

Toronto rapper Smiley has a knack for drama. The 24-year-old made his name the last few years delivering poisonous rhymes in a soft voice, a captivating—and chilling—tactic that has won him an ever-growing network of fans across North America and well beyond. Whether he's making terrifying murder ballads like 2018's "Body" or unleashing pop-rap anthemics like this year's "In My Zone," he demonstrates a keen eye for details and, of course, one of rap's most unique flows. It's no surprise he's caught the attention of one of his city's biggest stars: Drake.

Smiley united with Drake on his breakout single, 2021's "Over the Top," where his verse plays like a deserved victory lap, celebrating his come up from "trapping with bugs in the trap" to a life of luxury. It was a striking introduction for many and became Smiley's first single to hit the Hot 100. It's no wonder that, as he prepares his debut album *Buy. Or. Bye 2*, he's gearing up to take his sound to the world's stage. It's rare to hear a voice with something to say, let alone one as distinctive as Smiley's. Though his ambition is strong, his approach is also rare—refreshingly modest: "Remain humble, listen a lot, and do better than before to be the best," says Smiley.

Born in Montreal, Smiley moved frequently as a child, first settling down with family in Toronto at age 3. Growing up, 50 Cent and Lil Wayne were primary influences. Their music, inspired by the relatably harsh realities of their lives, shaped his love for rap's expression and the way he would later live in the streets. But Smiley didn't know he wanted to make music until he was expelled from high school. Out of boredom, he asked an older friend in the neighborhood, who rapped, if he could come along with him to the studio. That same night, Smiley laid down his first verse.

He started releasing songs for fun, slowly at first, but even these rough cuts found favor in the Toronto underground. In 2017, Smiley released the melodic and menacing "Hit," sparking online buzz and inspiring someone in Drake's camp to post the song. In the comments, the OVO boss himself wrote "Smiley = Goat." Drake—who it turned out had been clocking Smiley's moves since 2014—would later go on to say that the younger artist's dark yet colorful 2018 projects, *Buy. Or. Bye* and *A Tape to Remember*, inspired his own 2018 epic, *Scorpion*.

The attention only drove Smiley to complete his evolution into a bonafide lyricist, focused on bringing intricacy to his narcoleptic rhymes. In 2019 he released *Road to Buy or Bye 2* and then, in 2020, he shared *YYZ - LAX*, each of which demonstrated new dimensions and possibilities to his sound. All this work earned him a deal with Drake's OVO Sound label earlier this year, and afforded him some space to think about what he wants out of music, and life.

Smiley relocated to Los Angeles in 2021 to work on his debut album, *Buy. Or. Bye 2*, and on becoming the best version of himself. Recorded in various locations—from Smiley's manager's garage to Warner Records' studios—the new record represents Smiley pushing himself into new

spaces both literal and creative. *Buy. Or. Bye 2* shows Smiley at his most confident, celebrating making it out of the hood to live among the stars while working hard to become one in his own right. It's clear with the success he's achieved so far, that he's well on his way to that aim. He's confident the world will enjoy his music and he's eager to get it out, to achieve the goals he's set for himself since he first started rapping. "I want to be beloved," he says, matter-of-factly.