

By Kyle Kramer

**Frequently Asked Questions** is exactly what it sounds like, where we have experts guide you through the unknown about people and topics in music and pop culture. Today is Drake day, and everybody’s crying. He’s released his third album Nothing Was The Same and if you’re wondering what all the fuss is about or have been living under a rock that’s been sealed in a chamber and haven’t seen the light of day in eight years, this is an FAQ about Canada’s very own, Drake.

**Who is Drake?**

Aubrey “Drake” Graham is a rapper from Toronto, Canada, signed to Young Money Entertainment, a subsidiary of Universal Music Group founded by Lil Wayne. He began releasing music in 2006 with the mixtape Room For Improvement, but he catapulted to widespread recognition in the wake of his third mixtape, So Far Gone, in 2009. He has since released two albums, Thank Me Later and Take Care. His third album, Nothing Was The Same, comes out on today.

Unique in that he is equal parts singer and rapper, often blurring the boundaries between hip-hop and R&B, Drake is best known for songs that include “Best I Ever Had,” “Headlines,” “Take Care” and “The Motto.” This last song is credited with introducing the phrase “YOLO,” short for “you only live once,” into the popular lexicon. His current singles are “Started From The Bottom” and “Hold On, We’re Going Home.”

**So this Drake, he’s pretty successful? Is that why every song on the radio sounds like Drake featuring Drake?**

Absolutely. According to Billboard, Drake’s sold 4.5 million copies of his albums, and he’s had twelve singles on which he was the lead or featured artist crack the top 10 of the publication’s Hot 100. Additionally, he’s second only to his boss Lil Wayne in top 10 singles on the Billboard Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs, with 33 lead or featured performances achieving that mark, and he holds the record for most No. 1s on that chart, with 10.

Just in the past year, he’s had hit-making performances on Wayne’s song “Love Me,” A$AP Rocky’s “F\*\*\*in’ Problems” and Kendrick Lamar’s “Poetic Justice.” So yes, when he brags that every song sounds like “Drake featuring Drake”—a line from the standalone single “5 A.M. In Toronto,” released earlier this year—he has some numbers to back it up. And that’s just in terms of sales. As far as influence goes, Drake’s helped launch the career of fellow Toronto artist The Weeknd, and he’s helped make washed-out R&B and tired, post-party confessional jams into genre tropes. He has a unique ability to coin phrases that sound perfect as Instagram captions or Facebook statuses or T-shirt slogans. All of his actions feel so quintessentially Drake that anything he does publicly or releases musically becomes the center of conversation in hip-hop.

**How come he has a song called “Started From The Bottom”? Wasn’t he the guy on Canadian teen drama Degrassi? That doesn’t sound like starting from the bottom at all.**

Yes, Drake was on Degrassi. He played Jimmy Brooks, a promising basketball prospect who became confined to a wheelchair in later seasons after getting shot in the back and paralyzed. Drake used the money he earned from Degrassi to fund his early recording career, so he did have an edge over many other rappers, both financially and in terms of pre-established fame. But looking at Drake in terms of the archetypal rags-to-riches artist’s rise story is missing the point. Drake is successful because he invented his own version of what a famous rapper could be. Instead of puffed-chest machismo, Drake’s songs express vulnerability and wrestle with feelings like jealousy and regret. They talk about how hard it is to be famous. They spend a lot of time speculating on the emotions of the women who appear in them and speculating even more on Drake’s feelings about how he’s treating them. Drake songs are brutally honest and often really lame, and they had to fight their way into the rap mainstream by being so undeniably catchy that they couldn’t be ignored. So even if Drake started out with a few advantages, his rise was certainly not preordained. When he brags that he’s “kept it real from the jump,” he has—it’s just not the idea of “real” that you may have had in mind.

**So is Drake real hip-hop?**

What’s realer than being honest about how you want to be famous but you’re scared of it, about how you miss your exes and want to keep checking up on them, about how you used to argue with your mom about her medical needs? There’s a certain type of hip-hop fan who thinks that hip-hop has to sound pretty much the same as it did in 1995 and limit itself to topics that do not include serenading girls about their rituals for getting ready to go out. This type of “real hip-hop” fan hates Drake and sees his blend of singing and rapping as soft. Drake’s spent most of the last two years trying to prove the opposite, and his latest music definitely takes a meaner turn. But he’s also always operated on the premise that realness is mostly made up and that masculinity can also be vulnerable, with the confidence that, as he bragged on So Far Gone, his male fans will buy his album and say it’s for their sisters.

**What is this OVO thing he keeps talking about?**

OVO stands for October’s Very Own, and it’s the name of Drake’s posse/blog/artistic circle/budding label/brand/music festival. The name comes from the fact that Drake’s birthday is October 24. While the full nature of what and whom OVO is comprised of—other than dudes who stand around scowling in the back of Drake videos—is hard to pin down, key figures include Drake, his close friend Niko, brand manager/creative director Oliver El-Khatib and producer/engineer Noah “40” Shebib. Each crops up frequently in Drake’s lyrics, but the most essential for listeners is 40, the chief architect of Drake’s influential sound. His chilly sonic palette, hazy filters and otherwise crisp instrumentation tend to combine to perfectly express the swirling sensation of being under the influence and evoke the unique feelings of emotional recklessness that surface late at night. The effect has been widely imitated in hip-hop and R&B over the past four years and it’s put 40, who prefers to work mostly with Drake, in high demand among other artists.

Throughout his career, Drake has used the OVO blog, which is updated by him or one of the other three close associates, to release new music and share what’s on the group’s mind. The OVO logo, a black and gold owl, has become Drake’s branding device, and it’s what appears on most of his merchandise. OVOSound is the label founded by Drake, 40 and El-Khatib, and, in addition to Drake and 40, its roster currently includes in-house producers Boi-1da, T-Minus and Nineteen85, as well as artists Partynextdoor and Majid Jordan.

**If he’s so cool and famous, why does everyone make fun of him all the time?**

This is the Drake paradox. Everything he does is awesome and corny at the same time, and he embraces that persona fully. His quintessential and possibly most acclaimed song, “Marvin’s Room,” is about drunk dialing an ex. Drake raps about girls trash talking him over muffins, and he ends really cool songs with lines like “we’re not in Kansas anymore.” He wears stupid clothes like leather tank tops and Dada shirts so hideous that they spark ridiculous memes. His album cover looks like the sample cuts poster at a barber shop. Among his well-known home installations are an experience shower, a stripper pole and accompanying OVO recliner he bought himself for Christmas and a bedroom that’s entered through a hidden bookshelf door unlocked with a key code. It’s actually a mystery as to why people make fun of Drake, because the dude basically lives a parody of his own life.

**Gee, that is pretty lame. Why do people listen to him, then?**

Well, have you ever found yourself heading home late at night and having deep thoughts about your interpersonal relationships? Do you ever find yourself trying to make sense of your parents’ divorce? Have you ever used your friend’s Facebook to check an ex’s profile because he or she unfriended you? Do you ever find yourself amazed at how well your life is going yet confused as to why you’re not happier? Have you ever gotten stressed out because of a passive aggressive argument via text message with your significant other? Do you ever watch a stripper perform and imagine yourself hanging out with her in your college dorm room, totally in love? Have you ever driven to your girlfriend’s house sobbing, in hopes of saving your relationship? Do you ever find yourself looking for the right phrase to subtweet someone? Have you ever gotten jealous of your boyfriend for liking too many of another girl’s pictures on Instagram? Have you ever drank too much peach vodka and woken up the next morning realizing you said something you regret? Do you ever find yourself lighting candles in your room at the end of a long day but still wanting to listen to rap music? Yes? That’s why people listen to Drake.

**So you’re saying if my relationship with my mother is strained because I’ve taken out a lease on an extremely expensive car despite having a negative balance in my checking account, I should listen to Drake?**

Yes. In fact, you’ll probably find comfort in his song about this exact situation, “Say What’s Real.”

**What about if I’m sad because the person I was sort of in a relationship with lives in a different city from me now, and I still call them and want to be with them even though I’m hooking up with other people, should I listen to Drake?**

Absolutely. He has a song about that called “Hate Sleeping Alone.”

**What about if I’m worried about whether or not I’ll eventually have enough money to buy expensive paintings but currently I’m also worried I’m going to get my Fendi throw rug dirty?**

Yeah, for sure. Just listen to “Dreams Money Can Buy.” Wait, how are you actually dealing with all these situations? Is this Drake? Look, if this is Drake, I hope you didn’t think I was making fun of you up there. I actually really love your music. But dude, you have to admit you’re pretty corny sometimes.

**So then, what’s his best song?**

“Marvin’s Room” is the quintessential Drake song in that it’s mopey and that it perfectly blends Drake’s signatures of singing, rapping and murky production into a pop song with an inescapable hook. Other contenders include “Hold On, We’re Going Home,” “Miss Me” and “Houstatlantavegas.”

**What’s his worst song?**

“Over,” the confused first single for Thank Me Later, which might be the clumsiest and least catchy Drake has sounded since he broke out in 2009.

What’s his best guest verse?

Drake’s managed to take over a ton of songs, but his verse on Atlanta group Migos’s “Versace,” from earlier this year, is probably the best thing he’s ever rapped. Other great guest verses include his appearance on Rick Ross’s “Stay Schemin’” and his verse on 2 Chainz’s “No Lie.”

**What’s his best album?**

While Nothing Was The Same sees Drake improving as a rapper and crystallizing his sound, Take Care remains the benchmark for his career, a firm statement of purpose and breakout moment as a boundary-pushing artist.

**What’s his first song?**

The first documented piece of Drake rapping we have may be on this 2005 episode of Degrassi: Unscripted, where he takes the cameras on a tour of his home and shares some bars in his basement studio. Otherwise, Drake’s first release, Room for Improvement, is the first recorded music you can find from him on the Internet. However, his first single to gain any traction was “Replacement Girl” with Trey Songz, off of 2007’s Comeback Season.

**Now that we have Nothing is the Same is anything the same?**

Yes and no. Drake’s new album is definitely darker and meaner than anything he’s made yet, but many of the topics are familiar: He’s still revisiting old flings, trying to make sense of destructive relationship dynamics, attempting to come to terms with his family members and bragging about success. His approach is more straightforward rapping in the vein of many of the ‘90s artists he references as opposed to the genre-bending of Take Care and So Far Gone, and he’s let go of some of the hazier production in favor of crisper sounds. He raps “this is nothing for the radio/but they’ll still play it though//cause it’s that new Drizzy Drake that’s just the way it go,” and that’s pretty much how this album is likely to be received. Drake has become rap’s biggest hitmaker, and this album is a victory lap that will cement his place on top of the genre.