

Big Sean/Metro Boomin: Double or Nothing

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Big Sean's the worst thing about his own album. On *Double or Nothing*, his new joint tape with Metro Boomin, he waxes mystic about crystals and chakras; he compares himself to Kaepernick with Rhymesayers' earnestness; he raps shit like "*I do this for the dogs and nowadays we husky.*" And he does it all in a self-satisfied voice, perpetually on the edge of a sarcastic snicker, that lets us know how good he thinks his lines are. If your knowledge of and interest in Big Sean ends at his infamous verse on Kanye's "Mercy," know that may still be the zenith of his career.



But a good album can still be salvaged from a bad rapper so long as there's enough on hand to distract from the star. Travis Scott knows this and builds dark carnivals to brood in. So did Jaden Smith, a speck on the wind amid the Michael Bay budget of *Syre*. And *Double Or Nothing* is one of the more satisfying joint tapes this year because of all the voices *other* than Big Sean's.

There are more guests here than on most projects like this and they all put in work. Travis Scott is utilized precisely as he should be: as window dressing, his cavernous voice echoing from the distance like a robotic Michael McDonald. 21 Savage and Young Thug are old standbys on sublime autopilot. Swae Lee sings beautifully enough on "Reason" to make me desire a Rae Sremmurd songbook album; listen to "Reason," then imagine him singing "My Funny Valentine."

It feels like Atlanta's best, plus Sean from Detroit, gathered in the studio to shoot the shit. Even the samples seem to make small talk. Boomin's always used samples more than any other producer in the Atlanta stable, a classicist trait that perhaps explains why he's so revered as a talent despite recent work by TM88 and Southside rivaling his best. He's at his most chop-happy here, and on three songs— "Go Legend," "Who's Stopping Me" and "In Tune" —he lets the samples run unaltered for a bold percentage of the tracks' runtime before getting to the slicing and dicing.

Boomin and Sean have a lot of chemistry, in part because Sean's low, lecherous drawl isn't far removed from Boomin's reliable muse 21 Savage. It's great that the two work together well, but there's the sense that Boomin needed something, anything, to reclaim runtime from the rapper. Had *Double or Nothing* worked more like last month's undercooked Travis Scott/Quavo joint *Huncho Jack, Jack Huncho* and kept its focus squarely on the star behind the mic, it might have been a failure.

Instead, it's blossomed into a curious work whose bustling camaraderie allows it to stand apart from other entries in the recent collaborative tape trend, including *Huncho*, Young Thug and Future's *Super Slimey* and Boomin's *Without Warning* with 21 Savage and Offset. It's not the best of these: *Slimey* takes the cake there. But it doesn't feel like a rap bauble banged out for a few quick bucks. It feels like an album—though not a particularly great one, to be sure.

- Label:
G.O.O.D./Def Jam/Boominati/Republic
- Release Date:
December 8, 2017