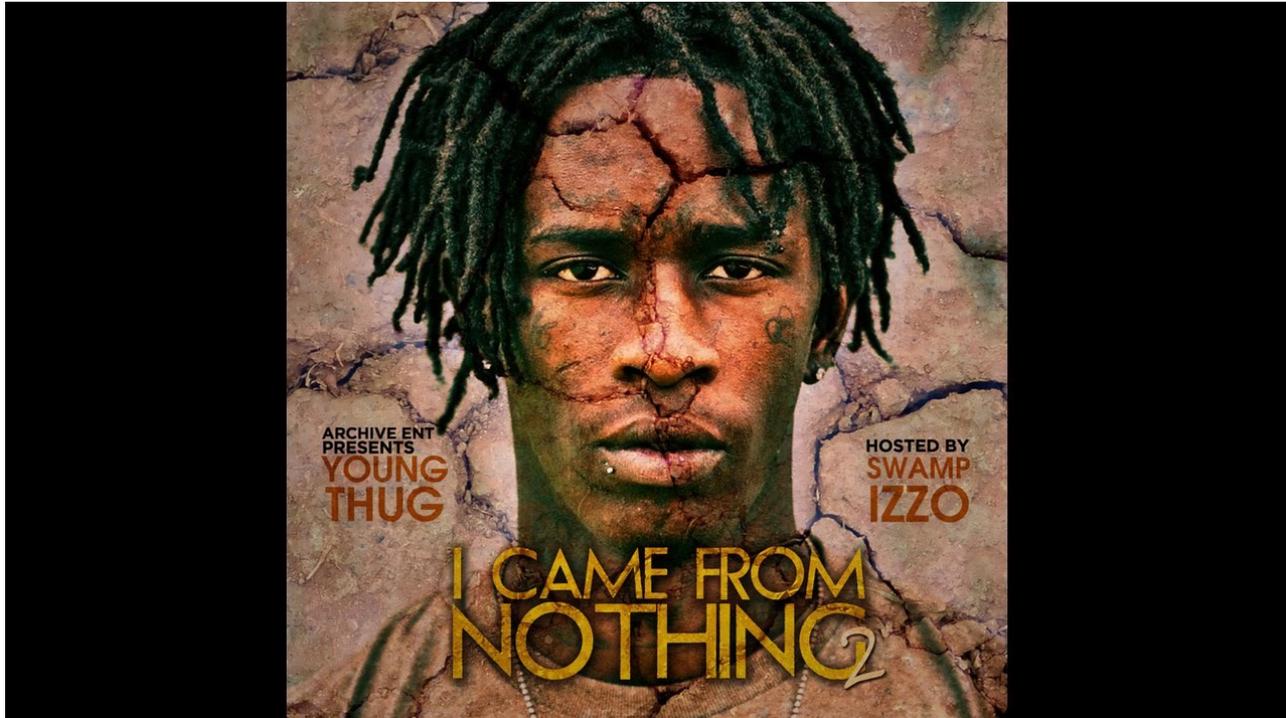


Pick of the Day: 'I Came From Nothing 2' by Young Thug (2011)

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I Came From Nothing 2, Young Thug's second-ever release, was recently made available to stream on Spotify. It's from 2011, which itself is kind of strange, when "swag rap" was the thing, Lil B was god, and amid a dearth of real hip-hop megastars, we saw the breakthroughs of A\$AP Rocky, Kendrick Lamar, Danny Brown, Action Bronson and every other smart, image-conscious rapper to merit their own VICE documentary. And Young Thug, 19 years old, was fine-tuning his sound in the canyons of the Atlanta rap scene, seemingly oblivious to the rest of the world.

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Thug's first tape, *I Came From Nothing*, came out the year prior. He was obviously trying to imitate Lil Wayne, and he spat with a clarity absent later. He wanted us to focus on the words (he's a more clever writer than he's given credit for), but for his second round in the booth he realized he could get more out of abstracting his lyrics than simply feeding them to us. Thug is easily fetishized for his eccentricity, but his voice, way with pop form and pervasive benevolence are equally key to what makes him one of the world's most brilliant rappers. Those would come later; here, he knew he had to get weird to earn attention.

He was growing into his identity but not yet his strategy. He fires from all cylinders: astral love songs enthralled by Weezy, murder-ballad street rap, starry pop that sounds like B.o.B or something. It's united by this screaming, over-mixed voice (drowned out by DJs on the version available on YouTube; what's on Spotify is the better listen), who seems awed by what he was revealing himself capable of in real time. Can't you hear the grin on his face when he slurs "don't lose it, don't lose it," on "Keep In Touch?" Or when he just shrieks "I'm iced out," rhymed with nothing, during a freak emotional climax in "[Bonjour?](#)"

My favorite Thugger moment might be at the beginning of "[Twitter Song](#)," one of the B.o.B-sounding cuts. The producer's DJ tag comes in — "ooh, Planet 9," a disembodied female voice moans. Thug immediately deadpans: "What is *she* talkin' about?" Is it a joke? Was he just stoned off his fucking ass? It's unlikely Thug would tell us, but he's obviously a man with a wicked sense of humor. Throughout *I Came From Nothing 2* he's on this insane plateau where he's laughing not only at his own jokes but his ability to rap like this, the absurdity of his situation and his glee at skyrocketing toward rap stardom.

Most of *I Came From Nothing 2* is forgettable, and the beats are more likely culled from a hard drive than tailor-made for Thugger's vocals like the ones on more developed releases like *Barter 6*. This is pretty clearly one of those albums where a young rapper and his friends pull up the first beats available and indulge in the booth, presumably between prodigious blunt hits. But it's safe to say this is the tape where Thug

became *Thug*. It's the sound of one of hip hop's great originals realizing exactly what he should do.

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