

ALBUMS

Slime Language 2

Young Thug / Gunna / Young Stoner Life

2021



6.7

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GENRE: Rap

LABEL: Young Stoner Life / 300 Entertainment

REVIEWED: April 26, 2021

The latest compilation from Young Thug's YSL label is packed with appearances from rap's biggest stars, though its flamboyant host seems content to take a backseat.

In 2016, Young Thug received a dressing-down on national television, at the hands of his then-mentor and label boss, Lyor Cohen. "You just record so many songs and leave them like little orphans out there," Cohen snapped, during a meeting that was filmed for the

CNBC show “Follow the Leader”. Cohen had a point. Thug had been recording at a furious pace, as leak dumps of hundreds of tracks revealed. And yet, the announcement of his debut album failed to stick, much like his short-lived name changes. A steady stream of mixtapes showed an artist who was evolving at a pace that was hard to comprehend and who didn’t always care for details like editing and sequencing. His innovations in songwriting and vocal delivery were pushing rap forward, but it was difficult to imagine Young Thug ever becoming an elder statesman—if anything, he seemed like a shooting star that we were lucky to have witnessed at all.

In hindsight, 2019’s *So Much Fun* looks like a turning point in Thug’s career. It stands as his most focused and consistent release since the mid-career masterpiece *Barter 6*. *So Much Fun* was also the first time we’d seen Thug standing still; it’s hard to point to something on the album that he hadn’t done before. What *was* new was the way that Thug ceded so many of that album’s big moments to his mentees Gunna and Lil Baby, both of whom have arguably become even better-known than Thug among younger listeners. *Slime Language 2* expands on that approach: here Thug comfortably rubs shoulders with superstars, peers, influences, and descendants, serving as the glue that holds these songs together while rarely commanding the spotlight. He feels a bit like Jay Gatsby here: the guests are glamorous and the trappings of the party are opulent, but the host is content to recede into the background.

Still, a party’s a party, and much like with the previous installment, the aspiration here is clearly to provide an hour of breezy songs designed to go off during the summer. Surely a few of these will. “Solid” feels by turns like a Drake song, a Gunna song and a Thug song, each rapper fully commanding the shifting, distant beat. Lil Uzi Vert draws a line in the sand between himself and his elusive host by infusing “Proud of You” with a gracious, wide-eyed sincerity (he also coins the term “Smithstoneian”). In one of his first high-profile appearances since his release from a New York state prison, Rowdy Rebel stomps all over the horn-filled fanfare of “Came and Saw,” which feels like a sequel to Thug and Gunna’s hit “Hot.” It’s telling that “Superstar” is one of the weirdest songs on here thanks

to an appearance from Thug's direct antecedent, Future: the trap legend reaches for notes out of his range and coos in a singsong cadence over what sounds like kazoos while Thug just coasts comfortably.

So many of Thug's verses and hooks here feel that way—competent and tuneful, if not quite memorable. Even the thrills feel a bit second-hand: we've heard better "mac and cheese" puns from Thug before and it was more convincing the last time he told us he felt something in his chromosome. There are a few noteworthy moments, like the way he enunciates the word "slatty," as if his mouth is full of crushed ice, or how his verse on "My City Remix" (a remix of YTB Trench's "My City"), swerves from "Federales looking but they can't find the body" to "Tryna see my kids every day because it's healthy" in the space of just a few bars. But by and large, Thug hangs back and lets his signees and guests shine. Both Gunna and Lil Baby sound like rappers in their prime; Thug's on-again-off-again fiancée Karlae is beginning to sound like a genuine talent; Thug's sister Dolly is downright menacing on "Reckless"; and Thug's latest sibling to take up music, his brother, Unfoonk, sounds poised to become a gravel-throated crooner in the mold of Ty Dolla \$ign.

Ultimately, *Slime Language 2* is a label compilation and the usual caveats apply: it's far too long, the back half is padded out with a few throwaways ("GFU," "Como Te Llama") and hardly anyone is showing up with their best material. That said, *Slime Language 2* succeeds as a survey of how pervasive Thug's influence has become. Young Thug may not be much of a presence on the album but his *sound* is all over these songs. It's in the way that stars like Uzi, Future and Travis Scott approach melody, the kinds of hooks and ad-libs that rappers pin to these twinkling beats, and most clearly, in the way that the YSL signees move. After a full decade spent at rap's vanguard, Young Thug seems content to step back and admire the landscape he shaped. You can't say he didn't earn it.

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