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ALBUMS

Live Laugh Love

Earl Sweatshirt

2025



Earl is on another level. The way he deploys his skill, humor, and encyclopedic knowledge of hip-hop has made him one of the most effortlessly deep and cool rappers alive.

Yeah, Earl Sweatshirt is rapping his ass off again. Since he was a teenager, you could count on him for that the way you can count on Aaron Judge to hit a moonshot to centerfield. For some years now—probably since he hopped on a Drakeo the Ruler remix talking blue strips and Ksubi jeans—it’s felt as if he’s been in a hip-hop bootcamp, soaking up, if I had to guess, everything from the casual flexes of the Michigan rap scene to the head-bustin’ word-foolery of the Ultramagnetic MCs.

His loose-lipped guest verses on the posse cut “Real hiphop” and El Cousteau’s “Words2LiveBy” are formative in that respect, balancing the heavy with the light, seriousness with some swag: “Free Gaza, we on the corner like Israelites.” His new album, *Live Laugh Love*, isn’t as obviously ambitious as his coming-of-age statement, *I Don’t Like Shit I Don’t Go Outside*, or the stylistic rebirth that is *Some Rap Songs*, but that’s not a bad thing. On this album, he avoids any stagnancy by digging deeper into feelings that are both uncomfortable and life-affirming.

Live Laugh Love—the title seems to slightly troll the inspirational slogan you might find framed in a T.J. Maxx—sounds straight out of a half-remembered dream. Barely over 24 minutes, it's a flurry of conversation scraps, inside jokes, hoops references, repurposed song lyrics, childhood memories, and moments of self-discovery that seems to put just as much into how the words sound as what the words mean. Earl leans into a lyrical absurdity and stream-of-consciousness that isn't quite at *Buhloone Mindstate* levels of eccentric silliness (he shouts out De La's Dave Trugoy on the bleary "Gamma (Need the <3)") but has a little of that sauce. "Jiggy bricklayer like J Hov breaker breaker they can't close," he raps from the gut on the intro "gsw vs sac." The density is overwhelming, and yet he makes it sound so effortlessly cool and easy to listen to.

A lot of that tension comes from the warmth and fried bounce of *Live Laugh Love's* instrumentals; they amplify the sentimentality and anxiety in Earl's stitched-together fragments. The beats by the Long Island producer Theravada are especially ragged, like a basketball that has been pounded into the pavement till its rubber's peeled (apparently a lot of the album was recorded after Earl and Theravada's pickup hoop sessions). But they also have a real slow-dance-with-your-girl groove to them. I can hear that in the sweetness of the gentle piano riff and mellow soul loop of "Infatuation" that turns a little warped in moments because of how the beat cuts in and out, as well as in the hazy funk flip of "Forge" that would be smooth if the background screams and zooming cars didn't make it sort of uneasy. "I'm playin' bae I'm still in love with you let's get in the tub," raps Earl on "Forge," sounding kinda affectionate, but also kinda deadly afraid of the responsibilities that come with love.

If *IDLSIDGO* became known as the Earl is sad album, there might be a tendency to label *Live Laugh Love* the Earl is happy now album, but it's more complex than that. His excitement for marriage and fatherhood has the all too real fear of *What if I fuck it all up?* and yet, with the comic timing of a long-winded standup, he gets out of his own head with jokes. On "exhaust," that comes in the form of taking a break from all of the personal meditations with a play on an old 2 Chainz hook: "Ya love stank bitches that's your fuckin' problem." While on "Crisco," Earl digs into the childhood anger that's still affecting him to this day, but just before that, he declares, "Get these white girls out my home like Babyfather." Dr. Umar would be proud.

The way his flow has become a lot more loose and unpredictable helps him draw out certain emotions, too. In the final few moments of "Static," the disgusted pause he takes before he says "It didn't shock me" turns some seemingly ordinary shit talk into a devastatingly funny lecture, in a DOOM kind of way. Speaking of DOOM, Earl still has a splash of the masked villain in his cadence, but mixed in with so many contemporary references done with his own flavor. When he spouts out, "Affogato cream and coffee, wally walker out the bottle drinkin', I never got on LinkedIn" on "Heavy Metal aka ejecto seato!," the sensible gibberish reminds me of California street rap, specifically the first few bars of WhoHeem's "Dum Hands." Also, "Live," where over a Black Noi\$e beat that is like haunted Backwoodz vibes meets sputtering StepTeam drums, Earl slurs his words almost as hard as Veeze. And not for no reason, that flow makes the song sound so deeply insular.

It's a lot. *Live Laugh Love* is equal parts heart and style, and is as much about Earl the grown man as Earl the hip-hop head. Earl shouts out friends, blots the album with relationship details that maybe only a few other people in the world would fully comprehend, and brings up his emotional bond with his son. These are his touchpoints, so it makes sense that everything else—the word-association marathons, the flowery punchlines—seems like an inconsequential blur. There are a few moments that ground it all even further: the dream he mentions on “Heavy Metal aka ejecto seato!” that he had years before his son was born, in which the baby was walking on the ceiling; on “Tourmaline,” the best song on the album, when in a romantically woozy rap-sing he goes, “She found me on the streets, she vowin’ to keep my feet grounded for my sweet child” so earnestly. There’s so much musical and personal inspiration colliding at once, you can feel the passion even when you can’t quite crack it all.