

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Welcome to *icy* University

Saweetie schools us on how her hustle and drive at USC was essential to her breakout success

By TOMÁS MIER
Editor-in-Chief

“Being educated is fly.” That’s what Saweetie, a 2016 alumna and rising rap goddess, told the *Daily Trojan* just days before she embarked on the latest — and arguably biggest — tour of her burgeoning career. With two released EPs, Saweetie has had a highly successful summer traveling the United States with Cardi B, whose rise to rap stardom just a couple years ago was similarly explosive.

But talking to Saweetie, you wouldn’t know that the past few months for her have been filled with endless accolades. She speaks with striking passion and unexpected humility. You would never guess that her viral sensation “My Type” made the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

And while it’s obvious that she is busy (she’s a few minutes late to the interview) she says, “I just want to give you my undivided attention.”

And she does exactly that.

Talking to the *Daily Trojan* for the first time, the rapper opens up about her time at USC, her musical influences and how her career has skyrocketed since she last walked down Trousdale Parkway as a student.

STREET SMARTS

Saweetie — born Diamonté Harper — grew up with a Filipina-Chinese mother and Black father in the Bay Area. She remembers spending her childhood playing with neighboring kids at the large apartment complex her family lived in.

“The streetlights were my curfew,” she says, giggling over her memories of Hayward, Calif.

As soon as those lights sparkled, she knew it was time to head home, where she often watched videos of some of the most influential Black female artists of the ’90s — specifically Ashanti and Aaliyah — who opened the door for artists like her.

Unlike her idol Ashanti, who opted to pursue her career over attending Hampton University, Saweetie enrolled in San Diego State University and later USC while remaining fully devoted to her music.

But finishing that journey through higher education wasn’t always in her plans.

When asked if leaving college with a degree was always her intention, she responds resoundingly and without hesitation: “No.”

As an Aztec, she contemplated dropping out and moving to Los Angeles to fully commit herself to a musical career in the ideal city to do so.

“But I promised myself if I got into USC, it

was a sign I needed to finish college,” she recalls.

She applied to USC as a communication major and waited for an acceptance letter to show up at her doorstep. After weeks of anxious waiting, it finally arrived.

“Someone really close to me told me I would never get into my dream school,” Saweetie captioned a photo of her acceptance letter in 2013. “Remember, actions speak louder than words, and I will always continue to prove my doubters wrong.”

Though she did prove her doubters wrong, there was one more obstacle she had to face to get exactly what she wanted.

“I cried because they tried to put me in Dornsife,” she says of USC’s most-populated school. “And you know, Dornsife is like miscellaneous. That is not what I was trying to do.”

So, she says with the cadence of a smile in her voice, she got “hella passionate” and fought her way into the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, as she originally intended.

“I wrote a letter and told them why I deserved to be an Annenberg student,” she remembers. “They replied two days later and agreed to all of my points and granted me access to be a communication student.”

BACK ON HER TRACKS

Saweetie got what she wanted and moved into the The Lorenzo Apartments near USC to kick off her sophomore year. And from the beginning, she stood out at USC. It was no different in professor Albert Napoli’s “Business for Non-Majors” class, which she took in Fall 2014.

“I saw in her the drive and focus that entrepreneurs have,” he says. “She had this passion, this drive. I knew exactly what kind of direction she needed.”

In their meetings after class, Saweetie told Napoli — whom she cites as an influential figure that encouraged her music career — about her aspirations as an entertainer.

Once, Napoli found Saweetie networking with corporate recruiters near Moreton Fig. He knew she didn’t belong there.

“Her being there, getting in those lines to talk to those companies, it was the wrong thing,” he recalls. “She would have been miserable.”

Napoli pulled her aside, and asked, “What are you doing here?”

For Saweetie, that moment was a wake-up call.

“He was like, ‘You and I both know that you want to do music, and none of these people here are in the direction you want to



Emily Smith | Daily Trojan

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Calling All Artists

Previously dominated by movie, album, concert and TV show reviews, the *Daily Trojan* Lifestyle section was inundated with mainstream popular culture. From covering newly-released Netflix specials to writing about Coachella, Lifestyle encompassed stories directed to a universal audience.

Now, we’re shifting our focus and changing our name — Arts & Entertainment.

Although we often covered USC arts and entertainment initiatives,

our decision to change our name harkens back to our focus and dedication to USC’s student body. We realized we were not embracing what was so unique about our University — we instead tried to appeal to a larger audience, an audience that could easily find similar stories at countless other outlets. But what better, more relevant stories are there to cover than the ones that take place on our campus and impact our students? We want to make sure students feel represented, highlighted and uplifted. We want to pay

homage to our student-led arts initiatives, up-and-coming artists, dancers, designers, playwrights, performers and musicians working out of our very own classrooms. We will be USC-centric.

That is why, with the first issue of Fall 2019, we are setting a standard of covering stories that are particularly applicable to USC students. By exploring Visions and Voices initiatives — such as their social justice-oriented and community-driven Arts in Action program — to interviewing USC alumna and rapper Saweetie, we

hope to shed light on our thriving arts community. We strive to continue a trend of encouraging artistic growth and engagement within our campus within these pages.

Although we will continue to cover culturally relevant and salient artistic endeavors which pique all college students’ interests, we want our section to stand out from other publications, to embrace what is unique about our school. USC is a top-tier artistic campus — we have dozens of artists making great things right under our noses.

Arts & Entertainment will put USC creatives first.

As we rebrand, we want to encourage students to reach out to us about their artistic endeavors. We are calling on you, our artists, to share your stories, experiences and projects. Help us redefine our muse and rebuild our section from the campus up.

NATALIE OGANESYAN AND ISA UGGETTI
Arts & Entertainment Editors

SAWEETIE | The MC juggled four jobs while at USC

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go," she remembers. "The fact that he said that, he believed in me more than I did."

Saweetie shined brighter than her peers and rarely does Napoli see students with the tenacity and endless drive he saw in Saweetie.

"I see a lot of dreamers and not a lot of doers. Diamonté is definitely a doer," Napoli says, calling Saweetie by her birth name.

"She's a rare breed," he adds. "She is the epitome of what you need to become a success."

THE TROJAN HUSTLE

But while at USC, Saweetie was more than just an impressive student — she was already knee-deep in the hustle. She made t-shirts for "Money Makin' Mamis," a brand she founded and worked at a sports bar as well as at Marshall.

On top of all that, Saweetie was working as a research assistant for professor Ann Majchrzak — who had absolutely no idea that one of her student workers had become one of the top-played rappers on the radio before the *Daily Trojan* reached out.

Majchrzak says Saweetie put in "several hundred hours" over a few months coding for a research project exploring the emergence of crowdsourcing as a mechanism for innovation.

"She was just tremendous," Majchrzak says. "I couldn't ask for anything better."

The fruit of some of Saweetie's "creative, focused, high-quality" research and coding is set to be published in Majchrzak's forthcoming book, "Unleashing the Crowd."

But for Saweetie, juggling multiple jobs while attending school and building her rap career "sounds crazy, but when you're actually doing it, it's not that bad," she says nonchalantly.

"I'm very high maintenance," she laughs. "I like to get my weave, my nails, I like going shopping. I had to keep myself up. And how do you do that? With four jobs."

With so much to do, it might seem like Saweetie wouldn't

have time to write music. But she found her muse in an unexpected place — her daily commute.

After moving out of The Lorenzo ("They had us packed in there like some rats," she says), she lived in the San Fernando Valley for her last two years of college.

"Imagine that commute from Northridge to USC every day," she says incredulously. "But it was on those unimaginably long drives where Saweetie's creativity flourished."

"I would play a beat, and I would write in my notes as I was driving," she says.

ICY GOES HOT

In May 2017, Saweetie released a homemade freestyle video of "ICY GRL" on Instagram, her unapologetic rap over the beat of Khia's "My Neck, My Back."

"There was a moment where I didn't really have anything," she said of writing the track to Billboard last year. "And the only option was for me to either mope, which I don't like doing, or to be aspirational."

Her track went viral, and from there, the dominoes started to fall. She was signed to Warner Bros. Records. The "ICY GRL" music video has already garnered over 80 million views. Her debut EP "High Maintenance" came out in March 2018, and featured her breakthrough track and two songs with her boyfriend, rapper Quavo.

And that rapid rise didn't end in 2018 — it was just beginning. "ICY," Saweetie's second EP, came out in March 2019.

Her new tracks seemed to precede the start of "hot girl summer," a viral term coined by fellow female MC Megan Thee Stallion.

"My Type," the most-played song on "ICY," perfectly embodies what it means to be a "hot girl." It taps into the nostalgia of listeners by sampling Petey Pablo's "Freek-A-Leek,"

while rapping the unsubdued lyrics, "Bust down wrist, not a bust down bitch / Said I want your man, no the fuck I don't sis."

“ [My music] inspires people to boss up, to get they cost up and go out there and hustle. ”

— Saweetie

group of popular MCs like G-Eazy, P-Lo, Iamsu! and Sage the Gemini.

"I'm making my mark. I'm putting my work in," she says. "I might not be a veteran in that group, but I feel like I'm making a name for myself."

While Saweetie says she's finally found her sound, she doesn't think it can be characterized.

"I feel it's not really like anybody else's so it's hard to put it into words," she says.

But if there's one way she describes her music, it's inspirational.

"It inspires people to boss up to get they cost up and to go out there and hustle," she says. "But beyond that, I'm also inspiring them to party and work that ass."

TROJAN AT HEART

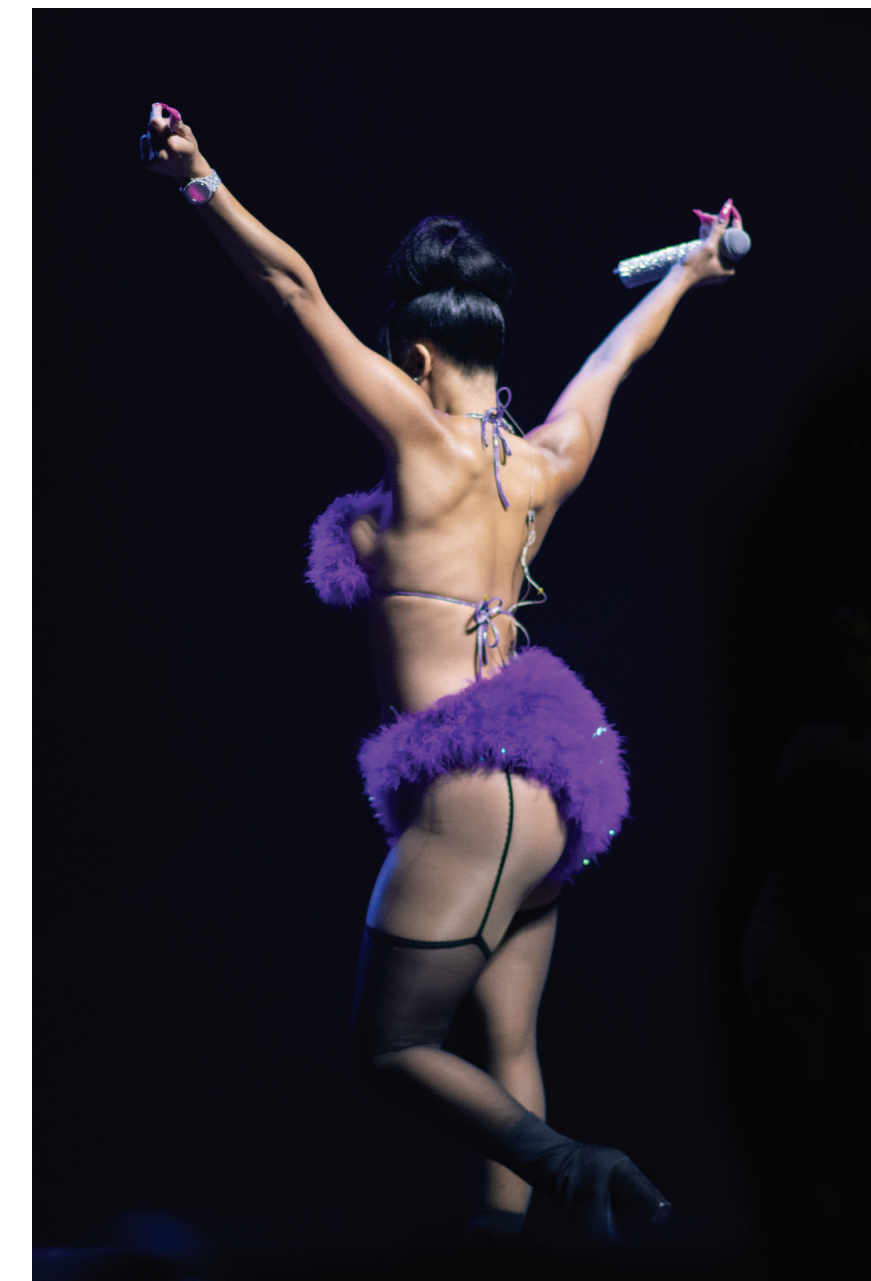
While her career continues to explode, she still keeps USC close to her heart, referring to her Trojan roots in her music and keeping up with the scandals that seem to continuously plague USC, like the college admission bribery scheme that unraveled earlier this year.

"I understand that parents go hard for their kids, but [as] someone who's

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Rapper Saweetie opens for Cardi B at the Target Center in Minneapolis, Minn. July 27, repping her traditional "Icy" brand. Emily Smith | Daily Trojan



Sporting a purple, feathery two-piece outfit during her setlist in Minneapolis, Saweetie performs tracks from her new EP "Icy." Emily Smith | Daily Trojan

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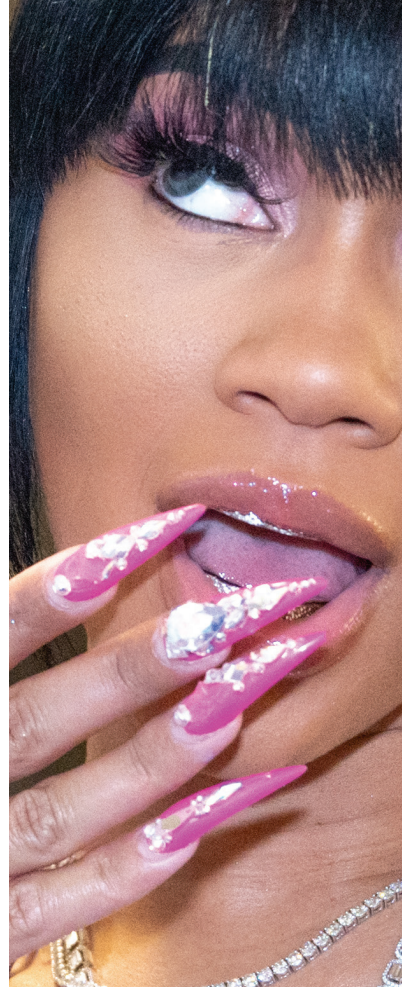
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worked their ass off and didn't have the resources like that, it's kind of not fair," she says.

She's even made appearances at the University since finding success. Last November, she met with students at a Black Student Assembly event, where she was happy to connect with Trojans of color who were once in her position as students with dreams.

One of the students at the BSA meetup was Arrington Bridges, a senior majoring in political science, who grew up in Castro Valley — a town adjacent to Saweetie's Hayward. He credits the rapper's success to her unequivocal relatability.

"It's the street attitude, [yet] she went to college," he says. "It just makes me feel like I'm at the right place in life. It can be disillusioning when you don't see yourself represented on campus. Being an African American student at USC can be alienating, but Saweetie is a beacon of hope and a motivation for a lot of the African American students on campus."

And for Bridges — who's dipping his own toes in the rap game under the name Bustdownnarri — Saweetie's visit proved the perfect opportunity for him to rap some bars for her.

"I raised my hand and was like, 'I'm from a city over, you gotta let me rap for you,'" he says. "So I started rapping on the spot."

And Saweetie? She was feeling it. "He was going off!" she exclaims.

Bridges' star moment even made its way onto Saweetie's Instagram story — which boasts a casual 3 million followers. She hopes that aspiring musicians like Bustdownnarri see her as proof that when it comes to school versus career, "you can do both."

"You don't have to be a dropout," she says. "You don't have to disregard your education."

And it becomes obvious, after talking to Saweetie, that sticking to a plan and always getting what you want is part of that "ICY" mentality that she embodies.

"It's not always about being iced up or stuntin' on hoes. Icy to me is hustling and having the mentality of getting what you said you was gon' get," she says. "Everything I was gon' get, I got. It's very important to believe in yourself — and that's what an icy girl and an icy boy is."

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