

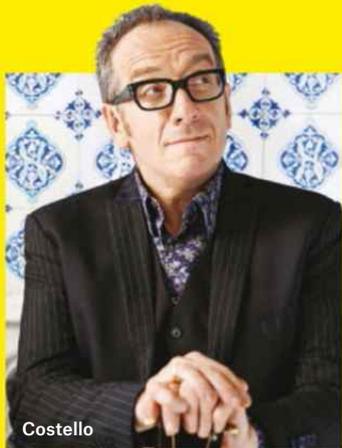
COSTELLO'S TURNING POINTS

Elvis Costello has enjoyed an extraordinary 61 years on earth and 38 years in the music business, and he recounts the many highlights and lowlights of both in his new 700-page memoir, *Unfaithful Music and Disappearing Ink* (Blue Pride Press). The rock legend spoke with *Billboard* about a few of his life's key moments.

His 1979 brawl with Stephen Stills and Bonnie Bramlett, in which he used racial slurs to describe James Brown and Ray Charles "I uttered words that were the opposite of my feelings. I have no explanation why, other than provoking those people. If I had been less drunk I could've surely found a more personal way to start a fight. But a book is a great place for an [explanation]. People can read and know my first and last word about it."

The 2011 death of his father, trumpeter Ross McManus – and writing about it "I could've made a dramatic flourish of ending the book on his death, but music carried him to the very last door. And the point of this [book] is it carried me beyond the worst thing that ever happened to me: to lose him. I wanted to have a more optimistic ending. Something of value comes out of [my struggles]: the love I have for all my family."

His 2013 song with The Roots, "The Puppet Has Cut His Strings" "I wrote a literal recitation of my father's last moments. I had no idea I was going to do that. I had told myself it was beyond me to write about, in book or song. But if I hadn't written that song, I wouldn't have completed the book in the same way. It goes to show the trust you place in music; my father's last solace was music." —CHRIS PARKER



Costello



"People who have these notions of what we should wear and do are raised in bubbles," says Le1f.

SLUG HERE

SPOTLIGHT

'Boi' Meets World

Before Young Thug donned a skirt, outspoken gay rapper Le1f was moving the needle

BY NATALIE WEINER

LE1F, THE MC-PRODUCER WHOSE OPEN homosexuality and eclectic fashion have made him an outsider in rap, is thinking about his favorite hip-hop record of 2015 and twisting his face into a cynical side-eye. "There hasn't been a rap album I like yet," he says over tea at a coffee bar on New York's Lower East Side, his 6-foot-plus frame tucked behind a tiny table. "That **Future** album? I thought it was kind of wack."

Le1f's outspoken aversion to Future's hit album *DS2*, filled with macho threats and songs like "Freak Hoe," is unsurprising: His rising fame is built on turning hetero hegemony on its head. In the video for "Koi," from debut album *Riot Boi* (out Nov. 12 on XL/Terrible), the 26-year-old hits dance moves inspired by the gay ballroom scene and tells a male suitor to "watch me shake that ass," reversing a familiar command; in another clip, he whips purple braids around his head and wears booty shorts. "People who have these notions of what we should wear and do are raised in bubbles," says Le1f (pronounced "leaf"). "They forget the era rap came from, when people wore gold jumpsuits and headdresses. Or what their great-great-grandfather was wearing: For white people, it's heels and ruffled shirts, and for most Africans, it's a raffia skirt. It's ignorance."

Yes, he's more likely to cite **Grace Jones** as an influence than **Gucci Mane**, but that doesn't mean Le1f, born **Khalif Diouf**, isn't a serious rapper. *Riot Boi* is exactly the countercultural manifesto you'd expect from the title and Le1f's history of tackling sensitive political topics — just set to eclectic, dance-friendly beats. "Obviously I'm not a female," he says of riot grrrls, the 1990s feminist

post-punk movement the album title plays on, "but I was just trying to be like that." The recent controversies over police brutality were another key inspiration. "Watching every video of every cop beating up someone — that definitely influenced the record a lot."

Born and raised in New York, Le1f started going to clubs around the age of 15. At first, he mostly stuck to dancing, which he studied at Wesleyan University, where he met fellow alums **Santigold** and **Das Racist**. After producing the latter's 2008 breakout "Combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell," Le1f turned to rapping with the 2012 mixtape *Dark York*. But when he performs, it's clear dance is his first love. "I feel comfortable being onstage by myself and doing whatever I need to hold it down," says Le1f, though

that doesn't mean he plans to have backup dancers — once he can afford them. "I totally want to have a **Janet Jackson**-style show."

Le1f's embrace of queer culture has made him an anomaly in rap, but he increasingly looks like a harbinger of change. Since his debut, hetero MCs like **ASAP Rocky**, **Young Thug** and **Lil**

B have taken to wearing androgynous clothes and saying things taken by some to be homoerotic or effeminate. Says Le1f: "Half the time I see a rapper in a skirt I'm like..." He gives another side-eye. "Except when ASAP wore a full-length dress — that was amazing!"

Could this sartorial shift mean rap is becoming more open to homosexuality? Le1f's take is pragmatic: "When something becomes the look, everyone in the hood accepts it. As long as [popular streetwear line] Hood by Air keeps making men's dresses, rappers will wear them and everyone will be fine." ●



The video for Le1f's "Soda" with Boodie.