

Review: Young Thug, Jeffery

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Now this is how you drop a surprise album. After six months of inactivity—an eternity in Atlanta rap years—Young Thug has delivered precisely what his audience wanted. *Jeffery* builds on Thug’s past work, emphasizes his best qualities, and comes on as strong as Young Thug’s first release in six months should; it’s dressed to impress. While many of us still pray Frank Ocean will actually drop *Boys Don’t Cry* on [November 13](#), *Jeffery* makes the fact that Young Thug has been sleeping on a major-label debut called *HiTunes* for almost his whole career entirely moot.

There have been a few last-minute addenda, which I fear are a given in [a post-Life Of Pablo world](#), but they’re harmless: one of the tracks has been retitled a couple times, and the album was called *No, My Name Is Jeffery* for a couple days before switching to what everyone was already calling it for short. *Jeffery* is a fully-formed entity sprung from Thug’s head in full armor. It’s the most exciting surprise release since [Lemonade](#) and proof the strategy still

has some worth after the exhaustive rollouts with which Ocean and Kanye dropped their last albums on the world.

It's not his best tape, though probably in the top three. Posse cut "Floyd Mayweather" is interminable, and "Future Swag", a tribute to the rapper shouted-out in its title, suggests that pastiche is not Thugger's strong suit. The fact that most of its worst tracks come right after the stunning sugar-high opener "Wyclef Jean" compounds the problem; this will usually be a better album on shuffle. But at its absolute best, *Jeffery* is infectious and endlessly playable.

Jeffery's biggest selling point is Thug's vocals. Locked into these beats, Thug is constrained only by the limits of his voice, and even those he stubbornly pushes against at every chance he gets. His vocals remind me less of other rappers than R&B's most unhinged greats—Sly Stone in the way his words devolve into guttural glossolalia, Prince in the way he likes to substitute his vowel sounds with little yelps and shrieks. There's even a bit of blues in "Harambe" (yes, "Harambe") where he pulls slimy exhortations out of the deep recesses of his gut.

The noises he makes don't make me wonder how he makes them so much as how he has the chutzpah to make them. He switches flows constantly. He uses the muscles in his mouth like a machine, and he's always doing something with his lips or his tongue or the back of his throat to warp his vowels or make his syllables extra-flexible. This freedom makes listening to Thug not just exhilarating but inspirational. Detractors who take issue with his emphasis on delivery over lyricism will inevitably cry out that this music doesn't require any talent, that anyone could make it, that my kid could paint that. Then why isn't anyone else doing this? Simple: they're too shy.

But this isn't some free-jazz move meant to weed out the unfaithful. In fact, despite being more extreme in many ways than his prior work, *Jeffery* is his poppiest tape since 2014's *Tha Tour* with Rich Gang (of "Lifestyle" fame). With its "Roxanne" reggae skank, "Wyclef Jean" could pass as a cut from Rae Sremmurd's first album until Thug's caterwauling begins. "Pick Up The Phone" is pop rap as it was thought of around 2007, back when "ringtone rap" was actually an insult. This is also his prettiest tape since *Tha Tour*. There's a cavernous, dub-techno feeling to a lot of these tracks; "Guwop" swarms on all sides with spidery synths, while the lurching rhythm of "Webbie" is offset by impossibly deep house chords (and, holy shit, that guitar at the end).

Jeffery's immediacy is what makes it make such an impression the first time around, and it's a break from the increasingly experimental leanings of hyped pop releases (*Anti*, *The Life Of Pablo*, *Blonde*). He has more to prove as a potential pop star than as an artist, and he knows it. *HiTunes* be damned—this is a more satisfying major-label rap album than most mixtape-bred rappers ever make. *Jeffery* isn't the best rap album of the year, but it comes on strong enough to convince you—even for a few fleeting minutes of "Wyclef Jean"—that it just might be. **B PLUS**