

I Did It My Way

T Tyler, The Creator loves to bring home the bacon. While he's accustomed to racking up plenty of bluefaces thanks to six critically acclaimed albums, the 30-year-old rapper isn't focused on the money-inspired idiom at the moment. He's driving through Los Angeles' residential streets in his "Green Goblin" Rolls-Royce Cullinan on an overcast afternoon in late August, fixated on his favorite real-deal bacon discovery at Whole Foods. "It's called Dry Rubbed Black Forest," he tells his passengers, including longtime friends Jasper and Lionel Boyce. Tyler describes the meat with a gleam of excitement in his eyes, like he just heard the perfect song for the very first time. "It look old. That shit is gorgeous." He finds joy in the unconventional details of life, even down to what he's eating.

Sir Baudelaire, the fresh, fly moniker Tyler adopts on his latest album, *Call Me If You Get Lost*, is also annoyed by slow drivers in front of him ("I wish you would drive, bitch") and amused by a jogger to his right ("She ran like a fucking dork") during the ride. Once Tyler arrives at his destination to grab a sandwich for lunch—hold the aioli or, as he jokingly warns Jasper, who grabs the food, "I'ma sock you in your dick"—The Creator proves to be swift with parallel parking. The car connoisseur owns two Rolls-Royces, two Lancia Deltas, a Fiat, BMW E30 and a McLaren. Tyler, dressed in a black ushanka hat, black Lacoste cardigan, blue Golf le Fleur slacks, loafers and a necklace full of pearls the size of gumballs, prides himself on being an excellent driver. He's the type to throw his arm in front of a passenger when he does two quick U-turns while heading back to his Golf Wang office. A natural reaction he picked up from his mother he says. Yet, Tyler takes even more pride in his career. As he reflects on nearly 15 years in hip-hop while behind the wheel, the multiplatinum-selling artist owes his longevity in the game to three key things. "'Cause I'm good," Tyler insists. "'Cause I care. And I didn't start off at the top.

He's familiar with being at the top, though. Tyler, The Creator, born Tyler Okonma, started at the bottom in 2007, with his rap group Odd Future and the release of their first mixtape, *The Odd Future Tape*, a year later. They parlayed their exuberant, shock-rap energy into an empire that went beyond music, including the sketch comedy show *Loiter Squad* and OF merchandise decorated with Tyler-created pink doughnuts. Simultaneously, Tyler, like other Odd Future members, was branching out



Tyler, the Creator at a Lakers game in May '23.

on his own. 2009's *Bastard* tape kicked off his solo work. The Creator's successful clothing brands Golf Wang and Golf le Fleur, a production company, sold-out tours, headlining music festivals and throwing his own, plus coveted partnerships like Converse followed.

The MC has solidified his place as a paramount raconteur at the top of the charts with his last two albums locking in No. 1 spots on the Billboard 200 chart: 2019's Grammy Award-winning lovelorn opus *Igor* and *Call Me If You Get Lost*, his nod to rap's mixtape era and arguably the best hip-hop album of 2021. Tyler translates the anomalous world of his albums to the stage and creates a weird reality in videos that have made him a vanguard on a steady rise. He peppers varying moods, ingenious puns and slick rhymes throughout his projects while evolving from a "they are them, we are us, kill them all" mentality to "a young, focused Black boy, oh, silly me." The rhymer's musicality is elevated through a lens of escapism and fearlessness, never taking himself too seriously and treating his voice like an instrument.

It took Tyler over 10 years to receive his first platinum record, 2019's *"Earfquake"*—released that same year and now three-times platinum—but success is in the eye of the beholder. The Creator's career is a red chart emoji—getting better with time. Everyone from 10-year-old kids to 50-year-old men, according to Tyler, are turning up to his music now. "I'm fucking great," he says matter-of-factly of his life thus far. "I'm blessed."

Long before Tyler was "talkin' that fresh shit, I don't need gum (No)/Cookie crumbs in the Rolls, never no

weed crumbs (No)," on his CMIYGL track "Corso," the Hawthorne, Calif. native, who doesn't drink or smoke, was whetting his music appetite at age 4 with albums from singers and groups his mom played: Zhané, Faith Evans, Rachele Ferrell and Brownstone. Usher's *My Way* captivated him—Tyler still knows all the choreography to the title track's visual. "'One Day You'll Be Mine' is my favorite song on that album," he tells. "I believe that's track nine." Tyler, who writes, composes and arranges his own music, directs his videos as alias Wolf Haley and produces for other artists like Schoolboy Q ("Big Body" featuring Tha Dogg Pound),

Westside Gunn ("Party Wit Pop Smoke" featuring Keisha Plum) and, most recently, Maxo Kream ("Big Persona"), can list off specific songs with their corresponding track numbers on albums past and present in seconds, like an eager kid naming every Pokémon character and their special abilities.

In a genre where rappers are often thrown into the music industry fire to chase a No. 1 with little comprehension of its history, his encyclopedic knowledge of music is respected. Tracks 14, "Love Won't Wait" with Macy Gray, and 16, "Positivity," from Black Eyed Peas' first album, *Behind the Front*, mark the first songs he wrote raps to at 7. "I'm still learning genres but like, Damn, that's jazz," Tyler reminisces, identifying the composition of BEP's tracks as a kid. "Then, they kick in and they're rapping and I'm like, Wow, this is sick. And the drum patterns kinda skip and stuff and I'm like, This is sick. And then, Dr. Dre's 2001 comes out. This is like, fourth quarter '99, and I'm hearing this Eminem guy and I'm like, What is this? And it was this channel called *The Box*." Tyler is clearly a student of the game.

Eminem, Lil Wayne, André 3000, Missy Elliott, Busta Rhymes, Pharrell Williams and Jay-Z are among the rhymer's whose artistry has most influenced Tyler's own. The latter two he also calls "real big homies." "I'm one of the few who's really listening and learned how to kind of run businesses since I was 17, because of [Jay-Z]," Tyler shares.

The polymath taught himself to play piano at 12, the same age his mom put him on to a valuable life skill. "On my 12th birthday, she was like, 'You're going to learn how to wash your own clothes,'" he says. She raised her rapping son on her own with the help of his grandmother due to Tyler's absent dad. At 15, Tyler locked in his first



Tyler, the Creator (right) and legendary producer Pharrell Williams (left.)

jobs—FedEx and a Starbucks barista. Soon after, in 2007, he formed the now-defunct rap group Odd Future and the rest is history.