like that's so short. I wish there was a bridge or something like that. Something more big picture with it. And then when the songs are done that I'm like, here's my vision for where these all fit together, then I send it to them, sometimes it'll be into it, sometimes they'll send it back. And we'll kind of you know, keep chipping away at it from there. But sequencing is one of my favorite things. And when I was doing the radio show, and now that I do the playlist, I kind of treat those the same way.

### DJ AMBUSH

Okay.

### KENNY FRESH

Treat them all, like a, like a DJ mix, or like, how an editor would you know, how you would edit a film. It has, you know, a beginning and an ending and a middle and some sort of doesn't need to be a narrative of this happens, then this guy does this. But there is like, I don't know, like, even some of my favorite artists, and my favorite songs don't have my favorite albums, because it'll go from sad song, to happy song, to sad song with no real connection in between. And it'll be fast, slow, just like but if it goes from sad to slightly optimistic, and then gets happy, and then there's a turn, and then it gets sad again, that makes sense and I could sit with it, you know?

### DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

### KENNY FRESH

So that's something I always try to keep in mind when- so when I have those eclectic projects that have these different types of songs, you try to find some through line, maybe it is narrative, maybe it is vibe, or BPM, or whatever. But um, and that all plays into the the replayability, which has now become more important than ever.

### DJ AMBUSH

Oh, yeah.

### KENNY FRESH

Because if it's, if it's just this once, like, you know, people used to be able to make millions of dollars off a one hit wonder, because people would have to buy the \$17.99 CD to get the one song. Now, they can just get the one song. So you know, you're gonna make 1/10 of what you would off of one song as if you would have 10 songs that are strong. So, you know, I look for albums more so than I do singles.

### DJ AMBUSH

The first actual record I purchased, first vinyl record I purchased was 93 'til Infinity,

### KENNY FRESH

Wow

### DJ AMBUSH

You know what I'm saying?

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

So that was my-

**KENNY FRESH**

When it new? Like had just come out?

**DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah, when I bought it in 93, as it dropped.

**KENNY FRESH**

That's dope.

**DJ AMBUSH**

So like, that was it for me. So when something like Handsome Boy Modeling School came around, it was like, all of the other, not necessarily like weird, but all the other genres of music that I was engaging with as a kid. And even in high school, you know, listening. Like I said, my homie introduces me to Metallica and a bunch of other stuff like, oh, wow,

**KENNY FRESH**

It's a full-circle moment

**DJ AMBUSH**

It came full-circle. It was beautiful. It was like, Damn, this is so dope.

Yeah.

And it's still hip hop. Yeah. handsome boy modeling school. They, like helped solidify the weird for me. When that album dropped. It was like, no, wait a minute. Why was all of this happening? Like Prince Paul and Dan the Automator are crazy.

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Paul is just wild. Like skit originator as far as I'm concerned 100%. Like, so like, when I heard that, like, how was this happening right now?

**KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

**DJ AMBUSH**

Why aren't more people listening to this? This is insane. Deltron 3030. This is insane.

**KENNY FRESH**

That was another one for a lot of people where... So I think for me- this is one of my favorite things about people who are into eclectic music is the different ways that people can arrive at that same destination. Because for me, my earliest experiences with music largely came from my father who was super- he had a big music collection he had an entire room in our house called the music room, wall to wall like library shelves of CDs, mostly, it's some records and tapes, but he was a big CD guy. But he was really into like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan that kind of like 60s dad rock kind of stuff. But he did have the kind of standout essentials, he had Stevie Wonder Songs in the Key of Life, John Coltrane, Giant Steps, stuff like that. So those were the kind of, the ones I would gravitate towards. But um, you

know, you saying- I'm assuming maybe you might have come from more of a rap music standpoint than Handsome Boy Modeling School is when things get weird. Me, I kind of came from weird music and kind of nerdy things and then got into hip hop more in like Middle School late elementary school for me. So then, when Dilla or Quasimoto or something like that would get into these weird or more psychedelic things, it kind of resonated and reminded, kind of connected me to my father in a way. It's like oh, this is that weird Frank Zappa stuff that he was listening to.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

So for me, it was kind of the same experience. So my father's Nigerian, my mother's Jamaican, you know, I'm first generation. So a lot of the things that I grew up listening to like, so my fiance will be like, you know, what was your relationship with Stevie Wonder coming up? Yeah, it wasn't the same as yours. I'm saying like, a lot of the American soul music that African Americans grew up listening to wasn't my experience coming up. I was hearing what my parents were experiencing, what their American music experience was. So it was anything from, of course, my dad playing Fela because he from Nigeria.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

My mom playing, you know, Peter Tosh. At the same time, I'm hearing Fleetwood Mac, I'm hearing Peter Frampton. I'm hearing all of that.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Gotcha.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

The Police, like, this is what I'm growing up listening to. So as I began my own musical journey, and of course, it's starting with golden era hip hop, you know, just for me as far as what I'm-

### **KENNY FRESH**

Teah, that's the type of stuff that like I was saying that I strive for is that stuff that can kind of connect other genres and doesn't have to necessarily have to be like, like a rap rock. That's not really the vibe I'm going for but like, like, you know, a jazz musician is playing a jazz record, but you could just tell through his timing that he's, you know, listening to unquantized Dilla drums. Yeah, you know, like that subtle, through line between different genres is really what appeals to me the most.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Give me your five year, everything goes right. Everything continues to go on the trajectory that you want it to be, five years from now, what is the label doing?

### **KENNY FRESH**

That's a good question. So right now we are in year seven of the label. That's a hard question. I've actually, I'm not very long term. I wish I was more. I really take it day by day and now I'm getting- I've been trying to get better at it. So now I'm going more year by year, I have a pretty decent idea of what next year is going to look like for us, which I never could have said at September of any previous year. But five years from now, I don't know it'd be great to, I would love to expand to other things. Just like how with the label, I never want it to just be- it would have been easy to just be a beat tape label, or easy to just be an r&b label. I never want it to be just one of those things. And so, but I wanted to establish those things so we had a home base, and then we could branch out from that, but then always return to it when we needed to. And you know, so in that same regard, I have always thought that would be nice, long term to do. I've never done any t shirts, or I've always just been music. I've never even made a sticker. Like I've just been so busy. I know a lot of people who will start a label, and the first thing they do is make stickers,

## DJ AMBUSH

All the merch. All the swag.

## KENNY FRESH

and make t shirts and they haven't even put out a release yet. So I'm like you're a T shirt company. You're not- record labels put out records, you know, so I've always like put out records like I put out albums, that's what I do. And then one artist was like, Oh, you know, I have this shirt design. I was like, okay, so we made one shirt that was attached to one album. That's it. So it's probably long overdue. But also, I'd never want to make a T shirt unless people wanted it. And now I think we've had- for long enough people have been asking me for shirts. So like, I should probably make some shirts.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

But I don't, I will make some like logo t shirts. That'd be dope, just to put out just shirts too, that aren't necessarily like maybe Fresh Selects was just the, the name of the line, but it's not branded all over. And in that same way, I'm also really into art, and I've been heavily getting back into comic books. So I would love to- I don't really know how that intersects yet. But it's something I kind of keep in my, you know, peripherals and just kind of this floating idea that I'm looking for that connecting dot. But I would love to publish, at the very least, zines, if not graphic novels or something. So I'd really like to expand in that way.

## DJ AMBUSH

Would you want to deal with film at all?

## KENNY FRESH

Film, too. Film is another thing though, where it's I've dabbled in directing music videos before, which was really fun. But film is just one of those things that just seems so expensive. And so, you know, it takes even to make a short film, it could take 50 people and a few you know tens of thousands of dollars to do it right. So that's something that maybe for the 10 year plan, but like you know, putting out a comic book or graphic novel like that's, you know, just knowing the right people and having a you know, few thousand dollars maybe if that. Same as shirts. I'd like to just do more different stuff. I'll always be putting out music. And the music will always be what it's been, it'll be eclectic and consistent and cohesive and albums you could listen to from front to back. But when I think of long term plans, I don't really- because like I said, I've never really come from a place of like, I need to put out a jazz release, I need to put out a rock band, or so I don't really think of like, what type of artists I put out in five years, that's just kind of on auto. But like, whatever comes to me the best of what I come across that wants to work with me, that's what I'll be putting out. And that's always what I've put out.

## DJ AMBUSH

I like that. I like the idea of, you know, diversifying what the products are. And, you know, venturing into apparel and comics and things like that. But I think what really, really made me a champion of you doing this is the approach that you've laid out like it's got to be organic.

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah.

## DJ AMBUSH

You're not jumping to do any of it.

## KENNY FRESH

I don't want it to be a gimmick.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah. It's not like part of the marketing attached to the product. You're gonna put this album out in - Yeah

## KENNY FRESH

I'm not going to commission Ibrahim to make a comic book of one of my artists, you know. I would just want to be completely separate. We just keep it under the same name. And that's kind of what Fresh Selects has always been. It started as a music blog, then I threw a concert series here in town, we had a sponsor, so were able to get some really great artists, we had Madlib, we had Erykah Badu, we had J\*Davey and Blue and all types of people. Yeah that was dope. And then it was a record label, then it was a radio show, and the record label now it's a playlist. And so I've always just kept it open ended, where I could make it whatever I wanted it to be. But sometimes it gets so tunnel focused and so hung up on the details of the five albums I'm working on right now that I forget that I can do anything.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

And instead of just keep doing the same thing. So it takes conversations like this to remind me that like, Oh, right, I can, there's still other things that I need to get to, you know, but it's, it's hard. And eventually, at some point, I got to get better at getting more people involved. Because it's always just-

## DJ AMBUSH

It's still a one man show for the most part?

## KENNY FRESH

One of my closest friends, Tawfiq Mardini, he's been super crucial in me scaling to the point that I have, because he does pretty much 100% of my designs and artwork and animations for Instagram and video clips. So if anything, it's me and him. But as far as like signing artists and working on the albums and working with the artists, like Tawfiq who works with me, I work with artists. So it's pretty much a one man operation. And then the artwork is a separate one man operation that, you know, I kind of consult and collaborate and oh, no, I am with, you know, feedback. But yeah, so it's, it's really always just been me. And so having a staff just seems like inviting people in to something that's always been so personal. And so just a passion project.

## DJ AMBUSH

Is there a fear in that? Because I'm interested to know why that wouldn't be part of the five year plan.

## KENNY FRESH

Yeah, it should be, right? But I think it's more, I guess fear would be a way to put it, but I don't know, just my just my nature, I'm not the most social person and I'm a bit of a shut in. And that's largely how my relationship with music kind of came about and how it's always sustains. You know? So it's just been me in a bedroom on a computer. Getting-receiving music, now it's me putting out music through that same method.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

So like, I get emails once a week, at least of college students asking to volunteering to intern and I'm like, Yeah, I just don't know what I would have you do, like, my day to day is writing emails and, and listening to artists, listening to

albums, giving feedback, maybe getting on the phone, like I don't really know what of those steps they could do. I used to ship things out myself and that took up so much time but now I have a partner that- a shipping partner that does a lot- our fulfillment. So that was kind of the one kind of physical in person thing, but I've got that covered and that's been going great. So it's like I don't really know what- if someone Tawfiq and I because he's done design for other record labels like indie rock labels in New York. And so he's always a great kind of barometer for telling me what- what's more normal than what other labels do. Like he's kind of like you got to get a staff at some point. I'm like, Yeah, what do they do and what do I pay them? Because my my payment is all commission off of how well stuff does. I gotta pay them a salary based on what and how much is enough? Like can I afford that. I've never paid that. I'm barely- I just in the last year or so I've kind of gotten to a place where it's like, Alright, the back catalogue is earning so steadily that now I'm- I know, for sure my rent is gonna be covered next month and -

### DJ AMBUSH

Right. That's dope.

### KENNY FRESH

unless something changes, I'm good for the- covered for the bare minimum, which is a great brand new feeling for me. For the first- you know I said I'm in year seven, the first four or five years that was not the case. It was very check to check month to month, you know, but so I'm like, I just got me good. Now I gotta pay for someone like me someone else's full time job. Like, I don't really know what that looks like. I don't know. So it will be in the cards at some point. I just don't know how or what. But if I want if I want to do these other things, it's gonna I'm gonna need some help with the day to day for sure.

### DJ AMBUSH

Yeah, delegation is tough.

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah. It's not my strong suit.

### DJ AMBUSH

Yeah, yeah, it's it's a muscle. I'm learning the organ or learning, flex and build up. It's tough. You know, you get used to wearing so many hats and being so familiar with the operation, as you're learning the different changes in the industry, and you know, you're making adjustments. So you couldn't really imagine still being in the phase of understanding that you have, and having to impart any of that on someone else.

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah.

### DJ AMBUSH

And then give them direction on top of that. It's like I'm responsible, too.

### KENNY FRESH

Yeah. It's a bit of, it's just a foreign idea to me. And so much of the label is just so personal to me. And, you know, I didn't write any of these albums, but they all mean so much to me. And they really have to do with my personal taste. And, you know, that's really what I look for an artist is a artist that sees things similar to or like they, they see the same thing in the album that I do, and that we were eye to eye on it. And you know, there have been times when I've worked with an artist, and then we get halfway in a project when we realize like, Oh, we want this album to be different things. At that point, I'm like, well, you're definitely right, because it's your album.

### DJ AMBUSH

Exactly.

## KENNY FRESH

But that's not the album I want to put out. So like, we should go our separate ways. And you should put that out, like, I'll probably still listen to it as a fan. But I can't put it out under this thing that I'm doing. Because this thing I'm doing is like, my vision for

## DJ AMBUSH

Exactly.

## KENNY FRESH

music, you know. So that's a tough thing to navigate. And no one really wants to hear that news, you know, but so, collaboration has always been kind of a tightrope for me, because I know exactly what I like and what I don't like and I'm understanding about that. And I know it's subjective, I don't treat it like fact, but it's still what it is for me. And I'm not really too interested in compromising that for this.

## DJ AMBUSH

But it's really important. That's really important. Having a label and curating the sound of that label is a huge responsibility. You know, so it's very important that you have that relationship with the entire process and with the artists that you're working with.

## KENNY FRESH

When I talk to people, when people ask me about starting a label or you know what to do, or what it takes. There's different types, there's people who are just good business people, and they just- they're good with schedules and they're great with working with people. And those- I wish I was more like that, if I were to hire somebody, it would be someone like that, and kind of fill in that blank for me. For me, I come more from a place of just discernment. And a lot of quote unquote taste or whatever that means to you that you know, I hate the term tastemaker and all this kind of stuff, really what it is, is just discerning. It's just like, like, this guy is rapping, and is good, but it's not good enough for what I'm trying to do. Or he's rapping good enough, over the beat is fine. But it's those things, you know, there's just so many things. And it's just a matter of having standards, having context for those standards.

## DJ AMBUSH

Yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

And then if you, if you know how to take something that's below them and raise it to the point where they meet or exceed those standards, that's when you're really cooking with fire.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right.

## KENNY FRESH

But that takes you know, years of experience but discernment is really like the biggest part of my job. And I think if there was a talent that I have that that would be it for the large part.

## DJ AMBUSH

For people hearing this interview, and they're interested in working with you. What would be the best way to approach you? What ducks would you suggest that they have in a row? And how would that- what would be the right approach? Is like is there a day of the week that you listen to music? You know what I'm saying.

## KENNY FRESH

Like as an artist?

## DJ AMBUSH

As an artist. No one's running out with demo tapes anymore. How's that? What's the best way to get-

## KENNY FRESH

It's tough cuz I get hit up by artists. You know, I get hit up offers for internships maybe once a week, probably seven times a week I get you know, hit up by artists sending submissions and I try to listen to everything. Sometimes you can tell just from the email this isn't what I need to listen to. But then when I do listen, that's what a discernment case and sometimes within a few seconds, I'm like this, isn't it or this isn't for me. Sometimes I listen to a project, I was really dope. This isn't for me, but I'll recommend it to another friend who has a label, or ah this is really cool. But it's not. This album isn't for me, but I think they're dope. So I'd be like, Hey, I'm working on a remix project right now. Do you want to remix something I put out? You know, so there's different ways for me to work with artists. But my, the way to get my attention, and this is my advice to all artists, when they ask this type of question, is to make something great.

## DJ AMBUSH

Boom.

## KENNY FRESH

Make a great album, you know, a lot of people like we were talking about earlier, it's easier than ever to make music. It's easier than ever.

## DJ AMBUSH

Absolutely.

## KENNY FRESH

But just because it's easy to make doesn't mean you don't hit me up with the first five songs you ever made, and say, hey, I want to put out this five song EP. It's like, why? Like, what, even if I weren't, like, even if I were to sign this, I can't, it being on my label doesn't magically make it good.

## DJ AMBUSH

Right.

## KENNY FRESH

I can only put out good music for it to do well, you know, I can't sell like, those songs being those songs. And now they're on my label, it might get more people to listen to it and give it a chance because of the label's brand or past releases. But it's not. But people are still gonna hear those five songs as they are, they're gonna- they're not good. It's not gonna convince people that they're good, because it's on my label. So it's like, you don't like- that's, that's the biggest thing with artists and that's hard, is being able to judge your own work.

## DJ AMBUSH

Oh, yeah.

## KENNY FRESH

You know, like, that's probably the hardest thing. So I get it, and I'm not I'm not- I don't make music, I have zero musical talent. So you know, I don't mean to be dismissive of people who are chasing that, because if they can make a bad song, they already can do more than I can, I couldn't even make a bad one. So so I don't at all mean to be dismissive of people's hopes and dreams or whatever. But the best thing you could do to get attention from a label is just already be great. Just really take it seriously, really make a song that and, and step back and be able to listen

to that song and be like, if I heard this, I would be excited by it. And I would be interested in who this artist is. Maybe it's because it doesn't sound like anyone else. But it sounds enough like different things that are recognizable, or, you know, whatever it is, but just really take it seriously, like I get sent a lot of music that I'm just like you- and not all music that's made quickly, or without professional means, like a lot of times that makes stuff more interesting. So it's not necessarily that. It's not that you don't have the right equipment or the sound quality, but it's just the the care and the intention of or just attention to detail. So if you send me an amazing song, I'm going to be interested 100% of the time - doesn't matter if you send it to me through Instagram or through email or through- lag it the method doesn't really matter.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Just give it to you and make sure it's good.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Just give us a song. Give us the music. So focus on the music, you know, 100% of your energy. And then when you're completely depleted, write a quick message and send it to me, you know, some people will, you know, spend an hour making a song and a month sending it to people, you know, spend a month on the song and you can send it to people for an hour and it'll go farther, you know.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Exactly.

### **KENNY FRESH**

So that might be a bit obvious and not the most helpful but it's the truth is just make make something amazing. And if you send it to five people, you might have five people you know, fighting for you and then you know, that's when you're really in a good place.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

So if people wanted to check out Fresh Selects, where would they go?

### **KENNY FRESH**

Bandcamp is probably the best place because it's just has our whole catalog so [freshselects.bandcamp.com](https://freshselects.bandcamp.com). Also, if you follow me on any of those social media then every Friday I put out the Tight Songs playlist. Usually the most recent release on the label will be like the first song in the playlist. So you could check- that way you'll hear the latest thing we've put out but also just what I'm listening to and other artists that I work with or just I'm a fan of, something that always gives a good context to the label- cause the label's not only about what I put out but also just what I'm a fan of you know. So yeah, it's @FreshSelects on twitter, @FreshSelectsLabel all one word on Instagram, [freshselects.bandcamp.com](https://freshselects.bandcamp.com), [soundcloud.com/freshselects](https://soundcloud.com/freshselects). Really, that's it.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

I'm thumbing through the bandcamp right now. And the artwork and yeah the artwork alone.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yes. Tawfiq.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

The artwork and then like just the roster of artists, like this already feels like home. It already feels like oh no. Why am I - I'm slipping, I should have been over here already.

### **KENNY FRESH**

That's the thing is I try not to be too overbearing with the branding. Fresh Selects isn't a collective. It's not something

necessarily a brand. It's a collection of music. So if you've heard of Mndsgn, if you've heard of SiR, if you've heard of Emmavie then I've done my job doesn't matter that you got to realize they're all on FreshSelects and they're on this label that doesn't really matter to me so much it, it'd be great if everyone knew Fresh Selects, and everyone was like, this is my favorite record label. But a lot of people don't even have favorite record labels. This is our favorite artists.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Yeah.

### **KENNY FRESH**

So if I put out some of your favorite artists or just artists you're excited about, that's amazing for me, you know. So you know, we don't put our logo on the album covers or, you know, try to be all up in the video. I'm not doing ad libs.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

But you just said something that, wow, people don't have their favorite. They don't have a favorite label.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Some do.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

There was a time though, when it was very easy. Like No, I like Bad Boy.

### **KENNY FRESH**

I like Def Jam. I like Rough Ryders.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Raucous. Like you had a favorite label.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

I think, again, just thumbing through the Bandcamp. Looking at that, like, I really appreciate the intent of the artists you've collected, the work you've collected to get people through your label, like just looking. It's just like, it doesn't feel like it's all over the place. But at the same time, it doesn't feel like it's all the same. So it's like, these are all the things that actually belong together. And there's these little branches that come off, that go in different directions, but they still all belong right here.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Yeah.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Man, thank you so much.

### **KENNY FRESH**

Thank you, man. That's what you just said is what I've always wanted to do. So that feels like a success. So I appreciate that. And you saying that is music to my ears. No pun intended.

### **DJ AMBUSH**

Thank you for listening to Art Unbound. Be sure to visit [freshselects.bandcamp.com](https://freshselects.bandcamp.com) to see Kenny's full roster of artists and their albums released by Fresh Selects. You can also hear tracks from Kenny's label by listening to us at

thenumberz.fm or 96.7 on your FM dial here in Portland. I'd like to thank Kenny Fresh for sitting down with me this episode, the Regional Arts and Culture Council for providing funds to make this possible. And I also like to thank you, the listener.