

# BULLET

Fashion

## Speeding BULLETs: Theophilio Celebrates Being Young, Black & Queer

September 27, 2017 2:54 pm By Amber Nicole Alston



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In the past few years, pop culture has opened itself up to the sights and sounds of the Caribbean. We're not talking Margaritaville at the Newark Airport think more Rihanna and Drake, who speak openly about their love affair with the region and infuse its rich textures into their songs and style. And because fashion always seems to follow music—or at least, Queen Rih—the industry has started to adapt the same vibes. That's where Edvin Thompson, the 24-year-old designer behind *Theophilio* comes in. Influenced by his vibrant Jamaican childhood and his experiences as a queer twenty-something, the New York-based designer uses exaggerated silhouettes, denim, leather and bold metal details to tell his own Caribbean story. Don't expect a sandy beach fairy tale, though. Thompson uses his brand to explore self-doubt, sexuality and masculinity—you know, the thoughts that keep us up at night.

*BULLETT* caught up with the designer to talk denim, dancehall and self-discovery. Read our interview and view the *Theophilio* S/S '18 collection, above.

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**Describe Theophilio in one word.**

CONCEPTUAL.

**What inspired you to start a clothing line?**

I learned that there was such a thing as 'personal style' when I was a sophomore in high school. My friends and I would call ourselves the 'Cool Kids Crew,' and we would dress up according to a new theme every week. Our clothes allowed us to showcase our personalities and that encouraged me to tap into my creativity. I started out by customizing all of my denim pieces—I'd decorate them with graffiti, distress the fabric and put graphics on them. I've also been drawing and painting since I was eight years old, so it felt like a natural progression.

**Walk us through your creative process.**

Music inspires me more than anything else. I can throw on a song, like one of my dad's old dancehall tunes and I'll see a garment come to life. So I'll put on a song that matches my mood, and go source fabric right after.

**You mix a lot of traditionally masculine materials with a lot of classic feminine elements. Why?**

My S/S '17 collection features male models who are deeply invested in their masculinity. So, I introduced a lot of heavy 'masculine' fabrics like denim and leather. For a lot of men, being vulnerable is a lot harder than being confident—I wanted to acknowledge that, so I added more 'feminine' textiles to the mix. The ripped pantyhose are my favorite—they remind me of my journey coming out. I felt so exposed.

**How does it feel to admit you're vulnerable?**

It's incredibly empowering. We live in a society where a man is considered weak if he is effeminate. It's as if vulnerability makes him unqualified to be a man. We need to be having this conversation.

**Are you trying to make a political statement through your work?**

I *am* making a political statement! I'm talking about my blackness, my queerness and my experience immigrating to America. My clothes reflect the way that my community lives and expresses itself. Black and queer self-expression are always being threatened. I am celebrating the right to live and love whoever you want freely.

**A lot of your details have been picked up and copied by big name retailers, like Zara and Forever 21. Why do you think that is?**

I think the elements I use are trending because they're timeless—denim and metal will never go out of style.

**You've been vocal about your love for Brooklyn's Afropunk Festival. Has it inspired you as a designer?**

My friends and I took a trip from Atlanta to New York for Afropunk in 2013—it was one of the first times I got to explore New York City. I was amazed by all of the different, self-loving black kids at the festival, and the vibrancy of their outfits was so inspiring. I moved to New York because of the effect Afropunk had on me.

**Do you think the fashion industry is doing a good job of crediting young people of color?**

Fashion trends come from the streets. Young people are constantly moving culture forward, and high-end brands can't get enough of it. The industry still has a way to go, but I'm glad events like Afropunk are getting credit for starting trends.

**You recently collaborated with Hommeboy on your first music video. How did that happen? Can we expect to see you working with more artists in the future?**

My friend *Hommeboy* from Atlanta released his first single 'FADEAWAY' from his new EP *FUNKWITME*. The song is about simply being yourself. He liked my S/S '17 collection, and I liked his vibe. So, it seemed like an organic match. I think a lot of it had to do with the natural authenticity of denim.

**What do you want people to take away from your work?**

I want people to stop being afraid to show the world who they are. I want them to understand that vulnerability is natural, especially when telling your story. I want people to be inspired to be themselves.