

Lil Yachty is One of the Only True Heroes in Music

 prettypmuchamazing.com/features/lil-yachty-is-a-hero

Daniel Bromfield



I don't like Lil Yachty's music. When I listen to him, I wonder why I'm not listening to Young Thug, Future, even Lil Uzi Vert. I think all those rappers do something he does better. I'm not particularly fond of his kids'-show aesthetic, but I'm usually not terribly fond of music that aims for cute. But he's still one of my goddamn heroes. He is essential for music, and it's because he's one of the only artists in any genre of music who knows what's bullshit and what isn't.

As the great rap albums turn 20 and celebrate their jubilees, rap has split into a schism, not unlike rock vs. disco, where the old order of music was threatened by something more nakedly commercial and got violent (sometimes, as at [Disco Demolition Night](#), literally so) to protect its stature. Yachty is emblematic of rap's version of disco. He doesn't listen to classic rap (i.e. '90s East Coast-West Coast rap), he doesn't freestyle, he makes explicitly youth-oriented music slathered in Auto-Tune. He also doesn't consider himself a rapper — ostensibly letting himself off the hook for all of this — and takes puckish delight in trolling the guardians of the old order.

An example: [on *The Breakfast Club*](#), he admitted he didn't know any Biggie songs. Then [on Pitchfork's *Over/Under*](#), he was asked if Biggie was over- or under-rated. He turned to the camera, stared at whoever was watching, and whispered "overrated." He later actually picked up a Biggie album and liked it — meaning he'd never listened to Biggie and had no conception of his work while he was doing the Pitchfork interview. He only said Biggie was overrated to get people's goat, which he knows it does. What he was really saying was, "come at me, bro."

His debut album *Teenage Emotions* comes out later this month, and the cover includes two men kissing in the upper left-hand corner. Joe Budden got pissed off, of course, and don't doubt for a second that he got *that mad* because Yachty was happy instead of because of an old synonym for "happy" he thought Yachty might be (the incident was preceded by a number of homophobic slurs directed at Yachty, unremarked on in the memeverse). Yachty knows what he's doing by putting two dudes on the cover. The hip-hop world is still immensely homophobic, and most fans looking at that cover will likely have their feathers at least a little rustled. Especially older ones.

He understands homophobia is bullshit and is willing to compromise fans who buy into it. He also believes the idea that the template of good rap is set in canon and anything deviating from it is ruinous is bullshit, which it is. Rap should evolve, even if it means fewer lyrics, more mood, more aesthetic, more Auto-Tune. Yachty isn't ruining rap; rappers with bars will always exist, and in fact, Kendrick's *DAMN* nearly drowned out the long-anticipated tape from Yachty contemporary Playboi Carti. Anyone who doesn't like Yachty can listen to someone else, and unless an artist makes morally compromised art or is a dipshit in real life, all the reasons for really hating an artist or the movement they represent are silly and unfounded in rational dogma.

Like envy. Budden also belongs to a school of rap that values technical skill. Yachty doesn't do the whole rappity-rap thing, meaning he probably puts a lot less physical labor into his music than Budden. Budden has been in the game a long time, has never had a *huge* hit ("Pump it Up" peaked at #39), and surely takes a lot more time writing out a rhyme and making it fit his vision of pathos than Yachty does. To have some kid coasting on rhyming about Lil Perry and how his hair is red like a cherry suddenly become the biggest rapper in the world — that's gotta hurt, especially if he's being groomed by a label as Budden suspects he is. He must feel like he clocked a lot of hours on bars for nothing when he coulda just rambled into some Auto-Tune and gotten rich. But if Budden feels that way he's not "right," just (understandably) jealous and mad.

Yachty's dogma is better than oldhead dogma, anyway. He stands up for queers as Lord Jamar fumes about not being allowed to say the word "faggot." Have you ever noticed how conservatism is nearly always harmful to marginalized people? The cesspit of sexism and queerphobia beneath the anti-disco movement? The way oldheads nearly always talk about new rappers in terms of their gayness or girliness, as if those are enough to make the new wave of rap despicable in itself? Yachty flips the bird to that and creates a space in rap for those traditionally excluded from it. Most of the queers I know love Yachty, but you won't catch many of them listening to Tribe, and that's because they're welcome in one space and [not in the other](#).

He accepts the evolution of rap while his detractors worship a stagnant ideal. He accepts people have different musical backgrounds and that it's no more necessary for a rapper to listen to Biggie than for a rock musician to listen to Chuck Berry (ask John Lennon and he might have scoffed at the idea of kids starting bands and not knowing the lyrics to "Memphis".) Yachty's dogma isn't bullshit but anti-bullshit, and he's the rare artist of whom that can be claimed.

A great record like *Illmatic* is eternal. But if rap doesn't evolve it'll only last so long.

Catch up on [Dog-Doo With Daniel](#).