



# EVERYTHING I AM



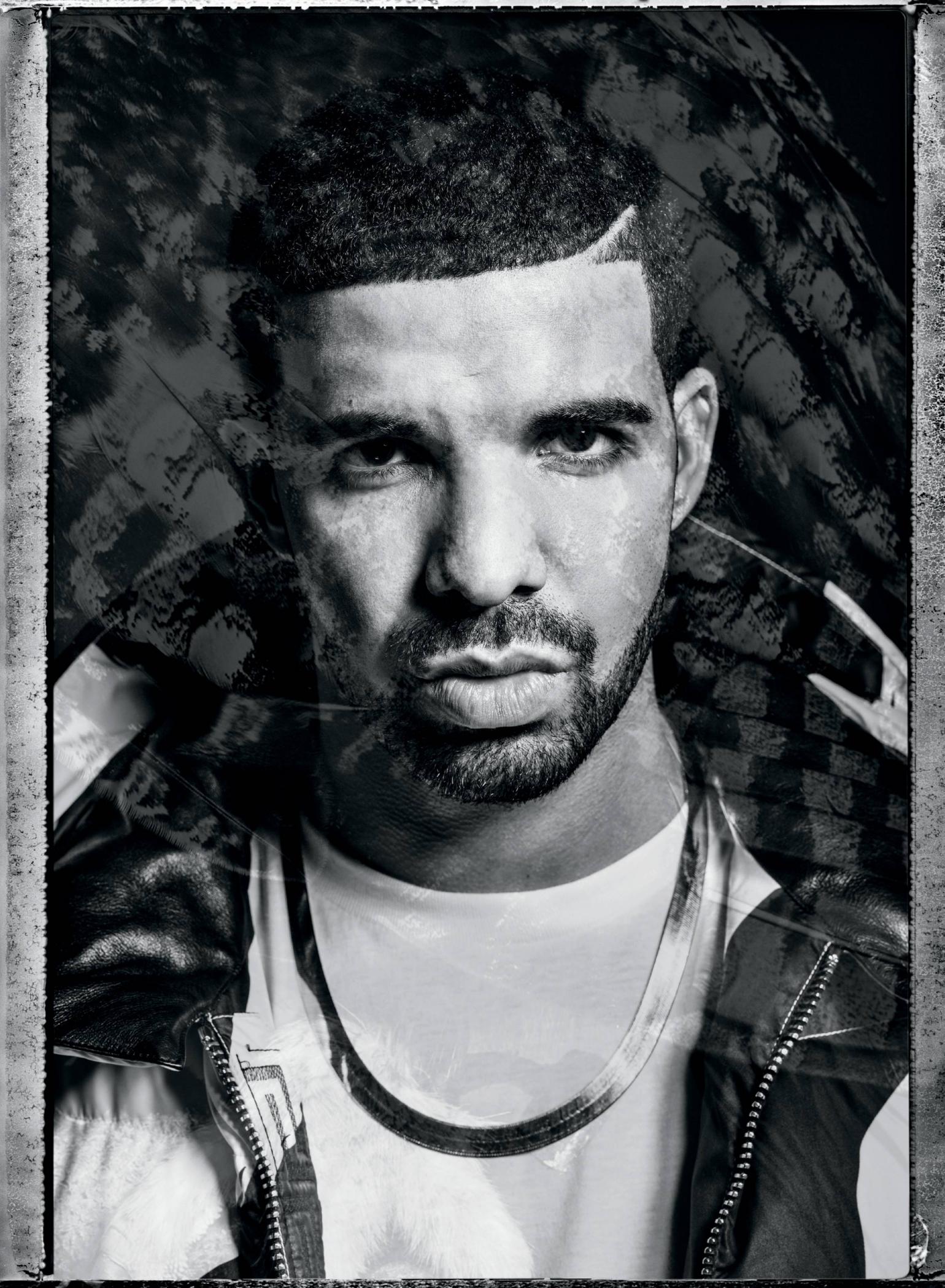
**DRAKE'S  
ON TOP,**  
HE'S BEEN THERE FOR  
A WHILE, AND HE  
DOESN'T SEEM TO BE  
GOING ANYWHERE.  
**HATERS  
CAN HATE,**  
BUT IT  
WON'T MATTER.

INTERVIEW **THOMAS GOLIANOPOULOS**  
IMAGES **JONATHAN MANNION**

One of the biggest rappers in the world lives on a busy street in Yorkville, an upscale neighborhood in Toronto filled with designer boutiques, European tourists and gelato shops. Aubrey Drake Graham, 26, is the half-Jewish, half-African-American former child acting star from *T Dot*, who has dominated hip-hop culture since his landmark mixtape *So Far Gone* heralded his arrival in early 2009. Since then, Drake, who signed to Cash Money/Universal that same year after being scooped up by Lil Wayne, has released two albums (*Thank Me Later* in 2010 and *Take Care* in 2011), collected an impressive 10 No. 1 records on the Billboard Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart, coined a generational slogan (YOLO: You Only Live Once from his record “The Motto”) and maintained a ubiquitous presence through his guest appearances; four of the six nominees—“Fuckin’ Problems,” “Poetic Justice,” “No Lie” and “Pop That”—for Best Collaboration at this June’s BET Awards featured Drake.

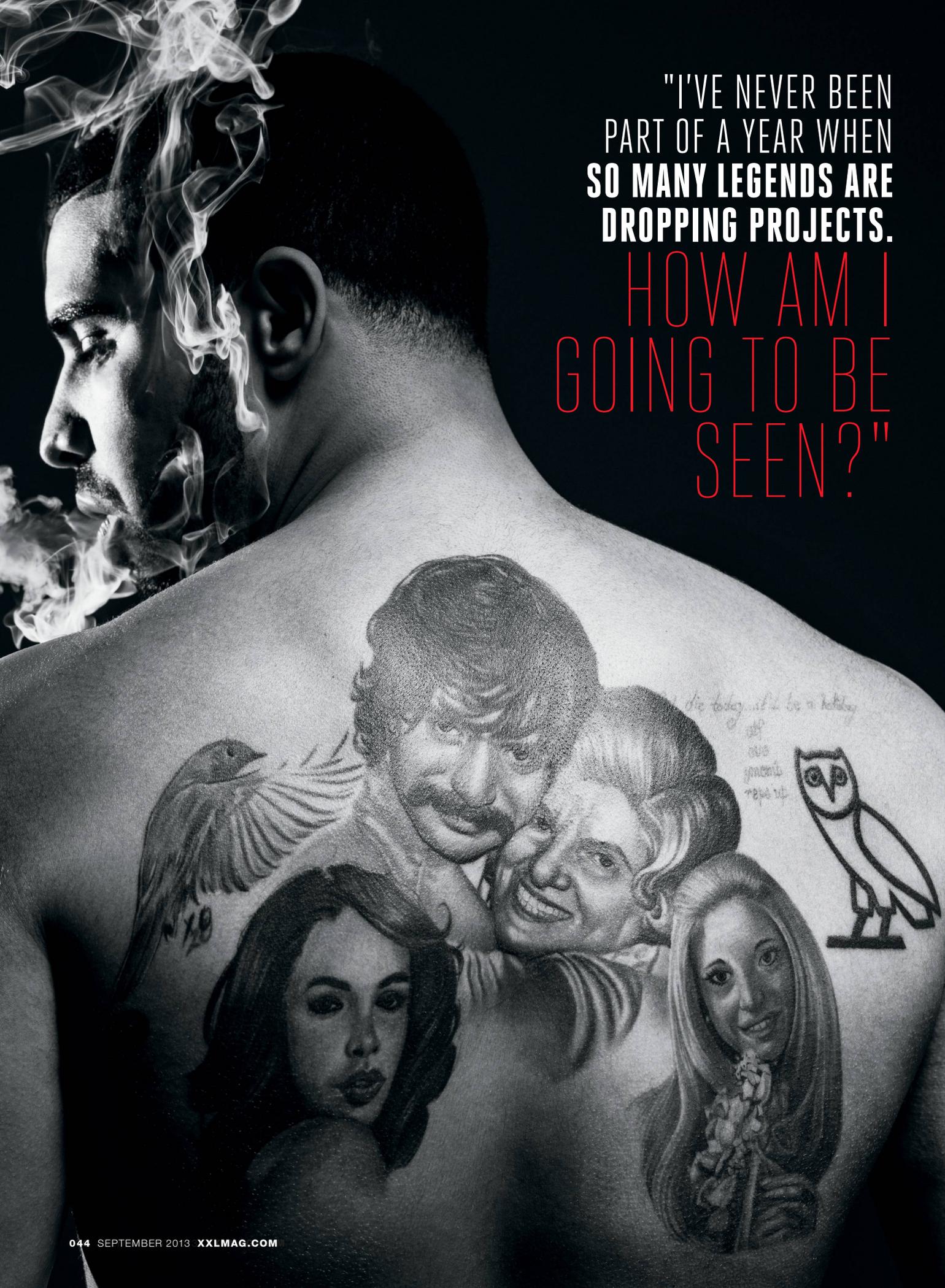
It’s an exciting time for Drake, who releases his third solo album, *Nothing Was The Same*, on September 17. This summer was hyped as a showdown of sorts between himself, Kanye West and Jay Z, but after *Yeezus* polarized listeners and *Magna Carta... Holy Grail* revealed itself as more marketing coup than artistic statement, it’s clear the throne is there for the taking.

On a steamy July evening, the newly health-conscience Drake sits in his living room drinking a vodka, seltzer and grapefruit cocktail and picks at a veggies and hummus spread. There’s an obscenely large flat-screen above his fireplace; his recent GQ cover and a book on the 100 best-selling albums of all time decorate his coffee tables; one of Andy Warhol’s famous Marilyn Monroe prints hangs in the hallway. Taller and sturdier than he appears on TV, Drake wears a black OVO T-shirt (October’s Very Own is the name of his crew, and OVO Sound is his new label on Warner Bros. Records), black gym shorts and Oregon University Jordan IIIs. Over the next two hours, he’ll address his competition with Kanye West, his battle with Common (the two have thrown dissés at one another since Com first dissed the emo rap specialist last November on “Sweet”), how Drizzy deals with hate from other rappers, hot mess Amanda Bynes’ love tweets to him, the drama over recklessly alluding to Kobe Bryant’s wife in a flagrant lyric and his acting comeback. Drake frequently takes control of the interview, hurtling into subjects most rappers avoid. But more often than not, the conversation returns to his status in the industry as one of the greats.



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**Touring seems much more grueling for you than for the average rapper. You have to rap, sing, engage the crowd...**

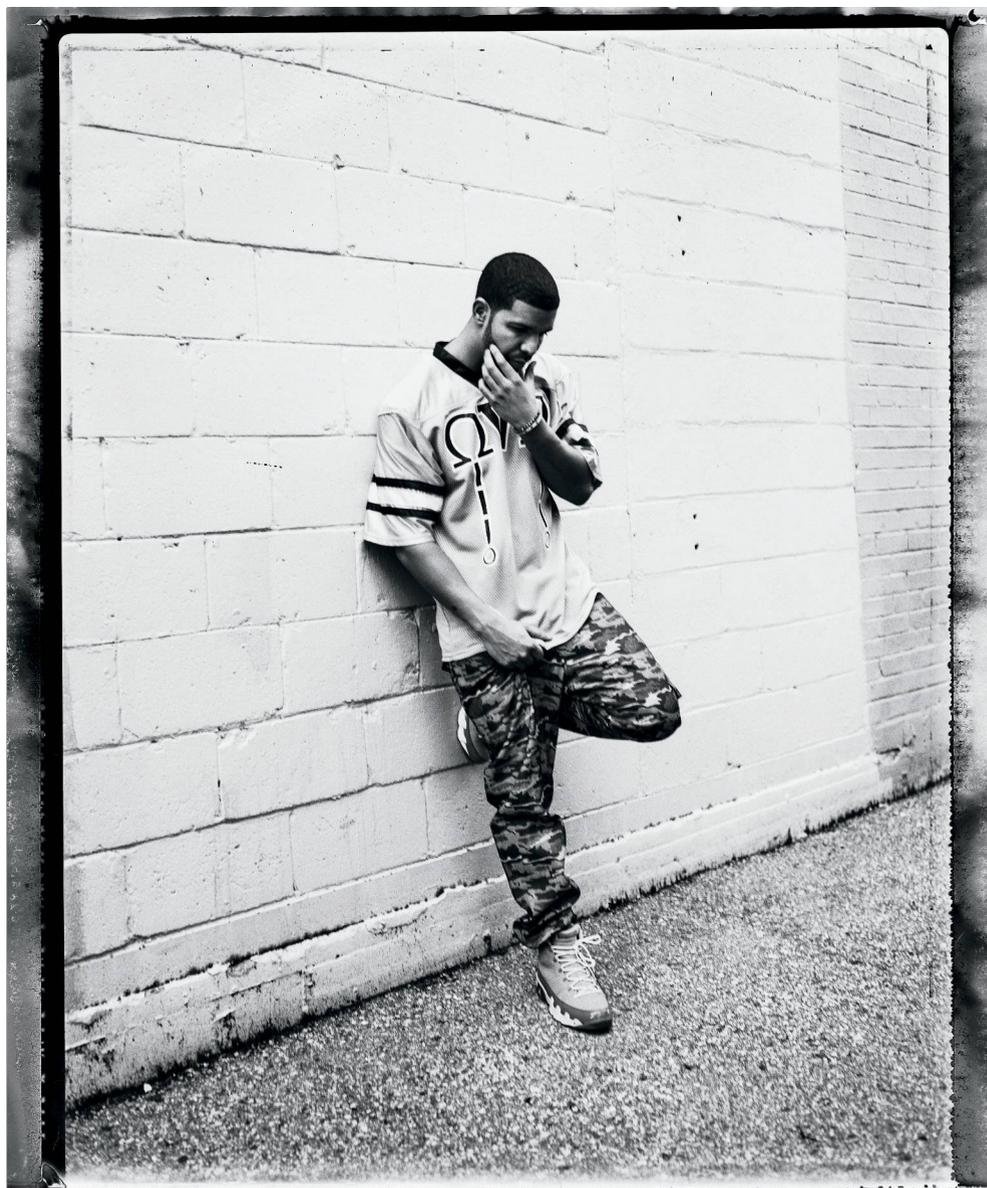
When I don't have to just walk into the room and start talking, I think, "What's the stance I'm going to take in this interview? What do I really want to get across?" And you kind of touched on it right away, which is kind of funny and weird. But I guess my biggest thing is, I just don't want people looking at me or talking to me like I'm a rapper. I want to be looked at as an artist, as a musician. I don't want it to be a shock when you hear singing on my album. I'm going to do that for the rest of my life. It's just something I do. I sing slow jams and then I rap songs like "5 AM In Toronto." This body of work is the most concise, best example of the marriage between, I guess, one style and the other.

**You always rap more about the present than the past.**

Because I don't overdo it with social media or press, the songs become updates in themselves. They become the answers to all the questions you have. If I were an irrational individual, I'd probably be just saying all those things online. But I try and save those moments and put them in music.

**On Migos' "Versace" remix, you rapped, "I'm at the top and ain't no one on top of me." When did you realize you were the top guy?**

I would say in the last four to six months things really changed for me. I think another big shift was when we dropped those four records—the Migos, "The Motion," "Jodeci Freestyle" [and "Over Here"]. I remember coming into this year thinking, "How am I going to cut through all these people and shine?" I've never been part of a year when so many legends are dropping projects. How am I going to be seen? I'm going to be like the kid waving in the background in the photo with all of his tall relatives. And, I guess, those were my initial thoughts, and not to say that I haven't enjoyed some of the



**"I'M ALSO HERE TO BE THE BEST. I'M HERE TO SURPASS. I'M HERE TO OUTDO."**

stuff that has come out this year, but it didn't pan out the way I thought it was going to. I think I am going for it, to really establish what are murmurs or things being said quietly, "Um, I think that Drake might actually..." On September 17th I want people to be like, "Oh, we were right." **What did you think of Kanye's *Yeezus* and Jay Z's *Magna Carta... Holy Grail*?** I can sit here and lie to you and

be like, "Man, I didn't listen to that shit yet." But I did. I listened to them, and I respect both projects for what they are. I never like giving my opinion on people's shit because it's going to come back to you. At the same time, I'm a very honest person. I've listened to them, and I can say that both projects have pushed me to go as hard as I possibly can, whatever that means to you. **You are very competitive.**

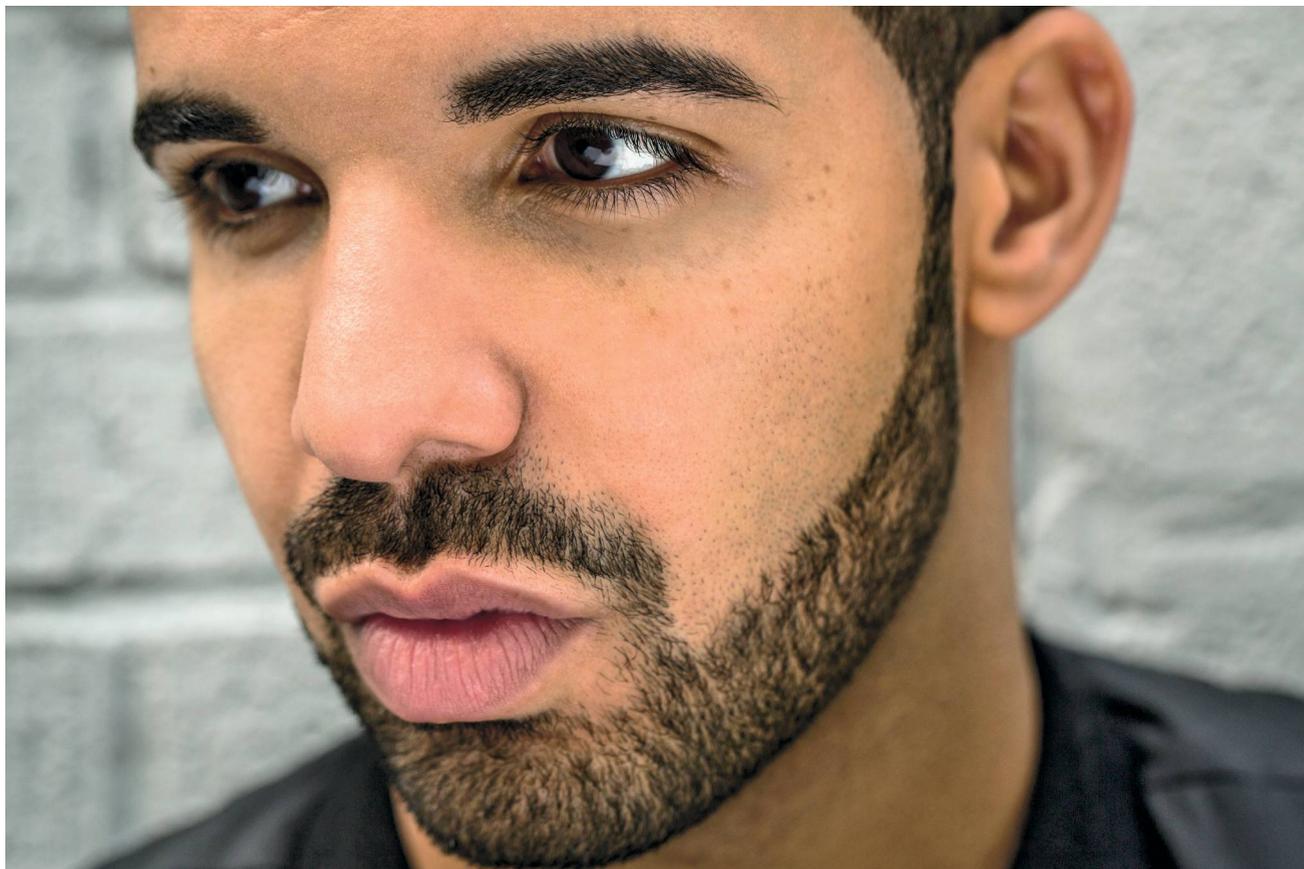
I had a rapper accuse me of being too competitive and ruining it for other people.

**Was he serious?**

Dead serious.

**How did you hear about it?**

Word of mouth. "I studied you." What do you mean? This is why we are here. This is what it's about. If you were me, would you be a pushover, like, "Oh I'm not gonna go that hard because I know we're all trying to do the same thing and



achieve the same goal.” It’s like, “Man, get the fuck out of here.” **Never heard of a rapper being too competitive.**

That was the whole gist of the comment. “You don’t have to go that hard. You’re making it really hard for...” It’s like, what? Hey man, that’s almost like a compliment in itself, for someone to say it out loud.

**Was this a veteran artist?**

I don’t even want to tell you. If I answered that, you would know the answer right away.

**Is it important to be perceived as the top guy by your peers?**

Nah, I don’t need acknowledgment. I just need silent understanding. I don’t want acknowledgment. That’s unfair. I don’t expect someone to come over and be like, “Congrats for being the guy.”

**You know what the rap equivalent of the pat on the back is, right? It’s people talking shit about you.**

[Laughs] Straight up. That is real shit. If that’s the case, I get patted on the back all the time. Straight up though, you’re

right. I was going to come to you today, like, I try to rehearse my interviews. I’ll be in the bathroom brushing my teeth, and I’ll hear you asking a question, and I’ll try to answer it the best that I can. It’s like that whole theory, are they going to ask Phil Collins about competitively releasing an album amongst his peers, or do they ask Toby Keith about what’s the beef right now? This is the genre where there is a lot of peer-to-peer competition, peer-to-peer discrepancy, peer-to-peer confrontation.

People have built the competition up between me and Kanye, per se. I get that a lot. “What’s the deal?” Personally, I’m not sure. I don’t have an answer. I know I’m here to do one thing, and that’s be the best, which I’m sure he’s here to do too. Maybe that’s where we butt heads.

**It’s not just media. It’s you guys too. You take subliminal shots at each other in songs and in interviews. Last month, in *The New York Times* [Drake**

**smiles and slightly chuckles], Kanye said, “There are people who have figured out the exact Kanye West formula, the mix between *Graduation* and *808s*, and were able to become more successful at it.” People thought he was talking about you.**

Yeah.

**Who else could he have been talking about?**

Or it could be *The Black Album/Confessions* formula, or you could put any other two albums together and say that I figured something out. It’s tough to get into a war of words with Kanye because he’s a huge reason why I’m here, why I’m confident enough to step to a mic and say, “Okay, I don’t have any murder or bricks or drugs to talk about, but I can tell you about myself, and if you’re willing to listen we can get into it.” Kanye was kind of the first guy to give me that boost of confidence. It’s tough to engage in any sort of confrontation with that guy. At the end of the day, I do look up to him. And if he feels the need

to remind people that, so be it. **In a weird way, he gave you a compliment, albeit a backhanded compliment.**

It’s tough for me. That’s a guy I can’t pretend not to like. He’s the guy to me, in a lot of ways. That’s Kanye West. But I’m also here to be the best. I’m here to surpass. I’m here to outdo. I’m ready for whatever with anybody.

**Were you talking about him in your verse on French Montana’s “Pop That?” [Ed. Note: On the song, Drake rapped “We don’t dress alike, we don’t rap alike/I shine different, I rhyme different/Only thing you got is some years on me/Man, fuck you and your time difference”]**

I’m not naïve. I know how it’s going to be taken. I guess in a way, for me to sit here and be like, “No.” I’m just talking my shit. It doesn’t just apply to him or to any one person. But it’s one of those things like, if the shoe fits, tie it tight.

**Do you listen to records and think people are throwing**



**subliminals at you?**

I think we all push each other to write. I know I write my bars about people. They may never catch it. I might use someone as inspiration when I need to get those real aggressive bars across like on “5AM” or [Nothing Was The Same intro] “Tuscan Leather.” I’m sure everyone does that. At the end of the day, you can’t overreact to every single thing you think is about you or that people tell you is about you.

**You did strike back at Common after he dissed you last year.**

Obviously, the whole tension with that whole camp has been

brewing for a long time, and that was the first time I felt someone had called me out personally. I reacted in a very poised way. First of all, I made sure it would run in the club because that’s more painful than anything. As opposed to just being on a blog, I wanted to be on a record that you would have to stand around and hear every night for a few months. That was my whole strategy going into that. Instead of sounding hurt and malicious, I wanted to sound fun, get my shit off. Like I said, if it happens again, not that I want it, not that I welcome it, but I’m ready. I really enjoy writing bars, man.

I’m not nervous about anybody saying anything to me.

**It seemed like you won, but his last line was good.**

The Canada Dry line? That was epic. I liked it. It wasn’t a good line necessarily, but it was funny.

**Did he step over the line when he scorned you for being biracial?**

For you to delve into my mom and my dad’s a bitch and all that, you’re just reaching for impact moments but the bars aren’t really good so it didn’t hit me. I never sat back and analyzed that either. I only heard it once, and thought, “I think I came away with the

W on that one.”

**Eminem has said he wouldn’t have sold as many records if he wasn’t White. Do you think you’ve benefitted from being biracial?**

Do I think that if I didn’t have, for lack of a better term, a unique look about me, if I was from somewhere in America and if I hadn’t been on a kids TV show [*Degrassi: The Next Generation*], would I be as famous? I don’t know, man. Honestly, I don’t think so. I was just some young kid on a TV show. And I haven’t become anything else while I’ve been in this position. It’s not like I got here and was like, “Oh, got to switch up my image.” I don’t wake up nervous. I feel like maybe a lot of these guys do. How old are you, really? What is your background, really? What have you really done in the drug game, in the thug game? You can come into the game and create whatever [image] you want, which you’ve always been able to but its tougher with the Internet. A lot of new artists these days that emerge, their labels will do a complete sweep of the Internet so you don’t know anything about them from before they came out. They will delete their Facebook, Twitter, anything they had, any pictures, and they get to start over. Me, I was famous before I was famous. Had I not have been, I don’t know if it would have been as big. I don’t know if I would have ever met Wayne or if they’d taken an interest in me.

**It’s a great origin story. He can rap, and he’s a former child star?**

Yeah!

**And he’s Canadian?**

Yeah!

**And he’s Jewish?**

And he’s Jewish! All those things. I get Jewish people coming up to me proud like, “Mazel tov, bro. Come to my house for Shabbat dinner.” I always say the next big rapper is gonna be like, “Yo, I play for Real Madrid or the Heat, but in the offseason, I make rap

albums, and they are nasty." It's going to have to be someone with the craziest story.

**So it's time for Kobe**

**Bryant's rap comeback?**

Straight up. It's Kobe's time. He just has to come out with the real GOAT bars.

**It seems Kobe reconsidered the divorce after your line.**

Which one?

**"Kobe about to lose 150 Ms/ Kobe my nigga, I hate that it had to be him/Bitch, you wasn't with me shooting in the gym" from your verse on Rick Ross' "Stay Schemin'."**

Oh God. That was tough too, man. I never meant that for that to be malicious.

**It wasn't malicious.**

It wasn't at all. I think given the issues that were happening at the time, I think it just sort of caused maybe some internal family things or whatever.

**Is that what you heard?**

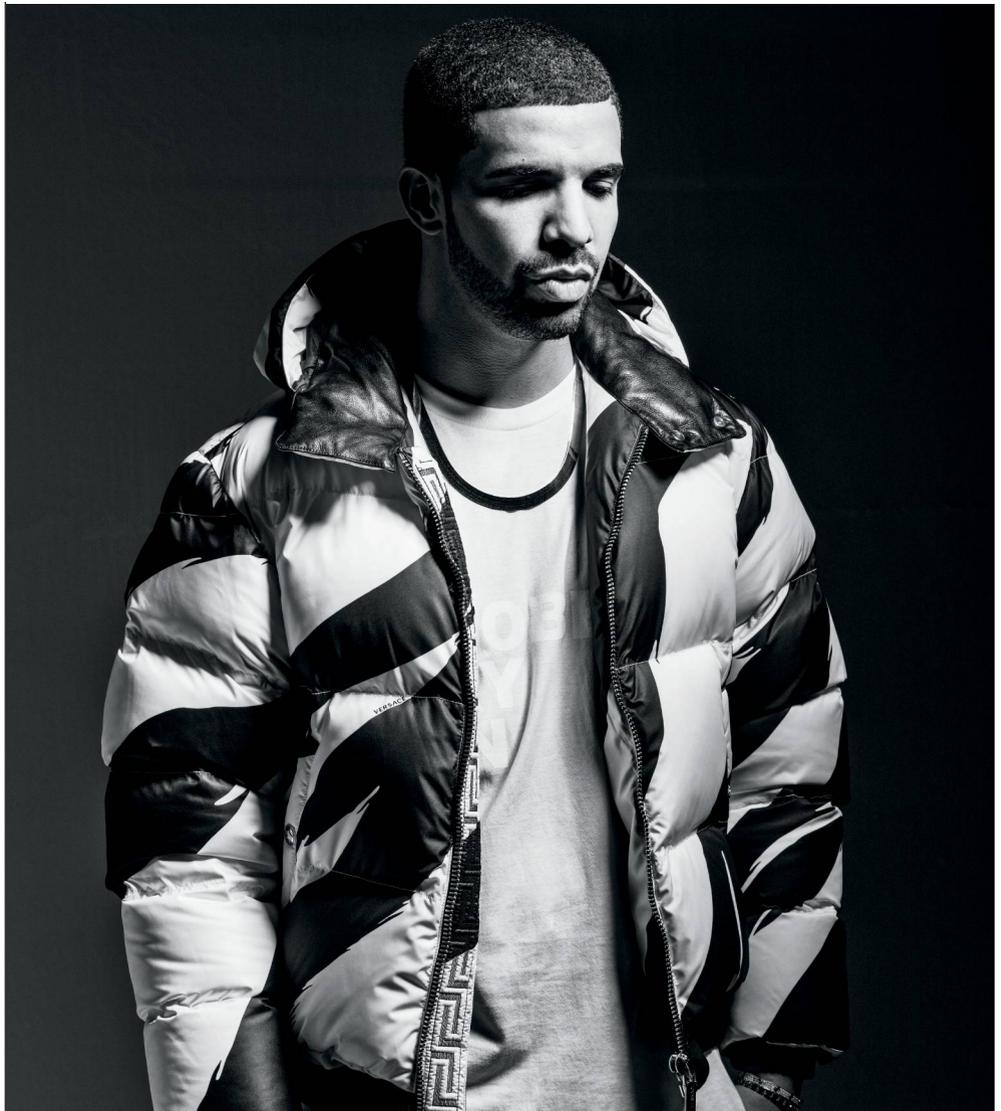
I caught wind that [Kobe's wife] was unhappy about the line. I never meant to. It's just rap. Sometimes you don't realize how big your voice is. Still, I guess it's weird to me. I'm just a kid from Toronto. I'm rapping a line. It's like, "Kobe Bryant's wife is not going to hear this and care about it," and then it's like, oyyy.

**Will you return to acting?**

I'm going to take a year off after I drop this album and go on this tour, and I'm going to return to acting before I start another album. I'm turning 27 this year—oh God, I'm getting old. I don't want to rush into another album. I want to do some living. I want to figure out where to from here, see what this album does for me, see how right I was about the direction I'm heading in and then, yeah, we'll see.

**Is there a project lined up?**

I'm down to be a cast member in any film, even if it's not a starring role, as long as it's a great film. Justin Timberlake has made great decisions. I enjoy Ryan Gosling's decisions in acting. I enjoy some of Channing Tatum's decisions, just as far as balancing comedy and being the heartthrob. I'll see where it takes me.



"I GET JEWISH PEOPLE COMING UP TO ME PROUD LIKE, 'MAZEL TOV, BRO. COME TO MY HOUSE FOR SHABBAT DINNER.'"

**And then hopefully Amanda Bynes can be your co-star. How do you feel about being her Twitter obsession?**

[Laughs] I don't even know who that is doing that or what that's about. If that is her, I guess it's a little weird and disturbing. It's obviously a behavioral pattern that is way bigger than me. Whoever is behind it, whether it's her or somebody else, they know people are paying attention so they keep it going.

**A few years back, you left Hip Hop Since 1978. Why change management?**

I just needed to put in place a team that had some feelings in their heart about me and my well-being in the future, as opposed to just seeing this as a right here, right now time to capitalize [thing]. "Who knows how long this guy is going to last?" That was one a comment that I heard that was really off-putting to me. You don't even

have faith I'll be around in five years. I heard that through channels. I hear what I hear. I felt like it was time. **And the plan is to keep pushing and see how big your career can get?** It's about me being able to look back on this and say, "Man, I gave it everything. I went in." I went in when going in was just a term and people thought that what they were doing was going in. I was going in on all fronts. ♠

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