

For an artist who raps so vividly about the toll that time, pressure, and regret can take on a person, Freddie Gibbs seems remarkably refreshed. “It feels good to still feel new at this age,” the Gary, Indiana-born rapper says. Despite his nearly two decades in the game—over which he’s racked up the adoration of critics, unwavering respect from his peers and hip-hop legends like Scarface, and a Grammy nomination—Gibbs is just now making his debut as a major-label solo artist. Those years honing his craft and battling the record industry have not only made him one of his generation’s most vital voices but also clarified the things he finds valuable. And so it should surprise no one that the title of his major-label debut takes a firm stance on what the powers that be can and cannot take from him: *\$oul \$old \$eparately*.

The album features verses from icons like Pusha T, Scarface, and Raekwon, and production from Alchemist and Madlib as well as James Blake, Jake One, Boi-1da, Justice League, DJ Dahi, Kaytranada, and Three 6 Mafia’s DJ Paul. As a whole, it weaves heartache and celebration, agitation and gratitude in a way that would be surprising—even impossible—for many artists but feels inevitable in the rapper’s deft hands.

Though celebrated for his lyrics—which reveal an ever-deepening sense of the peril that Black Americans face every day—Gibbs has become one of the genre’s most acrobatic, unpredictable vocalists, with a dazzling technical skillset. He can hit impossibly precise rapping patterns or break out into a singing voice that sounds like a 1970s soul star who woke up in a Gary stash spot. *\$oul \$old \$eparately* ties all of those threads together with an elegance that betrays Gibbs’ experience and his unique ear for musical cohesion and narrative arcs.

Gibbs came up with the album title when he was writing a verse for *Bandana*, his second collaborative album with the legendary Los Angeles producer Madlib, which was released in 2019 to rapturous acclaim. “*I pray the streets don’t take what’s left of me,*” he raps toward the end of the Black Thought- and Yasiin Bey-featuring “Education,” “*Drugs for the free—soul sold separately.*” That sentiment—that his life has been defined by the will to maintain his principles and identity in the face of adversity—guided Gibbs through the recording of *\$oul \$old \$eparately*. “The album is like a confessional,” he says, noting how difficult it can be to listen back to some of the more personally revealing verses he penned for it.

These introspective songs mingle with irresistible commercial tracks like the Moneybagg Yo collaboration “Too Much,” making the new LP the most varied, rewarding listen of Gibbs’ already staggering catalog. At its core is the same focus and resolve that he wrote about on “Education.” “*The street shit almost fucked up my potential,*” he raps on the harrowing “Rabbit Vision.” “*This rap shit bringing more enemies than friends—they out to get you.*”

As far back as 2009, when he shocked the rap world with his pair of breakthrough mixtapes, *Midwestgangstaboxframecadillacmuzik* and *The Miseducation of Freddie Gibbs*, the gravel-voiced MC has been committed to rendering reality on wax. His songs are unsparing in their attention to

detail and their unwavering arcs of cause and effect, tragedy, and fallout. While he was immediately recognized as a special talent, Gibbs did not have the smooth ride through the halls of power that he first expected he would have.

“Comparison is the thief of joy,” he says, reflecting on the envy he felt at the time. “There were times I’d think, ‘Man, why am I not getting the same things as *him*? Why I ain’t get the same looks *he* get, the same features *he* get?’ But then I was like, ‘You know what? That’s *his* lane. Let me create my own lane instead of worrying about what another person is doing.” So he stuck to what he knew made *him* special.

“When I did the Madlib albums and *Alfredo*, I established myself as a unique type of force,” he says. “I’m not like any other rapper. Make yourself something that nobody can be compared to. Be so good that you can’t be denied.” That’s exactly what he did with the first Madlib collaboration, 2014’s *Pinata*, and with *Bandana* and *Alfredo*, his 2020 record with the Los Angeles producer Alchemist that earned the pair a Grammy nod for Best Rap Album.

Given the unmissable charisma Gibbs has manifested for his entire career—and considering the acuity of the stories he tells in his music—it should be similarly unsurprising that the rapper has revealed himself, in a short time, as a force in the worlds of acting and film production. (Gibbs takes slight issue with the suggestion that this is a new phenomenon: “I got good at rapping fast, too,” he laughs. “Y’all just didn’t know it.”) Last year, he made his debut at the Cannes Film Festival with the Diego Ongaro film, *Down with the King*, which Gibbs produced and starred in, to rave reviews from the *New York Times* and other publications. He’s also expanded his repertoire with roles on the 50 Cent-produced crime drama *Power Book IV: Force* on Starz and the Gary-set comedy *Bust Down* on Peacock, and says he’s angling to bring new, unexpected stories to the screen—as he puts it, “Scorsese this shit a little bit.”

While his professional obligations would seem to pile up beyond any manageable level, Gibbs keeps perspective on his life and career by centering what matters most: family. “I love being a father,” he says, speaking glowingly about the three children he has under the age of eight. It makes perfect sense, then, that his greatest artistic statement yet is about holding tight to the things he holds dearest, which no one can strip away from him.